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# Intra-EU youth mobility, human capital and career outcomes: the case of young high-skilled Latvians and Romanians in Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the relationship between human capital and career outcomes using the case of highly skilled young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden. As a non-English-speaking country with regulated labour markets, the Swedish case provides a contrast to previous studies on EU10 to EU15 mobility that usually focus on English-speaking receiving countries with less regulated labour markets. Thirty-eight semi-structured interviews are analysed from a life-course perspective to map the education and career trajectories before and after their mobility. Three career trajectories are found: match, re-skilling, and de-skilling. Most young migrants tend to prioritize general, rather than country specific, human capital investments, which negatively affects their career outcomes. The results highlight the importance of individual human capital investment choices as well as structural opportunities in receiving countries for understanding the relationship between human capital and career outcomes for young EU-migrants.

## KEYWORDS

Intra-EU mobility; human capital; career trajectories; life-course perspective

## Introduction

Even though challenged by transitional legislations for new EU member states and Brexit, free movement is at the heart of the vision of EU (Directive 2004/38/EC). Free movement is supposed to create a single European labour market and increase its flexibility and efficiency. Increased mobility is furthermore considered to help match the labour supply and demand, to lead to a better use of the human capital stock and thus enhance economic productivity in line with the Lisbon Agenda. However, the barriers to successful mobility are plenty (see Boswell and Geddes 2011, 198–200), where one of the obstacles is the difficulties connected to the transferability of human capital. The fact that US citizens move across state borders within the USA ten times as often as EU-citizens within the EU, clearly illustrate the barriers for mobility in the EU (Geddes and Scholten 2016, 152). The enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 did, however,

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change the mobility patterns. While the decades preceding the enlargements saw a small, yet constant, expansion of the cross-state mobile population within the EU (Recchi 2008), the ‘new’ (EU10) citizens were more eager to take advantage of free movement. By 2013, half of all intra-EU migrants were from new member-states, although these countries account for only 21% of the total EU population (Castro-Martín and Cortina 2015). Even though Sweden is not one of the top immigration countries (Fries-Tersch, Tugran, and Bradley 2016), either in absolute or relative terms, it has experienced increasing inflows of EU10 citizens, including Latvians and Romanians.

This article analyses the relationships between human capital transferability, human capital investments, and labour market outcomes for high-skilled young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden. As a non-English-speaking country with regulated labour markets, the Swedish case provides a contrast to most previous studies on EU10 to EU15 mobility that usually focus on English-speaking receiving countries with less regulated labour markets (White 2016). There are two main research questions.

- A What kind of career trajectories is found among young high-skilled Latvians and Romanians in Sweden?
- B What role does human capital have in explaining the career trajectories?

The empirical material consists of 38 semi-structured interviews with young, high-skilled Latvians and Romanians. A life-course perspective is used to map the interviewees’ education and career trajectories before and after mobility. We especially analyse the transferability and use of pre-mobility human capital and human capital investment strategies in Sweden. Three career trajectory groups are identified: the matching group, the re-skilling group, and the de-skilling group. Applying a life-course perspective reveals low transferability of home country human capital in non-English-speaking sectors of the Swedish labour market. Most young migrants tend to prioritize general, rather than country specific, human capital investments, which negatively affects their career outcomes.

The article begins with a theoretical overview of the relationship between human capital and mobility, where the question of transferability of human capital and investments in country specific human capital is central topics. In the following section, the literature review contrasts the experiences of intra-EU youth migrants in Sweden to those in the United Kingdom. The third section describes the method and empirical material. Section four consists of the empirical analysis where three typical career trajectories are presented as illustrations of the relationships between human capital and career outcomes. The article ends with conclusions and some reflections upon the results.

## Human capital

Schultz (1961) developed the term human capital in the 1960s to reflect the value of human capacities. He believed human capital was like any other type of capital; it could be gained and increased through investments. According to Becker (1994), who popularized the use of the concept, education and training are the most important investments in human capital. It is assumed that the higher the investment in human capital through education, the higher the productivity of people. Increasing the stock of human capital is therefore a common strategy for individuals as well as countries. Today, human capital is often understood

more broadly, including tacit knowledge and competences such as values and attitudes, social and interpersonal skills as well as reliability (Lulle, Janta, and Emilsson 2019; Williams and Baláz 2008). For the purpose of this article, human capital is defined more narrowly as the skills acquired through formal education and employment.

### *Human capital and migration theory*

The idea of human capital has played a large role in the development of migration theories. In neo-classic micro-economic theory, migration is seen as an investment that is undertaken if a person calculates that the benefits outweigh the costs of the move (Sjaastad 1962). Human capital is an essential component in the calculation because the level and type of human capital is believed to determine which individuals tend to migrate, to which destination, and for how long (Dustmann and Kirkchamp 2002; Dustmann and Weiss 2007). The model predicts that a migrant will move to the place where the return to their specific human capital is the highest. This is perceived as a win-win situation where the migrant maximizes her income and the receiving society gains a productive worker.

