



European Year of Workers' Mobility 2006

# Europeans and mobility: first results of an EU-wide survey

Are Europeans ready to seize the opportunities that mobility offers in today's labour markets? Are EU citizens aware of their rights and opportunities? Would they move to another region or country to find a job? How often do Europeans change jobs and for what reasons? How do they feel about mobility?

These are some of the questions that Eurobarometer asked more than 24 000 EU citizens in September 2005<sup>1</sup>. This leaflet presents the key figures drawn from a first analysis by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions.

## A snapshot: how do Europeans feel about mobility?

- Despite being attached to their region of origin, 1/3 of EU citizens have moved from their home region and are happy to have done so
- EU citizens strongly believe in the right to free movement
- EU citizens know that geographical mobility can improve their job prospects
- Europeans value employment stability but, in some Member States, job mobility has proven positive and has become well-accepted
- Mobility should not put workers' sense of security at risk
- Both stability and mobility are important: stability helps workers build on their experience and changing jobs improves their adaptability

## Europe today – why should we become more mobile?

Today's European labour markets offer many new opportunities for workers. To benefit from these opportunities, citizens often need to be mobile, both between different jobs and between regions. The European Union has taken a number of measures to make it easier for citizens to move from one Member State to another, in particular through legislation that protects the rights of those who make the move, and through practical steps to increase the transparency of Europe's labour markets. Nevertheless, geographical and job mobility in the EU remain rather limited.

To open up the debate on the real benefits and challenges of working abroad or changing job, the European Commission has designated 2006 as the European Year of Workers' Mobility. This will be an opportunity to improve our knowledge on mobility, to foster awareness of the opportunities it offers and to stimulate cooperation within the European Union. To kick off the European Year, this special Eurobarometer was carried out to find out how Europeans view mobility.

## Despite being attached to their region of origin, 1/3 of EU citizens have moved from their home region and are happy to have done so

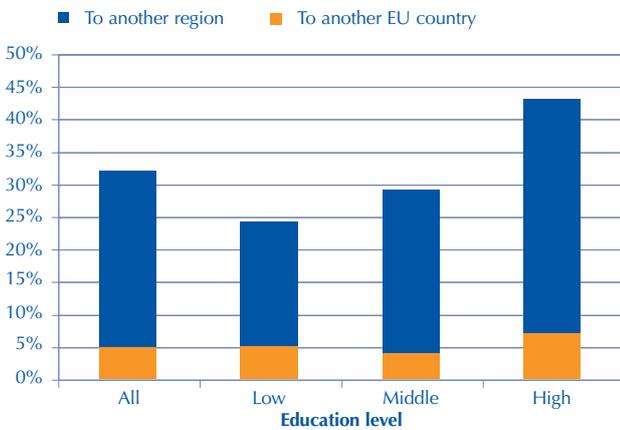
### How many Europeans have left their town or region of origin?

One third of Europeans have taken the step to move out of their region of origin at least once in the past. Of those that have moved, 24% settled at least once in another region, 4% in another Member State and 3% in a country outside the EU. To another question, 12% answer that they have participated in a training or education programme in another EU Member State. These people are both men and women of all ages, but it is more likely that they have a high level, rather than a low level of education (see Fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility was carried out by consortium 'TNS Opinion & Social' between 2/09/2005 and 6/10/2005. This survey covers EU Member States residents aged 15 years and over (a sample of 24 642 respondents together). All interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and in the appropriate national language.



**Fig. 1: Proportion of people who have moved outside their region of origin at least once by level of education, EU-25**



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility September 2005

However, more than two thirds of those that have already left their parental home continue to live in the city or region where they first settled. The large majority of Europeans (70%) have no intention of moving in the near future. Women, older generations and people with lower levels of education are among those who are least inclined to move. The main reason Europeans quote for not moving is the fact that they are satisfied with their current place of residence.

