



Does International Migration Pay Off?

The Labor Market Situation of Finnish Return Migrants Based on Longitudinal Register Data

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ABSTRACT

International mobility is a form of flexible labor market adaptation available for young Nordic nationals who have the privilege of relatively easy return if life abroad does not work out. The article considers mobility as a labor market transition and examines the pre- and post-migration situation of two Finnish return migrant groups—those who lived abroad in 1999 and in 2004—based on longitudinal register data. It considers the consequences of return for an individual migrant: is it a form of failure in labor market integration in the country of destination or rather a sign of success whereby the skills, resources, and experiences gained abroad are brought back to the country of origin. Migrants who leave Finland nowadays often opt to move to other Nordic countries and are younger, more educated, and have a better socio-economic status than previous migrant generations. The article demonstrates that international migration does not deteriorate the returnees' labor market status. While re-entry into the Finnish labor market may take some time and flexibility, mobility seems to pay off and have beneficial consequences: return migrants earn higher taxable incomes and have lower unemployment rates than their peers who only stayed in the national labor markets.

KEY WORDS

Finland, flexibility, labor market adaptation, longitudinal register data, mobility, return migration, transitions

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Introduction

Europe is home to a unique system where the nationals of European Union (EU) member states and countries of the European Economic Area (EEA) are free to move freely within a large geographical area. Different types of Europeans take

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advantage of free movement: manual laborers, service sector employees, highly skilled professionals, students and trainees, families, and retired persons move to different destinations depending on their own interests (e.g., King, 2002; Black et al., 2010; Recchi & Triandafyllidou, 2010; Engbersen, 2012). International mobility is a form of flexible labor market adaptation available also for young Nordic nationals who have the privilege of relatively easy return or onward migration if life abroad does not proceed as expected. This article, based on longitudinal cohort data, focuses on the pre- and post-migration labor market situation of relatively young Finnish migrants who experiment with living abroad only to return to their country of origin. The temporary move abroad is understood as a labor market transition (e.g., Schmid & Gazier, 2002; Schmid, 2008), which can have either positive or negative effects on the individual's career and labor market situation when returning to the country of origin. The article considers the consequences of return for an individual migrant: is return more likely to be understood as a *failure* in labor market integration and achievement in the country of destination or rather a sign of *success* whereby the skills, resources, and experiences gained abroad are brought back to the country of origin (e.g., Cassarino, 2004; de Haas et al., 2015)? And was the time spent abroad a *beneficial* or an *excluding* transition for the individual's career?

Research on labor market behavior (e.g., Lippman, 2008; see also McDonald et al., 2011) has noted that young cohorts who enter the labor markets during turbulent times differ from older cohorts with respect to their attitudes toward work and careers. The time during which different age groups grow up and become socialized to expect certain kinds of conditions in the working life play a role in how they behave when faced with the risk of involuntary unemployment. Older workers are more likely to become displaced and have a higher risk of long periods of unemployment than younger workers, who are more eager to retrain for a new occupation. This is not only related partly to age but also to the fact that they have learned how to navigate on the flexible labor markets (Lippman, 2008, 1285–6; see also Beck, 2000; Predelli & Cebulla, 2011). As Stephen Lippman (2008, 1285) has concluded: 'The flexible employment relationships that are a key characteristic of the "new" economy present a complicated mix of risks and opportunities for workers.' The age cohorts who enter the labor market during a recession or a period of economic uncertainty, and therefore have to learn to adapt to find their place in the working life, can be called *young flexible workers*—a term that also describes the return migrants of this article.