When making a decision to move, a migrant must take into consideration the expected need to invest in country specific human capital in order to be successful in the host labour market. This can be investments in language training or completion of education in the host country. However, a migration decision can also be about acquisition of human capital in itself, where the migrant moves to where human capital, through formal education and work experience, can be acquired most efficiently (Dustmann, Fadlon, and Weiss 2011). From this perspective, a person migrates as a way of gaining a competitive edge on the labour market upon return. For example, studies from Norway, Ireland, Netherlands on returned migrants in Eastern Europe show a wage gain from foreign education (Bijwaard and Wang 2016; Dustmann, Fadlon, and Weiss 2011). Thus, investing in human capital in the host country can be made for staying successfully in the country or for investing in success when returning.

### *The transferability of human capital and country specific human capital*

According to human capital theory, it is the levels of human capital that determine success in the labour market. However, human capital tends to be geographically and historically specific, and difficult to transfer between countries (Chiswick and Miller 2009; Erel 2010, 643). Chiswick et al. (2005, 335) exemplify the problem of transferability with three types of high-level occupations – economist, medical doctor and lawyer:

Country specific skills for the economist may include language and style of practice. The medical doctor has less transferable skills because, in addition to language and style of practice, the practice of medicine requires a license specific to the destination. The skills of lawyers are even less transferable across countries because, in addition to the above, the legal system ... varies sharply across countries.

Thus, human capital that are acquired in source countries does not always translate into better labour market outcomes in destination countries (Aydemir 2011, 453–454). Higher qualifications are, for example, often only valued by employers if they are supported by fluency in the host country's language (Adsera and Pytlikova 2015; Esser 2006).

Research has shown that migrants are often overqualified for their jobs (Quintini 2011). This kind of calculation often rests on an understanding of human capital where education and other formal qualifications are used as proxies for skills. Most commonly, over-qualification has been understood as some form of discrimination where skills from other countries are under-valued or not valued at all. The remedy to this problem has been measure to validate skills to make them acknowledged by employers. However, some human capital is not transferable. In those cases, the problem is not that the human capital is undervalued but that the human capital lost its value in the new destination. De-skilling of this kind questions the so-called 'rucksack' approach that view skills as something that people are equipped with and can utilise everywhere (Nowicka 2014).

This line of argument leads us to the concept of country specific human capital. The most obvious example is language, which is often found to be particularly important in enhancing earnings and career trajectories (Dustmann 1999). Country specific human capital can also include country specific educational requirements and licenses in regulated occupations like teachers, medical doctors and lawyers. Moreover, tacit knowledge and competences, such as values and attitudes, as well as social and interpersonal skills that can only be acquired through living in the destination country represent elements of country specific human capital (Williams and Baláz 2005, 2008). It is important to separate the two different forms of human capital since the planned length of stay at any given period is a key to understand investment decisions for both general and country specific human capital (Adda, Dustmann, and Görlach 2016). Expectation to return does give few incentives for investments in host-country specific human capital. A person expecting a permanent move, on the other hand, will have higher expected returns from host-country specific human capital investments. Return plans, Adda, Dustmann, and Görlach (2016) conclude, are an important source of heterogeneity in immigrants' earnings and career profiles. Important investment decisions are made in the early years after arrival. Beliefs about the migration being temporary may lead to large earnings losses over the lifecycle if such expectations are revised at a later stage. Thus, employment outcomes results not only from differences in productivity but also from human capital investment strategies.

## Previous research

Research about intra-EU mobility and human capital indicates a difficulty to utilize formal human capital in destination countries and that utilisation of human capital is lower for immigrants from the new member states. Studies from the UK show that migrants from new member states face a substantially higher risk of over-education than other recent EU immigrants (Campbell 2016; Zwysen and Demireva 2018). Evidence from Ireland also points in the same direction, with de-skilling and downward mobility as a result (Gilmartin and Migge 2015). Ethnic networks and recruitment agencies seem to play an important role in facilitating this pattern (Janta and Ladkin 2013). Some research suggests that over-qualification and presence in lower-skilled jobs are temporary and that many use a strategy to underutilise their skills rather than wait for a job in line with their qualifications (Alberti 2014; Trevena 2011). As migrants become more settled, improve their language proficiency and develop more country specific human capital many transfer into jobs more in line with their academic credentials (Janta and Ladkin 2013; Rolfe and

Hudson-Sharp 2016). Good knowledge of English language seems especially essential for the utilization of foreign human capital (Zwysen and Demireva 2018, 11).