**What do Europeans think about mobility?**

Europeans have rather positive views on the benefits of long-distance mobility<sup>2</sup> and think that it is a good thing for individuals (46% are in favour, against 11% who think it is a bad thing), as well as for the labour market (49% are in favour and 19% against) and for European Integration (57% are for and 10% against). They are more doubtful about the impact of long-distance mobility on family life, where 32% think the impact might be positive, but a similar share (27%) thinks it would be negative. Views are also split across the Member States. In Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Slovakia, more than 60% of people see long-distance mobility as an opportunity for individuals, while less than 30% share this view in Greece and Cyprus (see Fig. 2).

**What are the views of EU citizens that have already moved long distances?**

For the large majority of long-distance movers, the experience was positive. Almost half of them (46%) declare that no aspect of their life deteriorated after the move, and a fair percentage of them have seen their job (25%) and money (22%) situation improve together with their housing conditions (37%). As can be expected, social contacts and support from

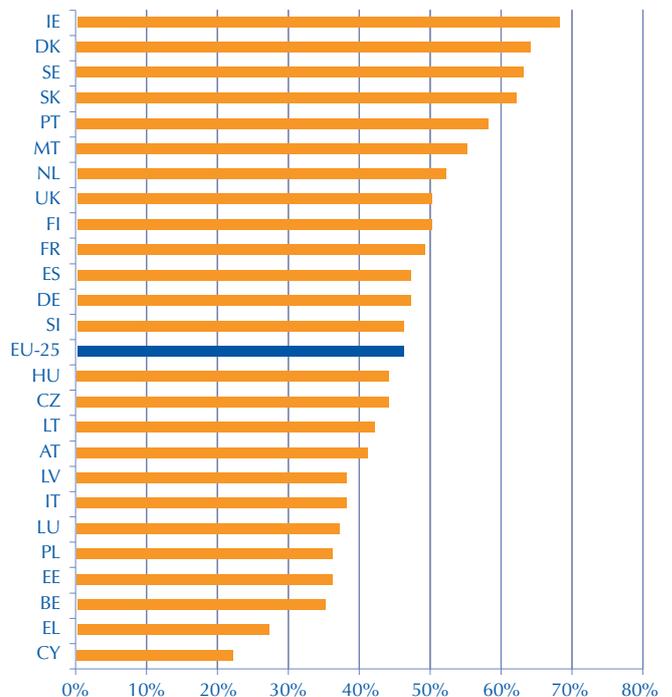
family and friends are the two aspects of life that are most likely to worsen after a long-distance move, even though they are also often perceived as having improved following a move (see Fig. 3).

**EU citizens strongly believe in the right to free movement**

EU citizens are well aware of their right to free movement and to work freely in another Member States. When asked about what the EU represents for them, 53% of EU citizens say ‘freedom to travel and work in the EU’. This answer comes first, well ahead of the Euro (44%) and Peace (36%).

EU citizens are also confident that the Union has lifted most administrative barriers for those who wish to find a job in another EU country. When asked about the difficulties they would expect to encounter if they wanted to move to another Member State, EU citizens first quote a lack of language skills (approximately 50%), or the difficulty in adapting to a different culture (20%). Relatively few (less than 15%) quote access to social protection or social services as potential barriers, and less than 10% of them believe that they would have

