

# In Praise of Freedom of Movement of People in the European Union

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MoveMapper Android App

In these days of mass movements of people connected with the [refugee crisis](#), it is rare to find recognition of the European Union's (EU) freedom of movement of people, let alone any commendations. Rather, the media and politicians tend to focus on the stresses and strains connected with migration and freedom of movement within the EU in general and the volume of refugees heading to Europe specifically. In this article, I argue against the grain of current discourse, fully acknowledging populists' ability to set the tone of public opinion. I make the argument that the single most important achievement of the EU is the principle of freedom of movement of people across 28 countries. This fundamental right is under attack from many quarters. This article and the [MoveMapper™ app](#) presented below, represent my effort to counteract this trend. Freedom of movement of people has the capacity to improve people's lives, while also raising standards of living for all. We should not allow it to be undermined by short-sighted, populist agendas.

## The Nation State: freedom of movement lost

Before there were dukedoms, fiefdoms, principalities and eventually nation-states, human being roamed the earth and settled where they chose to. Freedom of movement of people existed in its purest sense: we could go anywhere we liked and the world was our oyster. After the establishment the nation state we became Germans, Britons and so on. Fences, borders, visas and other obstacles restricted the ability to live and work severely and the arena of life was telescoped into national boundaries except for a lucky few, such as diplomats, the military and the well-to-do.

## The EU: freedom of movement regained

At the heart of the European Union (EU) is the establishment of a common market. This in turn required overcoming a number of restrictions and led directly to the establishment of the **four fundamental freedoms** at the core of the EU:

- The free movement of **goods**: this right allows free flow of products between EU countries free of import/export duties/charges and common customs tariffs for non-EU countries;
- The free movement of **services** (and of establishment): this ensures unrestricted rights to create firms/self-employment in any country and freedom to provide cross-border services;
- The free movement of **capital**: this allows capital flows (finance, property, etc.) within the EU countries;
- The free movement of **people**: this allows the relocation of citizens between EU 28 countries to pursue their activities, including the abolition of discrimination based on nationality.

The EU is dedicated to realising these four freedoms, subject to exceptions where a Member State can prove that they jeopardize a public good (e.g. public health) and are safeguarded by EU Treaty. Of the four freedoms, the most important to the 500+ million people living in the EU, is the freedom of movement of people throughout 28 countries (actually 32 in the European Economic Area countries, which includes Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

### **Up-Close: Movement of People**

For me, this is the most fundamental freedom and greatest achievement of the EU. It guarantees every EU/EEA citizen the right to move freely, visit, live, work and retire in any member state without restriction. It applies to all EU/EEA citizens, regardless of nationality and does away with discrimination in the common market. Furthermore, it ensures that certain rights can also be extended to the family members of the worker, including benefits, pensions, etc.

None of us believes that we should be disadvantaged in the labour market because of our religion, skin colour or other factors. This freedom means that discrimination on the basis of nationality, residence and/or language is not permitted, while also securing equal treatment in employment conditions, remuneration, dismissal and the receipt of social benefits.

If you believe in transparency and fair treatment, there is absolutely nothing that anyone should fear from the freedom of movement of people. On the contrary, this is an achievement that Europeans should be proud of.

### **The pros and cons: movement of the people**

At the most basic level, the freedom of movement of people means that you and I have access to 32 EEA countries, as well as Switzerland, at the drop of a hat. Not only that, we have automatically the same rights (and responsibilities) as the citizens of those countries. What does this mean in practice?

- You can visit all 31 countries when you like and as often as you like without cost, delay, restriction, etc.;
- You can study / au pair, etc. in any of these countries using the same procedures and incurring the same costs as the national citizens of that country;
- You can work in all countries without constraints or fear of discrimination due to nationality, residence, language, etc.;
- You do not need a visa or a qualifying period before you can start working or your family can join you;
- You do not need to fear being treated differently in the form of the contract, holidays, wages, pension, benefits, etc. just because your nationality is different;
- You can retire wherever you choose and transfer your pension without fear of being penalised or restricted by virtue of choosing to live in another EU/EEA country.

These fundamental rights are just the tip of the iceberg. Yet this degree of freedom to take greater control of your own destiny would have been considered to be a utopian dream not so long ago in Europe. It used to take hours to cross borders and the long, costly and uncertain bureaucratic nightmares involved in moving countries, getting a job, buying a property, establishing a company, etc. made it a remote dream,

except for a small minority. No longer; this particular freedom have been hard won and it is worth fighting tooth and nail to retain.

The above are not the only benefits of the freedom of movement of people. It can play an important role in other respects, contributing to individual, national and EU well-being:

- Ageing Population and pensions: the ageing population structure in the EU is a major challenge: of the 28 countries of the EU, only Ireland, France and the UK are remotely close to being able to replace their population. Politicians may seek to increase the female participation rate in the labour market and raise the pensionable age, however, the serious demographic challenge cannot be overcome without significant positive net migration for a sustained period of time, even beyond the levels currently being experienced due to the refugee crisis;
- Reducing unemployment: some cities and regions of EU countries experience much higher levels of unemployment than others (e.g. London vs Liverpool). In the same vein, some countries experience higher levels of unemployment than others (e.g. Greece and Portugal vs Germany and the UK). If economies are growing and labour is attracted to more dynamic cities, regions or countries, this is advantageous to all concerned, not least the unemployed, their dependants, the employers, as well as the tax man;
- Economic contribution: if economic growth is restricted due to lack of employees or absence of certain types of skill, a labour market of 500+ million makes it possible for economies to continue growing without overheating and resulting in recession. This applies not only to the top, professional jobs. Low paid, dirty, dangerous, dull, flexible and insecure work is the very type that many nationals of the wealthier EU countries are very content to leave to others.