The majority of the research on intra-EU mobility has focused on Ireland and the UK who represents English-speaking countries with relatively unregulated labour markets (White 2016). This is a problem since the evidence points to different labour market experiences of EU-migrants depending on destination countries, and especially between English and non-English-speaking countries and between countries with more or less regulated labour markets. Föbker and Imani (2017) explores the experiences of mobility of highly skilled migrants' accompanying partners and find significant differences between the UK and Germany, regarding language and labour market participation. Where the interviewees in Germany rarely consider working in a German-speaking work environment from the outset, the interviewees in the UK do not question working in an English-speaking work environment. This is, according to Föbker and Imani (2017), not only due to the generally lower level of language proficiency in the German sample, but also based on country specific differences. While Föbker and Imani (2017) point to the importance of language, Apsite, Lundholm, and Stjernström (2012) identify differences in labour market structures in Sweden and the UK that effects the outcomes of mobility for Latvians. Where the UK provide easy access to low-skilled jobs, Sweden is seen as providing more long term opportunities to secure better life-conditions. This suggests that immigrants in Sweden need to do more investments in human capital, especially learning languages, before finding jobs. Similar results have been found in Denmark, where high-skilled women from EU10 countries unable to find work based on their original skills resorted to different strategies – using their ethnicity, redo their educations or return migration – to re-enter skilled employment (Liversage 2009b). Paraphrasing Parutis (2014) description of the UK situation, most EU10 migrants in Sweden does not progress from 'any job' to a 'better job' in search of a 'dream job', they tend to progress from 'no job' to a 'good job'. This is confirmed by qualitative and quantitative studies that shows that EU10 migrants in Sweden tend to be high-skilled and have low employment rates (Apsite, Lundholm, and Stjernström 2012; Emilsson and Adolfsson 2019; Olofsson 2012), while those employed have a similar occupational structure and wages as native born (Andersson and Hammarstedt 2011; Gerdes and Wadensjö 2013). Thus, EU10 immigrants in Sweden does not function as a complement to the native work force or occupying low-skilled segments in the labour market as they tend to do in Norway (Friberg and Midtbøen 2018). Thörnquist (2015), studying the cleaning industry, explains this with the existing labour supply in Sweden consisting of non-EU humanitarian migrants, whom employers can recruit with considerable wage subsidies.

However, compared to the UK we know little about the utilization of human capital for EU10 migrants in Sweden. By looking into young high-skilled Latvians and Romanians educational and career trajectories, this article aims to remedy the lack of knowledge on human capital utilization and career outcomes in Sweden.

## Material and method

The article draws upon semi-structured interviews with 38 young high-skilled Latvians (18) and Romanians (20) who all have lived in Sweden for at least six months. Latvians and Romanians were selected because they come from typical sending countries within

the EU free movement regime. The experiences of the Latvians and Romanians were remarkably congruent and we, therefore, saw no reason to point out similarities and differences between them in the analysis. Previous research, as well as our findings, suggest that the experiences of EU10-citizens in Sweden are similar (Gerdes and Wadensjö 2013; Olofsson 2012) and the informants should therefore be considered as representative of high-skilled EU10 citizens in general. Research participants were recruited through contacts, through different university networks, social media, and through snowballing. The interviews were conducted in English in the south of Sweden between autumn of 2015 and spring of 2016 and lasted on average 50 minutes. Questions focused on migration histories and motivations, employment experiences in migration, life satisfaction, identity issues, social inclusion, remittances, and future plans. For the purpose of this article, the analysis focuses on the respondents' educational and employment trajectories before and after mobility. The interviewees were between 20 and 39 years old with a mean age of 30 years, living in or close to the city of Malmö in southern Sweden. A majority, 28 out of 38, are women. Twenty-nine of the respondents had at least a Bachelor before moving, eight had secondary education and are or have been studying at universities, and two have a secondary education and working in high-skilled occupations.

The article uses life course analysis to understand the relationships between international mobility, human capital investments and career outcomes. Such analysis is concerned with explaining how and when events such as leaving the parental home, having a child, educational choices, migration, job entry and exit are experienced. For this particular article, we focus on mapping the human capital investments in formal education and work experiences before and after moving to Sweden. Factors such as family relations and social networks could be important for these decisions but are not analysed in-depth in this article. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, decisions to move and stay and the importance of family and social networks are investigated in a previous article (Emilsson and Adolfsson 2019). Secondly, few of our informants have previous networks in Sweden which makes those factors less important in this particular study.

