

Diehl, Claudia; Mau, Steffen; Schupp, Jürgen

**Article**

## German Emigration: Not a Permanent Loss of University Graduates

Weekly Report

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)

*Suggested Citation:* Diehl, Claudia; Mau, Steffen; Schupp, Jürgen (2008) : German Emigration: Not a Permanent Loss of University Graduates, Weekly Report, ISSN 1860-3343, Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), Berlin, Vol. 4, Iss. 2, pp. 7-13

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/151025>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

# Weekly Report

## German Emigration: Not a Permanent Loss of University Graduates

*In 2006 about 155 000 Germans left their country—more than ever before apart from the postwar wave of emigration in the 1950s. However, many recent German emigrants return to their home country. Although the question of why this rise has occurred is now arousing much attention from the general public and in research, comprehensive analyses have not so far been possible owing to the lack of an adequate data base.*

*As part of two special surveys for the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) study more than 2 000 persons aged over 16 were questioned in the first half of 2007 about emigration and living abroad. Many Germans have at one time seriously thought about moving abroad, but very few have concrete plans to emigrate, and a good half of these only intend to spend a certain length of time abroad.*

*A more detailed analysis of the characteristics of Germans who are willing to emigrate shows that existing social ties in the country of destination and past experience abroad play a crucial role in the emergence of ideas of emigrating. Persons who are self-employed are particularly likely to leave Germany for ever, but university graduates do so particularly rarely.*

Much attention has been paid in public debate recently to the subject of Germans emigrating from Germany. The dynamic of emigration has increased<sup>1</sup> and the number leaving has clearly risen since 2001. In 2005 145 000 and in 2006 155 000 Germans emigrated—more than in any year since 1954 (Table 1). But the balance has only been negative since 2005, with the number leaving larger than the number returning.<sup>2</sup> If the number of migrations is shown in relation to the total German population, the annual emigration rate is very low.

Little is known of the reasons for this development. However, they are by no means of academic interest only,<sup>3</sup> for the scope for political intervention and prognoses of future developments in migration greatly depends on whether the figures are primarily a reaction to disadvantageous economic conditions, or the signs of gro-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the recent report by Sauer, L., Ette, A.: *Auswanderung aus Deutschland*, Wiesbaden 2007; and on the trend in the numbers Grobecker, C., Krack-Roberg, E., Sommer, B.: *Bevölkerungsentwicklung 2005*, in: *Wirtschaft und Statistik*, Vol. 1/2007, pp. 45-57.

<sup>2</sup> This group has not been analysed more closely here.

<sup>3</sup> As the Council of Experts on Immigration and Integration, Berlin, document in their definition of the term "migration", in their Annual Report 2004 "Migration und Integration - Erfahrungen nutzen, Neues wagen", for example.

Claudia Diehl  
[cdiehl@uni-goettingen.de](mailto:cdiehl@uni-goettingen.de)

Steffen Mau  
[smau@gss.uni-bremen.de](mailto:smau@gss.uni-bremen.de)

Jürgen Schupp  
[jschupp@diw.de](mailto:jschupp@diw.de)

JEL Classification:  
CBI, DOI, O15

Keywords:  
SOEP, Migration

**Box**

The data analysed is from two special surveys by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which is carried out by DIW Berlin in cooperation with TNS Infratest Sozialforschung. In the first study 1 023 randomly selected persons were questioned on the general subject of emigration.<sup>1)</sup> In a second study 1 057 persons answered the same questions again as part of an online survey<sup>2)</sup>. The calculations are based on an integrated data analysis of both part-studies which covered a total of 2 080 persons.

The questions on the general theme of "emigration" were drawn up by the authors jointly and they are part of innovative question modules that were successfully tested for later use in the SOEP longitudinal study in 2007. The module contains questions to enable the potential for moving abroad to be estimated. The question was:

Have you recently seriously played with the idea of moving abroad for a longer period, or maybe even permanently?

Those who gave a positive answer were then asked what were their specific motives for possibly moving abroad, how long they planned to stay there and any past experience of extended periods abroad.

**1** The field work for the survey "Private Life and the Community" that was carried out between 13.1 and 9.3 2007 was handled by Infratest. Persons aged over 16 in private households were questioned using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI). The utilisation ratio of the random route sample was 48.6%.