**Fig. 2: Percentage of people who think that long-distance mobility is a good thing for individuals, by country**

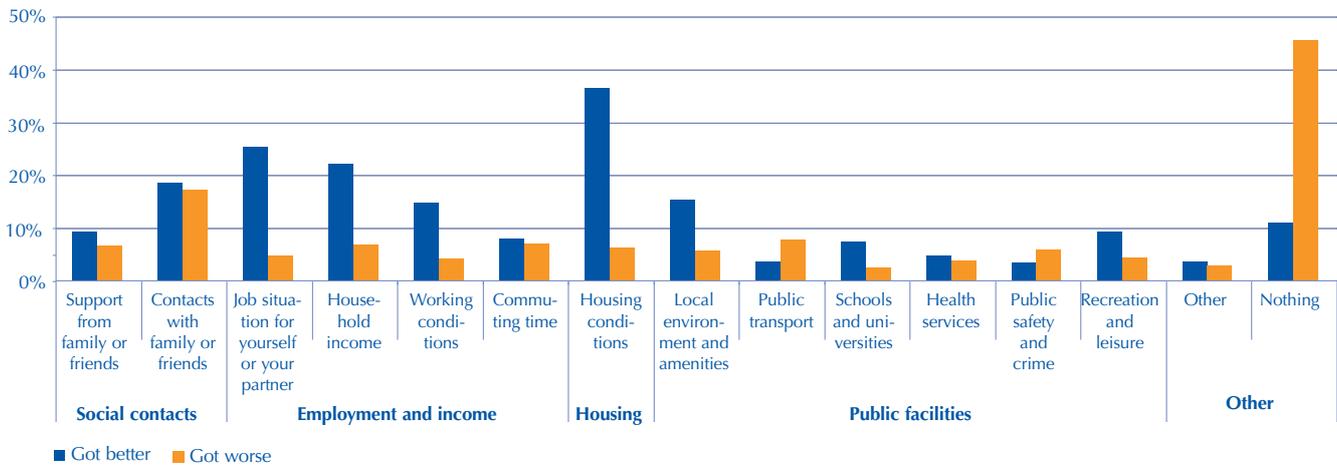


Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility September 2005

2 Long-distance movers: respondents who have moved at least once to another region or country.



Fig. 3: What has improved or gotten worse after the last time they moved to another region or country, EU-25



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

difficulties in having their skills and diplomas recognised or that they would have trouble obtaining a working permit.

Given the current restrictions to the free movement of workers that apply to the Member States that joined the EU in 2004, it is not surprising to find that the highest proportions of people quoting ‘obtaining a work permit’ as one of the main potential barriers are in Estonia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. However, these proportions never exceed 20%.

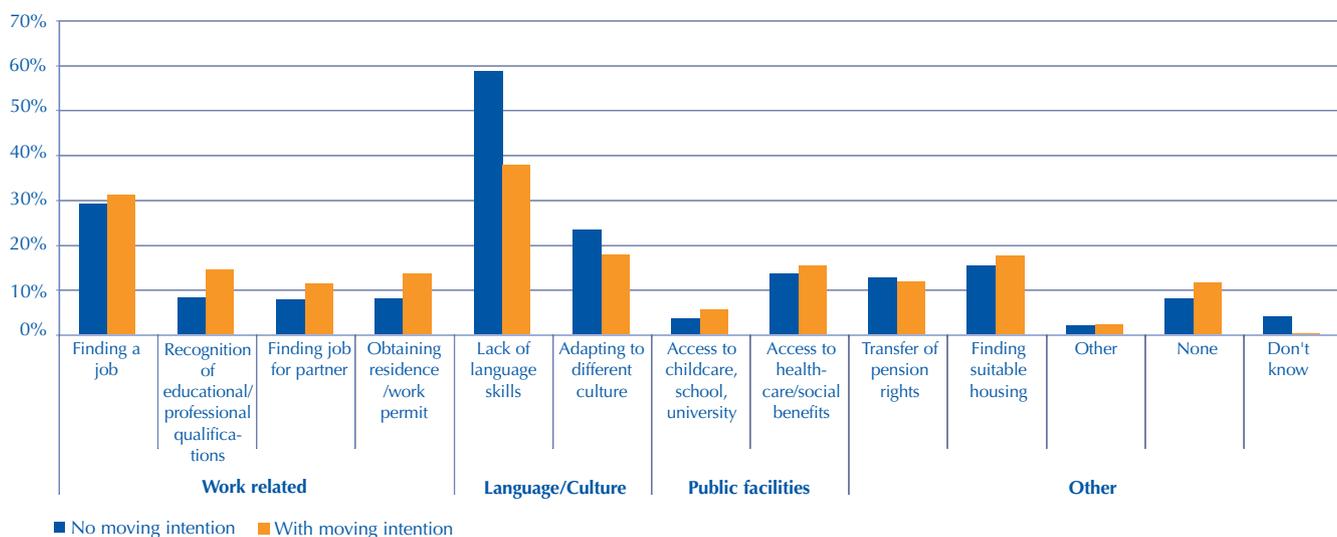
At the same time, 30% of EU citizens expect to encounter difficulties in finding a job in another country, either for themselves or for their partner. This is an area where the EU