Life-course analysis has previously been applied in studies of migration and integration, including high-skilled intra-EU-mobility. Liversage (2005, 2009a) draws on life-story interviews with high-skilled Eastern Europeans in Denmark to analyse labour market outcomes across time. She proposes a typology of five paths: three paths ('re-entry', 'ascent' and 're-education') lead into the higher parts of the host country labour market, whereas the paths of 're-migration' and 'marginalisation' remain outside of it. There are many advantages of using a life-course approach (Wingens et al. 2011, 1–2). It can be used to analyse the dynamic interrelation of structure and agency. It provides a research approach for understanding migrants' behaviour and explaining the cumulative effects resulting from their actions which, in turn, are embedded in societal structures and framed by institutions.

## Case studies

The analysis identifies three main career trajectories, which highlight different aspects of the intersection between mobility, human capital, and career outcomes. The three trajectories – matching, re-skilling, and de-skilling – are analysed in the following sections by describing three individual life-course cases, before and after mobility.



The three trajectories partly overlap with the reasons for migration. Those eight who came to work are clearly distinguishable group, the matching group. Three took up a PhD or Post-Doc at universities, while five work in multinational companies. They all could use their human capital and move into equally skilled or more skilled occupations.

Among the others, the reasons for young high-skilled Latvians and Romanians to move to Sweden are diverse and often overlapping. The most common reason is to study at an English-speaking bachelor (5) or master program (10). All who came to do a Bachelor expected to find a job on the side to help them sustain their studies. However, only one was able to find a job after a few years, taking advantage of English and Latvian language skills. Two of the ten persons who came to do a master intend to move back after the studies while eight express a wish to stay. Just like the Bachelor students, they had problems finding a job on the side. Two later found part-time jobs that could support them financially during the studies. Markus exemplifies the experiences of the ones coming to study:

I thought that I was gonna work in Sweden, there was no question about it, but when I came here I realised that you need Swedish first to actually work and in a month or two I understood that the chances of getting a job ... are quite slim, very slim, so I stopped searching for a job here and I've never worked in Sweden after dropping the search.

Fifteen persons moved to or with a partner to Sweden, or wanted to move specifically to Sweden for other reasons. All except one are female. Thus, they came to the country for other reasons than studies or to take up a job offer. This group can be separated into two: The ones that had successful careers before mobility (8), and those without much work experience (7). However, they have one thing in common, they all ended up studying before working. Of the eight women who left good careers in their home countries, many wanted to find jobs but most studied both Swedish and university courses as a first step towards employment. Of the eight, only three ended up in similar positions after mobility, and it was a long process for all except one who found high-skilled employment directly after a one-year master. Most, like Georgiana, attribute language as the main reasons for their inability to find employment.

I can assume it was probably the language. Being so busy and having so much fun with the studies in English, I didn't prioritise the Swedish language. So probably the jobs I applied in English everyone else applied to and I wasn't the biggest star, I don't know. Anyway, so after the studies, that summer I remember that I applied and applied and nothing happened, not even one call, nothing. It was very quiet and very frustrating. And at the end of the summer I said ok, let's start with Swedish.

The ones with less work experience in their home countries also had limited success on the labour market, and often spent years in Swedish language training and university education before some of them found employment. There are few gender differences within each of the three groups of identified career trajectories. However, since it were almost only women that moved to Sweden with or to a partner, they are clearly more overrepresented in the re-skilling and a de-skilling group.

### *The matching group*

The matching group, 8 out of 38 respondents, is a clearly defined group of people that have many things in common. They all had a specific job arranged before mobility, moving



between workplaces within a multinational company or for pursuing an academic career, to an English-speaking work environment. Mobility gave them the opportunity to work closer to the company headquarters, increasing work creativity and career possibilities. For those reasons, they could utilize their human capital in the destination country (Figure 1).

### Marian

A good example is *Marian*, 30 years old at the time of the interview, who had lived in Sweden for about two years. He grew up in a city in Romania, but moved, due to his parents' career moves, with his family to another Western European country when he was a teenager. He finished his high school there and came back to Romania to study at a university where he did a bachelor within communication sciences. Soon after graduation he got hired by an international computer game company in their Romanian office. In the next couple of years, he continued working for the Romanian office, while at the same time took on short-term assignments in the company's other offices across Europe (France and Sweden). In 2014, he again left for southern Sweden and this time for a more permanent contract. Marian explains:

As I told you, the first time was for 6 months. After 6 months I went back to Romania. There was me and 4 other guys. After 6 months they still needed people here in Malmö at the same project, and since I already worked on the project and it was easier for me to reintegrate in the company, and they actually preferred to call me back, and they said yes, you get to stay here for as long as you like on a permanent contract.