The article examines two groups of Finnish citizens of equal age who live abroad in two different years, in 1999 and in 2004, and return migrate the following years, namely in 2000 and 2005. The groups were formed to facilitate best possible comparison with the dataset that covers the years 1988–2007 in the lives of the 10% cohort of Finns born in specific years (1963, 1968, 1973, and 1978). The focus on those who lived abroad in 1999 and 2004 allows 3 years to pass for both groups after the return to Finland. While some uncontrolled selectivity issues may still remain, this comparison makes it possible to examine the situation of two statistically representative groups *before* and *after* migration. Thus, the article contributes to discussions on changing migration patterns in Europe and the labor market impact of return migration. The findings are contrasted with the work of Jan Saarela and Fjalar Finnäs (2009a, 2009b) who found that the odds of employment of Finnish migrants returning from Sweden in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s were *only about half those of their non-migrant counterparts*. The data of

the article facilitate two types of comparisons: examining how those who leave Finland differ from those who stay and how the two mobile group differ from each other. The questions asked include are the two groups that live abroad at two different times similar? Is flexibility visible in their labor market paths? And how does mobility influence their labor market position upon return?

Data and Methods

Statistically representative, longitudinal migration data are difficult to obtain, because migrants usually drop out from national registers, and cannot, therefore, be easily followed during their life-course. The same is often true even for return migrants because national population registers and available datasets may not distinguish individuals who have lived abroad (Saarela & Finnäs, 2009b, 208). In Finland, the Population Register Centre collects data that covers the entire population, and based on that, Statistics Finland can provide data where you can observe the life-course of the same individuals over time. This article is based on a Statistics Finland *longitudinal register dataset* of a 10% cohort of Finns born in 1963, 1968, 1973, and 1978. These cohorts are followed during 20 years (1988–2007). The sizes of the examined age cohorts vary, the largest being the cohort born in 1963 when a total of 82,251 live births of Finnish citizens were recorded. The size of the next age cohort born 5 years later is 73,654. The age cohort born in 1973 is the smallest (56,787 live births), while the last cohort born in 1978 is again slightly larger (63,983 live births) (Statistics Finland, 2015). The data were compiled from various different registers, and it includes information on the place of residence, primary activity, educational degrees, family situation, and utilization of certain social benefits, for example. Because the dataset is so extensive and the individuals were randomly sampled, the data presented in this article are representative of Finns who lived abroad at that time. The descriptive statistical methods used in this research are basic statistics and free frequencies. The results are presented in tables, where the same phenomenon—moving abroad and returning—is examined at two different times and where the mobile groups are contrasted with each other and with their cohort peers who stayed in Finland.

In order to look for trends in the kinds of migrants and types of migration outcomes that develop over time, two groups of return migrants were formed from the longitudinal cohort data: ‘the 1999 group’ (n = 310 individuals born in 1963, 1968, and 1973) and ‘the 2004 group’ (n = 470 individuals born in 1968, 1973, and 1978). There is no overlap between the groups, as they both consist of separate Finnish citizens who move abroad at the equal age, but at a different time. The groups were formed according to a number of parameters: each individual was born in Finland as a Finnish citizen, lived in the country when the dataset begins (1988), and continues to do so for at least 3 years after return.¹ Those who return as newly naturalized citizens or re-migrate abroad shortly after the return were, therefore, excluded. The year in the group’s name refers to the time when all group members lived abroad and thus had no official place of residence in Finland until the following year (2000 and 2005). The method of identifying migrants from the cohort data is similar to what Saarela and Finnäs (2009b, 210) used with a comparable data when examining employment rates of Finnish returnees during an earlier time period.



Taking into account the mortality rates of young adults at the time, around 98% of each age cohort is still alive in 1999 and 2004. Naturally, a number of individuals in each age cohort has emigrated permanently, and they are not included in the sample. The size of the cohort data to which the 1999 group ($n = 310$) refers to is ~ 208,000 individuals and the 2004 group ($n = 470$) is ~ 190,000 individuals. The years when the individuals move abroad vary, but for the majority, the experience is rather short: 74% of the 1999 group and 72% of the 2004 group stay abroad for less than 3 years². In both groups, those aged 31 years at the time of migration is the largest section of the group (born in 1968 and 1973, respectively). However, in the 1999 group, the second largest section is the oldest aged 36 years (35.5%, b. 1963), while in the 2004 group, it is the youngest aged 26 years (31.9%, b. 1978). The age composition of the two groups is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 The age composition of the 1999 and 2004 groups in cohort data