needs to improve and publicise its efforts to create an EU job portal (EURES<sup>3</sup>) and foster links between national employment services (see Fig. 4).

**EU citizens know that geographical mobility can improve their job prospects**

The experience of the long-distance movers largely represents the expectations of Europeans. Better working conditions and earning more money are the two main reasons that would convince Europeans to move abroad. They would also be tempted by the prospect of discovering a new culture or language (30%), or a better climate (20%). The main reasons

Fig. 4: Difficulties one expects to face should one wanted to move to another country within the EU, EU-25

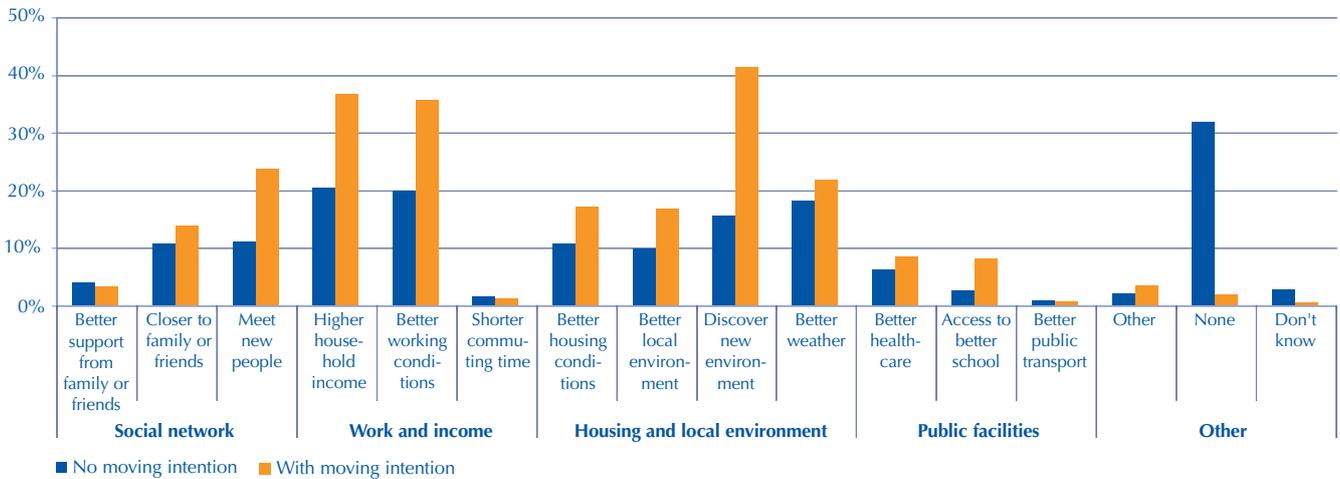


Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

3 EURES job portal: online service providing practical advice and access to thousands of job offers (<http://europa.eu.int/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>).



Fig. 5: Factors that would encourage one to move to another country, people with and without moving intention within the next 5 years, EU-25



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

not to move abroad would be to lose direct contact with family and friends, as well as their precious support in every day life in terms of childcare or care for the elderly (see Fig. 5).