Marian enjoys the privilege of working in a profession – IT – where skills are easily transferable between countries. Moving within a multi-national company also helped. He first did short term contracts in other countries before deciding to make a more permanent move to Sweden together with his Romanian girlfriend. Because he had worked in Sweden before he knew what to expect: 'a better economy, a better job, and a better CV'. The job in Sweden is similar to what he had been doing in Romania, but on a 'higher lever so to speak'. His estimation is that his salary is three times higher than what it was in Romania. In addition to the higher salary, he also enjoys his work at the Swedish office more. Here he is able to work more integrated with the creative part of the work process, which is both more fun and gives experiences.

Yes, much better than Romania because in Romania we're all working in the same building as only testers ... but here I actually get to work with the people that actually create stuff, so I get

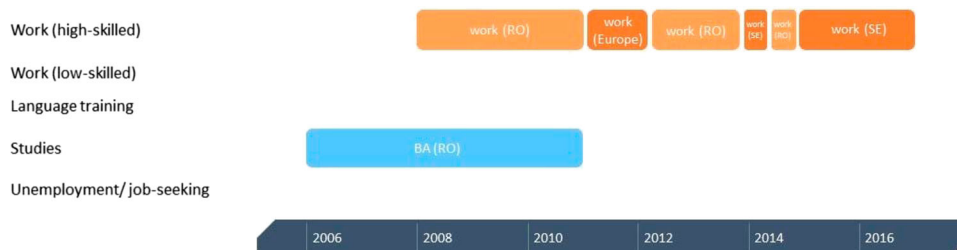


Figure 1.

to see the whole process of creating something from scratch and it's much better because you accumulate experience, you get to learn new things every day as opposed to [the city] where you just ... test.

Another difference from the Romanian office is the international vibe at the Swedish office and the use of English as the work language. In the Romanian office, everyone was Romanian and even though they reported in English, they spoke Romanian. Marian enjoys the diverse environment and has developed new friendships with persons with different nationalities: 'When you go out with them you get to learn about their traditions, what they do for Christmas, what they think of different things ... And people have different opinions, it's based on their nationality. So yeah, it's much better.'

Marian is satisfied with his move to Sweden, giving him a more interesting job and more money in the bank. Career-wise, it is a step up.

I'm thinking career-wise I have more opportunities here, that I know for sure. Since I've worked here and I've learned a lot, I'm hoping to actually grow inside the company, as opposed to [the city] where of course you can grow but it's a really, really slow process and it takes a lot of time and to be honest the money is ... you spend ten years trying to build something and at the end of the day you're thinking if it's worth it or not.

Through his work experiences, Marian clearly improves on his human capital. He learns new skills by working closer to the creative side of the company, improves his English, and learns to work in an international work environment. These are all general human capital which can be used anywhere in the world. However, at the moment he is not only considering investing in country specific human capital. Marian feels integrated and comfortable at work in the English-speaking international environment but does not plan at the moment to actively learn Swedish.

To be honest I don't think I need to learn Swedish. I would love to, but since 95% of the people in Sweden speak English so good and especially everybody at my job speaks English, there's no need at the moment. Of course I would like to because it gives you better opportunities in the future to know a language. But at the moment, I don't see the need and I don't have the time because there's so much work, but in the future, yes, I definitely consider going to courses. The company actually provides courses. I don't have to look online to sign up or anything.

Marian believes that his international experience is appreciated by future employers and that the current job could potentially be a stepping stone for other attractive positions. However, he plans to stay in Sweden: 'I'm not thinking about going back to Romania. The future here sounds good', Marian told. 'I love it here. We love it, we both do actually, even though we miss our families and friends.' Marian is similar to most of the others in the matching group. They utilize their general human capital in the destination country within a specific English-speaking context. Most want to stay, but few actively invest in Swedish language or other forms of country specific human capital.

### *The re-skilling group*

On the surface, there are many similarities between the persons in the re-skilling group and de-skilling group. They did not have a job upon arrival, and most have spent time investing in formal human capital in Sweden. Whatever the reason for migration, there were

expectations of finding a full time job, or a part time job next to their university studies. Instead they often ended up in university courses and other kinds of educations such as Swedish language training before eventually finding a job. What primarily differs between the groups are the former groups willingness to make longer term investments in country specific human capital, which in turn often correlates with clear ambitions to stay permanently in Sweden. The decisions to invest in country specific human capital is not as natural as one can expect. Young EU-migrants who come to Sweden tend to live and socialize in international environments using English as the language of communication.

Persons belonging in the re-skilling group can be summarized as follows. They have a good education and/or job in their home countries that they have a hard time utilizing in Sweden. In Sweden, they invest heavily in general and country specific human capital and eventually reach the same level of career in Sweden. Mobility, thus, prolongs their entry in the labour market and results in a loss of working years ([Figure 2](#)).