**2** For the second survey of "Private Life and the Community" a total of 2 600 participants in an online access panel were contacted by e-mail by Infratest. Within a 19-day period from 14.6. to 2.7.2007 for downloading the questionnaire, altogether 1 057 participants responded. That is a utilisation rate of 40.7%.

wing international mobility.<sup>4</sup> A more exact analysis of migration from Germany has so far not been possible owing to lack of a data base.<sup>5</sup>

The subject of emigration raises problems for research, principally because it is difficult to obtain more exact information about the characteristics and motivation of emigrants. Secondly, the equally interesting group of persons who are willing to emigrate is relatively small, so that reliable information about them can only be obtained as part of large surveys, which have not so far been conducted. Thirdly, to ask about ideas of emigrating is only to ask about an intention, and the validity of the results obtained in "ad hoc surveys", namely that a considerable percentage of Germans would be glad to turn their backs on their country, is questionable.<sup>6</sup>

The analyses based on SOEP and on which this report is based not only provide information about how many Germans are playing with the idea of emigrating, but also whether these ideas lead to concrete plans (box). They permit statements to be made on the socio-demographic characteristics of persons willing to emigrate, and what factors encourage the intention to do so.

**4** Cf. Mau, S.: Transnationale Vergesellschaftung, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

**5** For an initial evaluation of the SOEP survey using Germans who moved abroad during the panel run cf. Schupp, I., Sohn, J., Schmiade, N.: Internationale Mobilität von deutschen Staatsbürgern - Chancen für Arbeitslose oder Abwanderung der Leistungsträger? In: Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft 30 (2-3), 2005, pp. 279-292.

**6** At the beginning of September, for example, the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach reported that every fifth person would like to leave Germany, Allensbacher Bericht 2007, No. 14, Allensbach am Bodensee.

### Many think about emigrating—but only a very few have concrete plans.

The SOEP surveys show that just under one quarter of the over-16s questioned stated that they have already once seriously played with the idea of going abroad for a longer period of time or for ever (Table 2). But only a small minority of those who were "thinking about emigrating" had moved into the phase of making concrete preparations. Only a third had already obtained information about a period abroad (for example from the Academic Exchange Service, organisations giving scholarships or the advisory services of the labour agency). Even smaller is the number of those who were actually planning

Table 1

#### Germans Emigrating and Returning<sup>1</sup>

	Immigrants	Emigrants	Net
1956	76 581	119 880	-43 299
1966	69 841	73 540	-3 699
1976	88 983	53 695	35 288
1986	88 867	59 350	29 517
1996	251 737	118 430	133 307
2001	193 958	109 507	84 451
2002	184 202	117 683	66 519
2003	167 216	127 267	39 949
2004	177 993	150 667	27 326
2005	128 051	144 815	-16 764
2006	103 384	155 290	-51 906

**1** Up to 1990 only West Germany

to move abroad in the next twelve months—only 35 out of a total of more than 2 000 questioned (just under two percent).<sup>7</sup> Independent of whether those questioned had rather vague ideas of emigrating or concrete plans to do so, just under half in each case would like to go for ever.

By far the most popular target region for those who had concrete migration plans was Europe; it was the target for two thirds. The data from the Federal Statistical Office also confirms a trend to Europeanisation of migration. Whereas in the 1950s two thirds of emigrants chose the classical immigration countries USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and even in the 1980s the share emigrating within Europe was still regularly below 40 percent, a clear rise in the numbers moving to another European country is evident. In recent years the number remaining in Europe has continuously been above 60 percent, with Switzerland, Austria, Poland and Great Britain showing particularly strong growth rates as target countries. The trend is not least due to the fact that there are scarcely any legal barriers now to mobility within the European Union, indeed mobility of people is intensively encouraged. Only 6 percent of those who were thinking of emigrating reported about legal or bureaucratic obstacles that made possible emigration more difficult.

The group of potential emigrants is certainly not homogeneous, on the contrary, we encountered a large number of different types of potential migrants and motives for emigrating. Beside the classical employment reason for moving, there were newer motives—retirement, social and cultural reasons, educational and training mobility and the return of late resettlers (Spätaussiedler). The SOEP survey shows the groups in which considerations of emigrating are particularly frequent.

Table 3 shows that potential emigrants tend to be male, in the age group 16 to under 40, live in West rather than East Germany and more frequently have a university degree or are self-employed. Unemployed persons who lost their job relatively recently are also rather ready to emigrate, according to the descriptive analyses. However, it should be pointed out straightaway that registering as unemployed does not, in a multivariate observation, have significant influence on readiness to emigrate.

Table 2

**Stages of Intent to Emigrate**

In percent

	Number of cases <sup>1</sup>	Share in	
		Total no. questioned	Respondents thinking of emigrating
Thinking of emigrating <sup>2</sup>	458	23.5	100.0
Of whom:			
Informed about emigrating <sup>3</sup>	151	7.8	33.0
In tend to emigrate in the next 12 months	35	1.8	7.6

<sup>1</sup> N = 1947; calculations weighted<sup>2</sup> "Have you recently seriously played with the idea of moving abroad for a longer period or maybe even permanently?"<sup>3</sup> "Have you already obtained information about emigrating?"