Recent data from the European Labour Force Survey illustrates that, for people already in employment, moving to another region or country seems to increase the risk of becoming unemployed or inactive. This is partly because when a couple moves, it is often difficult for both partners to find a job at the same time. Even so, as mentioned above, 25% of long-distance movers have seen their job situation or working conditions improve, while very few have seen it deteriorate (less than 5%).

In fact, moving to another country (or to another region) appears to improve the chances of finding a job for unem-

ployed and the inactive. 59% of those who were unemployed in another EU country the previous year had found a job in the current year. This was in contrast to 35% that stayed in the same country (see Table 1).

Europeans seem to be well aware of the opportunity of mobility as a solution to unemployment or the difficult in finding a job. Two thirds of those asked would be prepared to leave their region in search of new work. This percentage remains high in all countries, but varies from almost 50% in Hungary, Ireland and Malta to more than 70% in France, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden. More strikingly, between 25% (Austria, Ireland, Hungary) and 50% (Poland, Luxembourg) would be prepared to move to another EU country to find a job (see Fig. 6).

Table 1: Links between cross-country mobility and year-to-year job mobility, EU-25

EU-15		Current work status			
Country of residence year before	Work Status year before	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive	
Same Country	Employed	94%	3%	3%	100%
	Unemployed	35%	43%	22%	100%
	Inactive	5%	2%	93%	100%
Other EU-15 Country	Employed	74%	13%	12%	100%
	Unemployed	59%	25%	16%	100%
	Inactive	26%	10%	64%	100%

Source: Eurostat LFS – pool of data over 2000-2004



Fig. 6: Percentage of people who would be ready to move to find a job if they were unemployed, by country to another region or country to another EU Country



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

**Europeans value employment stability but, in some Member States, job mobility has proven positive and has become well-accepted**

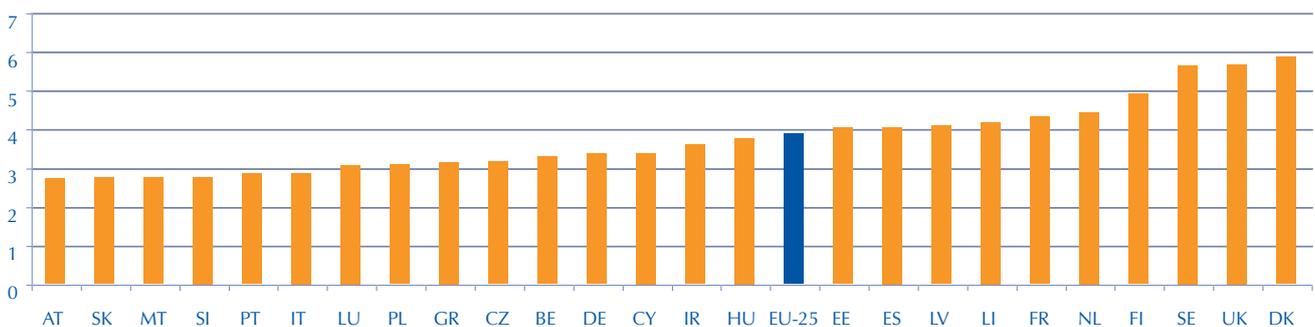
**How often do Europeans change job?**

Both international and EU data show relatively low levels of job mobility in Europe. According to Eurostat, the number of workers that have changed employer in the last year rarely exceeds 10% in EU Member States. The average duration of employment in the same job is 10.6 years in Europe, against 6.7 years in the USA and 12.2 in Japan.

According to our survey, EU workers have had, on average, 4 jobs in their career to date<sup>4</sup>. This varies across Member States. For example, the number of jobs per worker is close to 6 in Denmark, the United Kingdom and Sweden, while it is less than 3 in Austria, Slovakia, Malta, Slovenia, Portugal and Italy (see Fig. 7).

These job changes seem to concentrate at the beginning of a person’s career as the average number of jobs slows down in the 35-44 age-group. This partly reflects higher mobility rates among the young people and the lower mobility of older workers when they were younger.