### Tatjana

*Tatjana* exemplifies persons in the re-skilling group. She was born in Latvia and moved to Sweden over 15 years ago in order to be together with her Swedish boyfriend. In Latvia, she finished secondary education and a vocational training before doing a bachelor in telecommunications. She also worked for a year in the retail sector before her university studies.

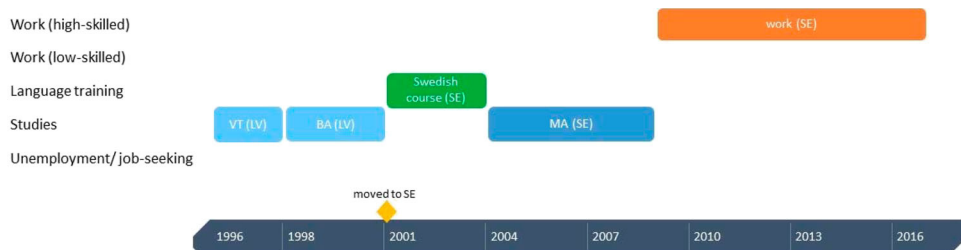
After finishing the bachelor, she moved to her Swedish boyfriend. With her background as being a Russian-speaking Latvian, she saw no future in Latvia:

I am Russian-speaking from Latvia, so with my knowledge of Latvian language I would never get any job there. Because I was not native. And if you are not native, if you are Russian-speaking, then it was nothing for you there.

Since she was confident that her mobility was permanent, she decided on a long-term strategy with the goal to take a second university exam.

You know, I was very aimed to study here. It was because I had this idea that Sweden has this really good educational system. I wanted to study here, so even if I had this three-years education, I started from zero. But when I went to SFI [language training], we had some lessons where the counsellor try to help us to, how to go out and start working directly and it was really good, but I said, no, I am gonna study from zero again (laughs). So, that was my plan, and I think it was really good. In other case I wouldn't get this job.

In order to be eligible to study at a university in Swedish, she concentrated on learning the language the first couple of years. First, she enrolled in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), a course within the adult education system. She continued with a Swedish as a second



**Figure 2.**

language course and lastly studied Swedish for one year at a university. These three courses led up to an exam representing Swedish language level B, which is the entry requirement for university studies. She chose to study economics, first doing a three-year bachelor and directly after that a two-year Master. The education lived up to her expectations. Compared to the education in Latvia, she thought it was 'more serious. And it was more fun, really, really good quality.'

She did not work at all during her studies, but started looking for jobs while writing her Master's thesis. It was a difficult time for her and her confidence was low: 'It was a little bit stressful because first job in Sweden, I mean, who am I, I am not a Swede, my Swedish is like okay, of course, but I didn't have any confidence. So, it was really hard.' However, after a couple of months of job hunting, she got her first job as an intern at a big private company. Half a year later, she got full-time employment at the same company. The job was in line with her studies, but she later changed her position to another field in the same company.

Even though her current job is not directly in line with her university education, she thinks her job is in level with her educational background. She proved her skills when she was hired, and then re-trained in-house for her current job.

It's not above not below, it's really specific ... And whoever starts to work [within this field], it doesn't matter what education you have, you need to learn by doing. At work. So, it doesn't matter. You need high education to prove that you can learn, but to do the job, you need to go to education at this place and know what to do. So, it's very specific.

After the relationship with her Swedish boyfriend dissolved, she is now 'free to go wherever I want.' Therefore, after eight years of working for the big private company, she decided to relocate to a city in central Sweden, working for another private company with the same kind of tasks.

She is satisfied with her past choices and her life. Looking at the alternative of staying in Latvia, she is confident she is doing better in Sweden:

Yeah ... I wouldn't succeed there as I did here. I think that everything is, I am done really. It looks good. I don't have any ambitious plans for my future, but I am satisfied with what I have. But I wouldn't come so far in Latvia. That's for sure.

Persons belonging to the re-skilling group had different career strategies. What they have in common is the heavy investments in human capital, including country specific human capital, making the transition to high-skilled employment a long but eventually a successful one. Persons moving to Sweden with or to a partner is over-represented in this group. Compared to students and adventure seekers, they were more instrumental in their human capital investments due to their initial decision to stay. Within this group, we also find a specific trajectory for those who utilize their skills in their home language and/or find a job at an English-speaking work place. After learning basic Swedish, they find skilled employment in work-places prioritizing multi-lingual skills.