Data base: SOEP Pre-Tests 2007; calculations by DIW Berlin

**The image of the inexperienced pioneer abroad does not correspond to reality**

In public debate it is still assumed that it is mainly lack of economic opportunities in their home country that drives Germans abroad.<sup>8</sup> However, empirical migration research has shown that the dynamic of emigration can increase simply because more people have social ties abroad. These relations work like catalysts on migration, because they lower the economic and psychological costs - for instance, because they provide information about a certain target country and because potential networks of assistance are available.<sup>9</sup> They are acquired either through personal experience abroad, as a student, for example, or through contacts with friends and acquaintances who are already living there.

The latest results from the SOEP data again confirm that the image of the "starry-eyed" pioneer who sets off abroad with no experience does not correspond to reality. Potential emigrants differ from non-migrants primarily in terms of their foreign contacts and experience. Nearly two thirds of those questioned who had seriously considered emigrating had regular contacts abroad, while this applied to only just under one third of those who had no idea of emigrating. The share is even higher among those who have made concrete plans to move, with 80 percent of those who would like to move abroad in the next twelve months already having contacts in their target country. That suggests that not only the emergence of the idea of emigrating but also its implementation is facilitated by contacts abroad. From these results it may also be assumed that the emigration of Germans

<sup>8</sup> Cf. for example the article by Müller, H.: Wir bluten aus, in *manager-magazin*, 22.6.2006, [www.manager-magazin.de/unternehmen/artikel/0,2828,422371,00.html](http://www.manager-magazin.de/unternehmen/artikel/0,2828,422371,00.html)

<sup>9</sup> Massey, D.S., Espana, F.G.: *The Social Process of International Migration*, in: *Science*, Vol. 237, 1987, pp. 733-738

<sup>7</sup> This modelling of emigration decisions as a sequential process and the measurement of ideas on emigrating and plans to emigrate largely follow Kalter, F.: *Wohnortwechsel in Deutschland*, Opladen 1997.

Table 3

**The Socio-Demographic Features of Potential Emigrants<sup>1</sup>**

Shares in %

	Potential Emigrants	Memo Item: Over-16s Questioned
Total	23.5	100.0
Gender		
Male	25.9	48.6
Female	21.2	51.4
Age groups		
Up to 40	35.4	33.7
41 to 64	20.1	38.0
65 and over	1.5 <sup>a</sup>	28.3
Region		
West Germany	24.6	78.4
East Germany	19.3	21.6
Education		
General school certificate	14.4	36.2
University degree	28.7	10.8
Employment status		
Employed	29.4	25.7
Self-employed	33.1	8.2
Otherwise employed	22.1	15.9
Unemployed (for up to 12 months)	36.5 <sup>b</sup>	3.3
Long-term unemployed (12 months and longer)	19.6 <sup>b</sup>	5.8

<sup>1</sup> Potential emigrants are respondents who answered "Yes" to the question "Have you recently seriously played with the idea of moving abroad for a longer period or maybe even permanently?"

<sup>a</sup> Fewer than 10 cases; <sup>b</sup> fewer than 30 cases; N = 1947

Data base: SOEP Pre-Tests 2007; calculations by DIW Berlin

attracts others to do the same—in other words, that emigration can have cumulative effects.

**People who have once lived abroad are inclined to migrate again**

The same applies to earlier stays abroad. Just under 15 percent of those who have seriously considered moving abroad, and as many as 20 percent of those who would like to emigrate in the next 12 months, have already lived abroad, while that applies to fewer than five percent of respondents who are not considering emigrating. As the majority of the periods spent abroad lasted more than one year most of these people do think they have a "good" or even "very good" command of the language of their target country.

Knowledge of the language is a good example for how past periods abroad encourage mobility. It not only helps to overcome the linguistic, psychological

and practical barriers to emigration, it also constitutes an individual resource that can be utilised with profit in later periods abroad. The diagram shows the importance of experience and contacts abroad for the various stages of intention to emigrate.

Although the importance of occupational reasons for emigrating cannot be examined from the available data for all those willing to emigrate there are indications that economic motives do play an important role in inducing emigration, mostly with regard to temporary migration. More than two thirds of those who had already lived abroad went abroad to study or for training, or as part of their job. At the same time more than half of the respondents with experience abroad said that their stay was always intended to be only temporary. So the results confirm that cultural competences or social contacts are acquired during temporary periods abroad which in turn increase the inclination to go abroad again later.