Fig. 7: Average number of jobs to date, per worker and per country



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

4 A change of job is defined here as a ‘change of employer’.



Table 2

Average number of jobs per age group, EU-25	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
	2,8	3,6	4,2	4,2	4,2	3,5	3,9

Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

It is also striking that 25% of workers interviewed have never changed employer. This proportion does not fall significantly with age where we see it is 24% for the 25-39 year-olds, 20% for the 40-54 year-olds and 25% for older workers (55+).

**Why do Europeans choose to change jobs and how do they feel about change?**

This ‘weak mobility culture’ in the EU is reflected in the cautious attitude of Europeans to the issue. When asked about their future intentions, 54% of European workers reply that they do not intend to change job in the next five years. In most cases, this is simply because they are satisfied with the job they have. Among the 41% who expect to change job, more than half expect to do it for positive reasons – 40% intend to change job to find a better job, 13% will do it because they like change and 8% will change because they plan to move house. However, for almost 1 in 5 workers, such a change will not be on their own initiative since 8% of

workers fear losing their job and 11% know that their contract will expire (see Fig. 8).

While the large majority (77%) of Europeans considers that there is no such thing as a job for life, only 40% of them say that changing job every few years is good for people. Mobility may be the result of free choice, or it may be imposed by circumstances, such as the loss of one's job, so it is not surprising that Europeans remain divided on whether mobility is good or bad. It is interesting to note, however, that in two of the countries with the highest job mobility, Denmark and Sweden, people strongly believe that job mobility is good for people (72% and 79% respectively). In contrast, more than two thirds of Belgian, German, Estonian and Greek respondents do not believe that mobility is good for people. This suggests that mobility is largely considered a threat in these countries. What makes some Europeans fear mobility while others see it as an opportunity? Social policies that support mobility and reduce the risks for individuals may have an important part to play (see Fig.9).

Fig. 8: Reasons for expecting to move in the next five years, EU-25

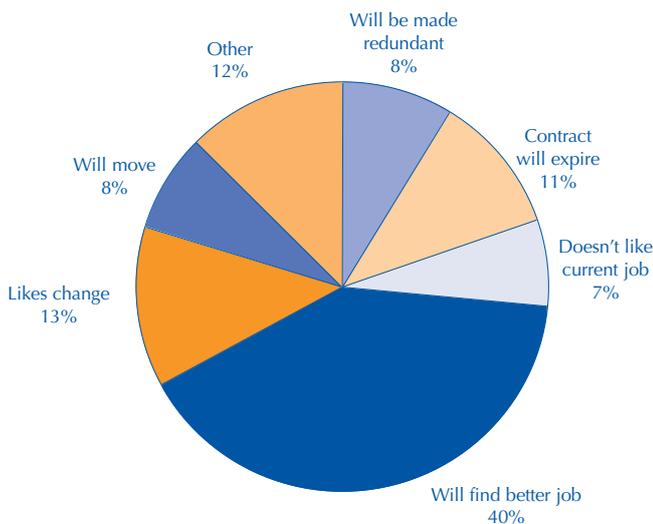
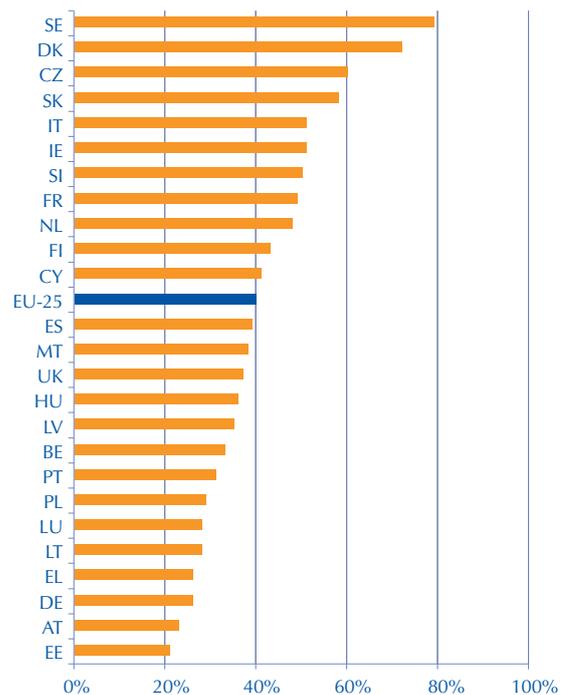