### *The de-skilling group*

Persons in the de-skilling group had good educations and/or careers in Latvia and Romania, and mobility resulted in unemployment or less skilled work. The typical path for this group is to first study an English-speaking Master at a university. After they

realize that they might want to stay in Sweden, Swedish language training becomes an option. However, few make a real effort to learn Swedish in a formal way. Although most have an ambition to stay in Sweden, some uncertainty about future plans leads them to mostly invest in general human capital (Figure 3).

### Stefan

The career trajectory of Stefan is used to exemplify a case of de-skilling. At the time of the interview, he was in his mid-30s and had lived in Sweden for a few years. In Romania, he did a bachelor in Law, while at the same time working alongside his studies in different mid-skilled occupations. Directly after his bachelor degree, he started a master in Economics. He was working in a bank when he decided that he wanted to change direction in life. His decision to move was not related to career choices or material conditions. He worked in a good sector, had friends and family and ‘a bright future’. But he ‘wanted something else, quite different’, and that’s why he decided to change things drastically. His goal was to study something in English related to sustainability. His sight was on countries like France, Italy or Switzerland where one can speak Italian or French which are languages closer to Romanian, which he felt would be an advantage. Eventually he couldn’t find programs there in English and ended up in Sweden.

When he moved, he did not know much about Sweden and did not know anyone. He was alone, but also very confident in his future opportunities. Soon he found that his expectations were too high, especially with regard to finding a job.

But the expectations were definitely different, much different. I mean, of course I was expecting to find a job during maybe my second year of studies, but it was really difficult, almost impossible to get a job during my studies. I was continuously looking for jobs from the 2nd year and I applied to several jobs and although in my opinion I was quite qualified for some, I didn’t get any because I couldn’t speak Swedish.

Some years after he moved to Sweden, he finally found a part-time temporary job at a NGO that provides support for EU migrants. He describes his job as an advisor as

doing more or less anything that comes up since I can speak one of the languages, Romanian in this case. Trying to help people with everything they need, starting from food, showers, these kinds of things, emergency kind of support.

He does not think that his educational background or experiences gave him the job. The main reason, according to Stefan, is ‘because there are people here in need and it happens

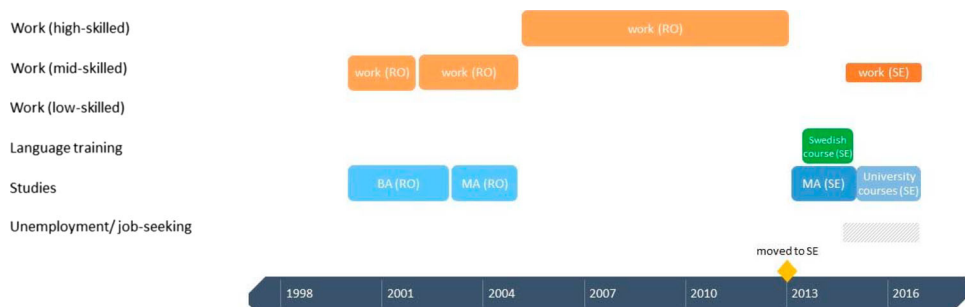


Figure 3.

that some of them are from my country, of course, and they speak the language. So these are the most important things.'

The job barely covers his living expenses but gives him the chance to stay longer in Sweden. Despite poor economic circumstances compared to his previous life in Romania, he says that he is 'very satisfied'. He feels that it is up to him to deal with whatever struggles he encounter and does not expect any support.

I'm very satisfied, not necessarily here with my life, but I would describe it like that. I don't want to attach my life to a certain place. Now I'm here, it's perfectly fine, things worked out for me in the end, but by the end of the year it may not work out and then I have to go somewhere else, probably home, but it's still fine.

Although he would like to stay, he has made few efforts in investing in country specific human capital. Instead of learning Swedish, Stefan studied several additional university courses in addition to his Master. He was enrolled in a Swedish language course where he dropped out because lack of motivation. He didn't think it would improve his situation and ability to compete with Swedish speakers in the labour market.

I mean, going to language courses and me speaking Swedish in 1 year ... I mean to what level can I get in order to compete with a native Swede for a job?

Stefan has adopted a fatalistic attitude where he downplays his possibility to influence and improve the situation. It is not only language and skills that gets you a job, says Stefan, and mentions networks, trust, luck, timing, nationality and the 'competition of 7 billion people' as other factors. Moving to Sweden made him realise how difficult it is to transfer skills and how subjective and relative human capital can be.

I thought that I was prepared, but once I came here I realized that skills and competences is such a subjective and relative thing. Because I had a huge experience in many fields and I could do a lot of things, but in the end it was pointless. That was my feeling and even now, it's pointless if you don't end up in the right context. You can be the best of the best, it doesn't matter at all and I think that's not valid only here, but everywhere in this world. ... And another thing, it's extremely difficult to value your skills or to be able to show them off somewhere. Maybe nobody cares that much about my skills since I'm an immigrant, I don't speak Swedish, I don't know, it's like my skills are dropping 90% because of this.