**Existing Ties Play a Major Role in the Intention to Emigrate**

To obtain a more exact picture of who would actually like to move abroad and which factors interact in this decision, the following different factors are examined together.<sup>11</sup> The concern is firstly to estimate the relative importance of experience and social ties abroad and of local ties in Germany (e.g. home ownership). Secondly, possible economic motives for emigrating, like low income or unemployment, are considered. Thirdly, the effect of psychological predispositions, like a high individual willingness to take risk, are examined. And fourthly, the question is considered whether the socio-demographically defined sub-groups differentiated above show a particularly high risk of emigrating, taking all these factors into account as well. These models are calculated, first for all the respondents together and then separately for those contemplating temporary and permanent emigration (Table 3).

The results confirm the central importance of ties abroad. Persons who already have contacts in a foreign country or have already lived abroad for a time are most likely to seriously consider moving

<sup>10</sup> The question whether occupational reasons were the main determinants of the decision to emigrate was only addressed to the small sub-group who reported having concrete plans to emigrate within the next twelve months. Fewer than half of this group stated that the main reason was their job.

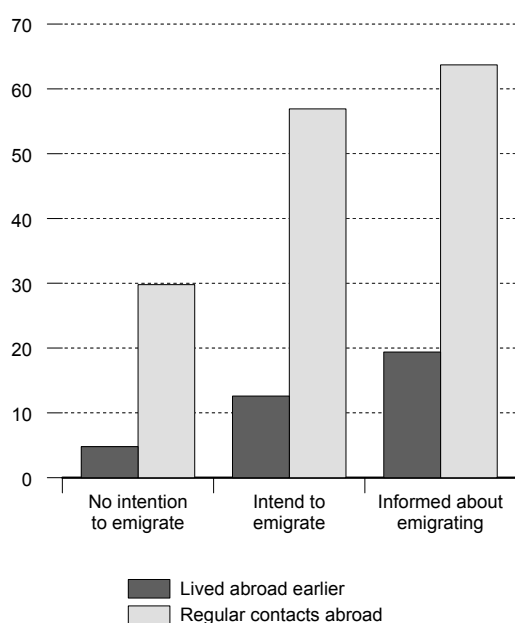
<sup>11</sup> Multivariate analyses were carried out using logistical regression models, with the intention to emigrate estimated as a dependent variable through a number of socio-demographic features. The coefficients are an odds ratio and can be interpreted as relative probabilities. Coefficients under "1" point to a lesser probability of wanting to move abroad compared with the reference group. Parameters over "1" indicate a greater probability.



Diagram

### Experience and Contacts Abroad in the Different Stages of Intention to Emigrate<sup>1</sup>

Shares in percent



Sources: SOEP; calculations by DIW Berlin

abroad again for a longer period or even permanently. Conversely, local and economic ties to Germany are a barrier to emigration. If account is taken of the individual ties in the target country and in the home country in appropriate modelling, individual features only play a part insofar as an above-average share of younger men and persons who are generally willing to take risks are more likely to consider emigrating. But the analyses give no indication that an inferior economic position, measured by the present employment status, plays a central part. At least that applies insofar as in multivariate modelling persons who are registered unemployed, or are on low incomes, do not consider leaving Germany more frequently than persons on middle incomes.

### The self-employed think of emigrating permanently, but not the highly qualified

In regard to the factors that encourage mobility examined here there is apparently not a big difference between those who intend to move abroad for a temporary period and those who intend to stay permanently. However, there are two quite remarkable exceptions to this: Firstly, even taking social ties into account the self-employed evidently consider permanent emigration particularly frequently.<sup>12</sup> A

<sup>12</sup> Which types of self-employed account for this result, in how far the above-average readiness to emigrate in this group is a reaction to unfavourable economic conditions in Germany and which target countries they have in mind are questions that must be the main focus of any future research activities.

second surprising result is that *ceteris paribus* Germans with university degrees are particularly rarely inclined to contemplate permanent emigration.

The growing mobility of highly qualified people is being followed in public and political debate with particular attention.<sup>13</sup> This is also evident in the Federal Government's declared aim of setting new incentives to persuade German academics to return. In fact, the analyses based on the intention to emigrate show that the mobility of this group is particularly frequently temporary. However, it is impossible to say conclusively from the available data how many of this mobile group eventually decide to stay abroad, contrary to their original intention. Many academics have returned to Germany in the past—and with their experience abroad they then form a big potential for renewed emigration.