Fig. 9: Percentage of people who think that changing jobs every few years is good for people, by country



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005



## Mobility should not put workers' sense of security at risk

Labour market mobility can also be approached by looking at how many years workers have spent with their current employer. On average, 10% of European workers have been with their current employer less than 1 year, 36% have changed employer between 1 and 5 years ago, 17% between 6 and 10 years ago and 36 % have been in their job for more than 10 years.

### Some groups of workers are more mobile than others

When looking at specific sub-groups of workers we can identify those who have changed employer more recently (the most mobile) and those who have been longest with their current employer (the most stable). The characteristics associated with the highest mobility (measured by the proportion of people who have been with their current employer for less than five years) are the following: age – 58% of workers aged 25-34 have been with their current employer for less than 5 years; type of employment contract – 81% of people on fixed-term contract have short tenures; family situation – 70% of lone parents; and skills – 51% of the low-skilled\* (see Fig. 10).

Those with the most stable employment situations (measured by the proportion of people in each socio-demographic sub-group who have been in the same jobs for more than 10

years), by contrast, are older workers (68%), people on permanent contracts (41%), people living in couples without children (45%) and people employed in supervising or management positions (45%)\*\*. This reflects the fact that intra-firm upward mobility is one of the way to access supervising and management positions (including low and middle management). The older age and large number of people who have never changed jobs in these categories may also indicate that a few have reached the top of the ladder and do not envisage any further mobility (see Fig. 11).

The other groups of workers such as those occupying jobs that require middle or higher skill levels, and those of prime working age generally display more balanced levels of mobility. They typically have been with their current employer for between 1 and 10 years.

### Both stability and mobility are important: stability helps workers to build on their experience and changing jobs improves their adaptability

In order to better understand the relationship between mobility and the acquisition of skills, EU workers were asked to compare the type of skills they need today with those they needed with their previous employer (previous job), as well as with those they needed when they first started with their current employer (current job).