Just like many in the de-skilling group, Stefan want to keep his options open. Even though many decide later on to stay more permanently, their initial human capital investment choices leads them towards English university educations that only prepares them for a small segment of the labour market. Many end up unemployed or in lower-skilled and precarious employment, while others have to return when their money runs out or when their parents stop their economic support.

## Conclusion

Ideally, free movement should enhance productivity within the EU by matching skills and jobs, and create a better allocation of human capital. The case of high-skilled young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden show that the reality is far from smooth, and that intra-EU mobility in many cases leads to prolonged labour market entry and downward socio-economic mobility.

This article has studied the educational and career trajectories of 38 high-skilled young Latvians and Romanians in Sweden, and what role human capital have in explaining the employment outcomes. A life-course perspective is used to map the interviewees' education and career trajectories before and after mobility. We especially analyse the transferability and use of pre-mobility human capital and human capital investment strategies in Sweden.

Three main career trajectories are identified. The first group is hired into high-skilled jobs, matching their educational background and previous career trajectory, in English-speaking work environments at universities of multi-national companies (the matching group). Marian is representing the matching group in this study. He works in the English-speaking computer game industry and moved effortlessly from one country to another, within the same company, where his human capital is used and developed. The findings confirm the idea of Bauder (2012) that academics and inter-firm transfers as a privileged group in mobility that more easily can transfer their skills between national contexts.

However, most doesn't have a job upon arrival and their career trajectories depend on their human capital investment strategies. A second group of people is able to enter into high-skilled employment after several years of investments in (country specific) human capital (the re-skilling group). Tatjana, representing the re-skilling group, consciously decided to re-do her human capital from scratch, investing in seven years of additional country specific education. While the long-term outcomes are good, it means that many spend additional years in education outside the workforce. A third group end up unemployed or in less productive work, often a result of investing in general human capital (the de-skilling group). Stefan, representing the de-skilling group, had a good career in Romania. He experienced that all his education and work experiences was worth little in the new country. Uncertain about the future, he studied English-taught university courses and did not invest in country specific human capital.

The life-course cases help us understand the three main career outcomes. In general, most have a very hard time utilizing their home country human capital in Sweden. Many had careers and good educations from their home country. However, it is mainly those hired directly into a job in the English-speaking sectors of the Swedish labour market that benefit from their previous experience. For those arriving without employment, the educational investment choices persons decide on is vital for their employment outcomes. Decisions to invest in country specific human capital tends to pay off in the long run, and those choices are often a result of firm decisions to stay in the country. Others study university courses in English that improves their general human capital but is difficult to utilize. Some can utilize those skills, together with home-country language skills, to enter specific niches in the labour market. However, many end up unemployed or in lower-qualified jobs.

From the findings, we can draw several conclusions that have relevance for the understanding of human capital transferability and labour market outcomes for high-skilled young intra-EU migrants.

The results highlight the importance of structural opportunities in receiving countries for understanding the relationships between human capital, intra-EU mobility and career outcomes. Similar to the findings of Nowicka (2014) and Kogan et al. (2011) the results confirm that labour market outcomes are a result of the interplay between immigrants'



individual resources and decisions, and host countries' structural constraints. In Sweden, free higher education and language courses offer opportunities for investing in country- and non-country specific human capital while there are less opportunities to enter the labour market. The high threshold to enter the labour market and language barriers, therefore, require extensive investments in human capital after mobility, often in the form of formal university education and language training. Investments in country specific human capital is a necessity for those who stay in Sweden and want to establish themselves on the general non-English-speaking labour market. Here Sweden clearly differs from a liberal English-speaking labour market where many advance within the labour market, from low-skilled to more skilled jobs.

The results also confirm that employment outcomes not only depend on differences in productivity but also from human capital investment strategies (Adda, Dustmann, and Görlach 2016). Human capital investments depend both on structural opportunities, as well as individuals' subjective perceptions of their own situation, depending on the reasons for migrating and their intentions of staying in Sweden. There is a trade-off between investments in country specific and general human capital. A quick decision to stay often results in investments in country specific human capital and, later, entry into high-skilled jobs. Others want to stay, but keep their options open, and invest in general human capital with limited use in the Swedish labour market.

Youth mobility from the new member states to Sweden hence mainly result in additional years spent in education and interrupted careers. Rather than acting as a tool for increased efficiency of the EU-labour market, intra-EU youth mobility too often results in a lose-lose-lose situation: Sending countries lose productive workers, receiving countries has to pay for re-investment in human capital, and individuals lose valuable years in the labour market.

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