### Conclusion

A survey of Germans aged 16 and over in two special SOEP surveys in 2007 has shown that almost every fourth person can imagine moving abroad for a longer period or even permanently. However, only very few respondents have made concrete plans to do so. The preferred target region is not the New World but Europe, and this is presumably related to the new possibilities for free movement and mobility of labour within the European Union.

Experience and contacts abroad acquired in the past play the decisive part in encouraging and concretising ideas of emigrating. These ties with the target country facilitate access to information on life abroad, they help in finding a job and accommodation and ease homesickness. In many schools, colleges and companies a period abroad is now a fixed component of education and training or a step up the career ladder. That is evident from the high share of those who have already lived abroad.<sup>14</sup>

These periods abroad reduce the linguistic, practical and psychological barriers to future temporary or permanent emigration. In a globalised world, in which these experiences are becoming general, a rise in the willingness to emigrate is to be expected, but so is a bigger return flow.

The image frequently depicted in the media of the economically motivated emigrant turning his back on his own country for ever can best be found in the group of self-employed people who are often particularly willing to take a risk.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Diehl, C., Dixon, D.: Zieht es die Besten fort? In *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 4, 2005, pp. 714-734.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Büchner, C.: Investition in Humankapital: Auslandsaufenthalte von Schülern, Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin, No. 45/2004.

Table 4

**Which Factors Encourage Ideas of Temporary and Permanent Emigration?¹**

Odds Ratio

	Full model	Temporary period abroad	Permanent emigration
Gender (reference group: women)			
Male	1.236*	1.052	1.490**
Age (metric)	0.951***	0.931***	0.968***
Region (reference group: West Germany)			
East Germany	0.727**	0.746	0.835
Size of municipality (reference group: 20 000 to less than 500 000 inhabitants)			
Under 20 000 inhabitants	0.613	0.663	0.568
500 000 and more	1.276	1.118	1.186
Educational level (reference group: higher education or other vocational qualification)			
Pupil	1.550	1.068	1.106
Without vocational qualification	0.778	0.876	0.690
Apprenticeship	0.974	0.816	1.002
Technical college graduate	0.784	0.813	0.771
University graduate	1.236	1.335	0.327***
Job status (reference group: not employed without pupils)			
Employee	1.179	1.105	1.250
Self-employed	1.877**	1.084	2.375***
Otherwise employed	1.050	0.736	1.320
Unemployed	1.365	2.088	0.801
Long-term unemployed	1.242	1.450	1.051
Income (reference group: 2nd, 3rd, 4th income quintile)			
Lowest income quintile (under 1 200 euros)	1.057	0.938	0.832
Top income quintile (above 3 000 euros)	1.020	1.350	1.061
Child(ren) under 16 in household (reference group: no children)			
One child	0.851	0.820	0.170
Two and more children	0.799	0.728	0.791
Housing (reference group: head of household, sub-tenant)			
Home owner	0.709**	0.685**	0.722*
Type of survey (reference group: CAPI, January-March 2007)			
Online questionnaire (May 2007)	1.351*	1.300	1.666**
Subjective indicators (reference group: low willingness to take risk (scale 0-5), no experience abroad, no local ties to strong local ties, no contacts abroad)			
High risk willingness (scale 6-10)	1.278**	1.481**	1.195
Experience abroad	1.960***	1.997**	1.783*
Very strong local ties	0.568***	0.676**	0.450***
Contacts with friends/acquaintances abroad	3.383***	4.505***	2.890***
Statistics			
Quality measurement: Nagelkerkes R²	0.273	0.327	0.177
No. of observations	2 025	1 796	1 779

¹ Results of a logit estimate with 0/1 dummies; dependent variable: seriously considered temporary or permanent emigration  
 Error probability: \* < 10%, \*\* < 5%, \*\*\* < 1%.

Sources: SOEP, calculations by DIW Berlin

The inclination of university graduates to move abroad is frequently regarded with particular concern, but in fact very few plan to move abroad permanently. This group is rather distinguished by a generally high degree of flexibility and mobility. University graduates are particularly attracted to foreign countries with their experience and contacts abroad, but very few want to stay there permanently. So the mobility evident in this group is not so much a “brain drain” as a “brain circulation”. As many of them return to Germany in the long term positive effects are actually to be expected from their movements.

DIW Berlin  
Mohrenstraße 58  
10117 Berlin

Tel. +49-30-897 89-0  
Fax +49-30-897 89-200

ISSN 1860-3343  
Price: Euro 10.–  
[www.diw.de/english/produkte/publikationen/weeklyreport](http://www.diw.de/english/produkte/publikationen/weeklyreport)  
All articles are protected by copyright.