There are few things in life that only entail benefits and no costs; freedom of movement of people is no different. The main potential disadvantages include the following:

- Cheap Labour Depressing Wages: it is possible that inflows of people willing to take even lower pay than the going rate for certain jobs depresses the wage levels. However, the case either way (depressing or increasing wages) is hotly disputed by economists. Most studies find that there is almost no effect either way but many people remain fearful of this issue, especially the less educated/skilled;
- Already High Unemployment Levels: it is possible that migrants will flow to areas with already high levels of unemployment. However, migratory flows have an internal logic – migrants want to find work, not to move from being unemployed in one location to being unemployed in yet another. As a rule, they seek out high employment areas because they want to work, they want to save and they want a shot at a better life for themselves;
- Welfare Tourism: it is possible that a proportion of migrants will seek to improve their lives by migrating to a country offering higher social benefits than in their own nation. However, research suggests that a tiny proportion of EU migrants fall into this category ([less than 1% of all beneficiaries in six EU countries and 1%-5% in five others](#)). Despite the great song and dance about this issue by the populists, no government has come up with any data corroborating the overblown claims of cross-border welfare tourism;
- Brain drain: freedom of movement of people can lead to skilled people leaving countries that paid for their education and training to be benefit of the receiving country. This is certainly an issue for the emitting country. But there is also the prospect that many choose return to their country of

origin, bringing with them higher levels of human capital, know-how, investment capital and an entrepreneurial mind-set that can contribute to national development.

While recognising the pros and cons involved, on balance, most conclude that the freedom of movement of people is a great boon for the individuals concerned, as well as for the emitting and receiving countries. Migration across localities, cities, regions and countries has the capacity to unleash economic development and raise living standards, while also delivering greater satisfaction and happiness at the individual level. It is not a one-way street, but it is worth defending.

### **The Reality: movement indirectly hampered**

The reality however is that governments, to varying degrees, are sensitive to the issue of freedom of movement of people. While recognising the great potential and actual advantages of migration, politicians are extremely mindful of emotive public opinion. They are fully aware of the demographic ticking-bomb that is the ageing European society. But short-termism is inherent their profession (4-5 year election cycles) and populism (winning the next local / regional / national / European region election) is the name of their game. They and the media feed upon people's concerns and fears, regardless of whether these are well-founded or not. Fear, not hope, is their basic working material.

The consequence is that none of the EU and EEA governments (the European Commission included) make it easy for people to get access to the information that they need to have a sound basis for deciding whether to move to another country or not. A lot of information is available, but it is fragmented, outdated, uncoordinated, etc. Moving to another country may be something that we consider but we usually do not get far. It takes weeks of research effort to connect up the fragmented dots and build a clear picture of what is involved in moving from one country to another with the EU. We typically lack the time, skills, energy and patience to do this.

Relatively few people make use of the single most precious gift of the EU to its 508 million citizens: only 11 million EU citizens have taken advantage of the right to live, study, work or retire in another EU country (or 2.2% of all people in 28 countries). It is clear that some countries are more attractive than others, but the low level of general migration within the EU is not something to fear and deny.

### **Moving people: MoveMapper™ app**

Through the EU's freedom of movement of people, we have almost utopian rights to live our lives how and where we want. If we choose to, we can change our minds and go back home and pick-up where we left off. I am a serial migrant. I have lived in several EU countries and worked in almost 40 countries worldwide. I have benefited enormously as a human being and as a professional. I do not fear migration or migrants. On the contrary, I embrace other cultures, languages, traditions, history, art, ideas, cuisine, and yes, also our differences and our sameness as human beings, whatever our skin colour, language or beliefs.

The beauty of the freedom of movement of people has inspired me to develop the **MoveMapper™ app**, which is designed to bring to together key information in deciding whether to **work / study / au pair / retire, etc. in another EU country**, starting with Britain and Germany.

The MoveMapper™ app covers the **formalities** of moving to another country, how to get **accommodation**, how to find **employment**, how to deal with **financial** issues, how to integrate your **family**, how to gain **education / language** skills and **other issues**. By pulling the relevant information together, the app provides you with the capacity to enrich your life.

I do not claim that this is a perfect app, that it has all the possible information or indeed that it is 100% up-to-date. The situation is constantly evolving and maintaining information is not easy.

But I believe that it will provide you with sufficient information with which to enable you to **decide whether and how to take advantage of the EU's greatest gift** to its citizens. The rest is up to you.

The MoveMapper™ app offers information for two countries to start with: **Britain and Germany**, the countries closest to my heart and which form the focus of my blog: the [AngloDeutsch Blog](#).

The free version can be tested for free. The premium version costs Euro 0,99 + VAT per country.

When the MoveMapper™ app generates sufficient interest and revenue, I plan to add other countries and update and improve the information available, as well as the app experience.

**[Test MoveMapper™](#). Rate it. Share it by forwarding it to people who might be interested.**

Do not fear the freedom of movement of people within the EU; instead, recognise it for the incredible opportunity that it offers to those that choose to make use of it. This amounts to real power, real freedom to shape our lives and those of our families.

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