Fig. 10: The least stable groups of workers, EU-25

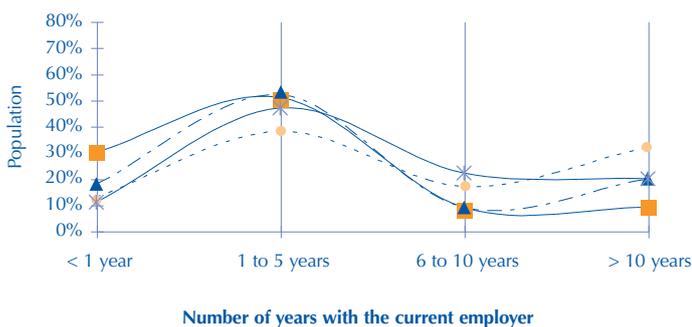


Fig. 11: The most stable groups of workers, EU-25



— \* — Aged 25-34

— -▲- Lone parents

— -▲- Aged 55+

— ■ — Couples without children

— ■ — Fixed term or temporary agency contract

— -●- Low-skilled jobs\*

— -●- Permanent contract

— — Management jobs (including low, middle and top management)\*\*

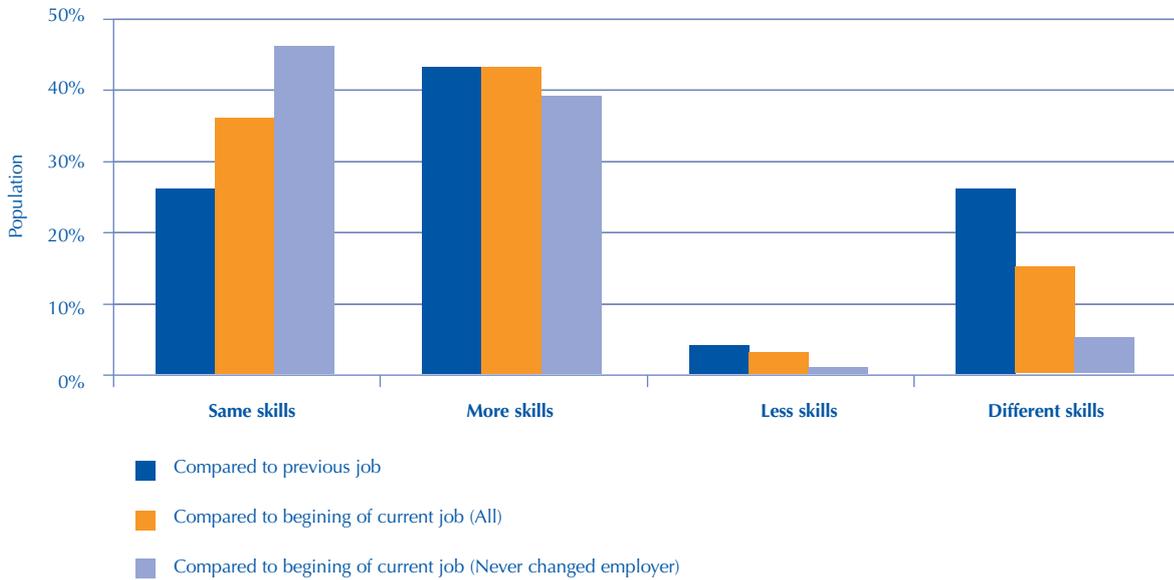
\* Low-skilled jobs: include employed positions – not working at a desk but travelling or in a service job, skilled manual workers and unskilled manual workers and servants.

\*\* Management jobs: include general management positions like directors or top management, middle management and supervisors.

Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005



Fig. 12: Types of skills needed: between current job and previous job and between current position and first position with the same employer (for all and for those who never changed employer), EU-25



Source: Eurobarometer 64.1 on geographical and labour market mobility – September 2005

Changing employer seems to be the best way of acquiring new and different skills. 25% of workers declare that they had to use different skills after they changed employer, but only 15% have learned different skills within a company. Changing employer does not seem to have an impact on the possibility for workers to improve their skills. 43% of workers have improved their skills either after having changed employer, or within their current job (see Fig. 12).

Moreover, the chance to improve one's skills within a company seems to decrease for those who stay too long with the same employer. 46% of those who never changed employer

claim to use the same skills as when they first started, while 39% use more skills, and only 5% use different skills.

These results appear to be consistent with the evidence presented in recent studies on labour market mobility<sup>5</sup>. They highlight, in particular, the fact that while job-to-job mobility facilitates the acquisition of different skills and therefore fosters adaptability, employment stability allows workers to gain company-specific skills and to raise their productivity. These studies also show that very long-term employment stability can lead to stagnation in the acquisition of skills.

The results presented above are a short first analysis of the data. The Eurobarometer survey contains a wealth of information that is currently being analysed in depth by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions (EFILWC). Before the end of 2006, the Commission and the EFILCW will publish both summaries and full reports reflecting this in-depth analysis. These documents will be made available on the web page of the European Year for the mobility of workers:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/workersmobility2006/events\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006/events_en.htm)

5 'Is a stable workforce good for productivity?', by Peter Auer, Janine Berg and Ibrahim Coulibaly, *International Labour Review*, vol. 144/3, ILO, Geneva 2005.