1999 group ($n = 310$)		Age when living abroad	2004 group ($n = 470$)	
Year of birth	n		Year of birth	n
1973	70	26	1978	150
1968	130	31	1973	190
1963	110	36	1968	130

Source: Statistics Finland cohort data

There are also other differences apart from age. While the 1999 group has more male (58.1%) than female (41.9%) migrants, the opposite is true of the 2004 group (male 38.3% vs. female 61.7%). In line with the fact that the migrants of the 1999 group were older at the time of migration, a higher share of them had children (64.5%) than the 2004 group (53.2%). The groups also differ in terms of education: in the 1999 group, 35.5% moved with only an upper secondary school education, while in the 2004 group, their share is only 21.3%. The high share of less educated individuals in the 1999 group reflects the boom of interest toward studying abroad that characterized the late 1990s. The numbers of those receiving student benefits abroad rose steadily throughout the 1990s and peaked in 1998–1999 (Garam, 2003, 7). The data on post-migration education levels also testify to the fact that many in the 1999 group moved abroad to study: the share of those with no post-secondary education drops by more than 6% points once they return to Finland. The cohort data also give an indication of socio-economic standing: in both groups, employees are the majority, while only 11.1% (1999 group) and 21.7% (2004) of them are manual laborers. In conclusion, the 1999 group consists of individuals who are older and less educated, are more likely to have children and be male, than those who live abroad 5 years later in 2004. The exact figures, based on the situation of the last year when each individual was still living in Finland, are summarized in Table 2.

Unfortunately, the cohort data do not include information on the countries where the individuals lived during their stay abroad. In their study on Finnish-return migrants Saarela and Finnäs (2009a, 492) were faced with the same dilemma:

Table 2 The key characteristics of the 1999 and 2004 groups

Age	The 1999 group	The 2004 group
Aged 26 (born 1973 or 1978)	22.6%	31.9%
Aged 31 (born 1968 or 1973)	41.9%	40.4%
Aged 36 (born 1963 or 1968)	35.5%	27.7%
Gender		
Male	58.1%	38.3%
Female	41.9%	61.7%
Education level ³		
No education, or education level unknown	3.2%	8.5%
Upper secondary level education	35.5%	21.3%
Lowest level tertiary education	25.8%	19.1%
Lower-degree level tertiary education	6.5%	19.1%
Higher-degree level tertiary education	25.8%	27.7%
Doctorate or equivalent level tertiary education	3.2%	4.3%
Family situation: children		
Had children in the year prior to moving	64.5%	53.2%
Did not have children in the year prior to moving	32.3%	42.5%
Data missing	3.2%	4.3%
Socio-economic position ⁴		
Employees (upper or lower level)	72.2%	78.3%
Manual laborers	11.1%	21.7%
Self-employed	16.7%	0.0%

Source: Statistics Finland cohort data

We have no explicit information about the country from which the migrants had returned, but since we are primarily concerned with the period prior to the mid-1990s, return migrants as discussed here should be understood as Finns who have return migrated from Sweden.

Due to the diminished importance of Sweden as a destination country (e.g., Koikkalainen, 2013, 22; Korkiasaari, 2013, 163–165), the same straightforward assumption cannot be made here. Therefore, an indication of the countries where our migrants returned from in 2000 and 2005 is found from the general Statistics Finland data (2014).

In the year 2000, a total of 557 and in 2005 617 Finnish citizens, born in the same 3 years as the 1999 and 2004 groups, moved *back* to Finland (see Table 3). A number of reasons explain why these return migration figures are slightly higher than the sizes of the two groups of the cohort data (310 and 470 individuals). While the return migration figure includes all Finnish citizens who moved to Finland in a given year, our sampling procedure excluded individuals who were born abroad, who adopted Finnish citizenship only later in life, and those who moved abroad again later. Those moving abroad again may be a sizeable group, as many studies have noted that international experience and studying abroad increases the likelihood of re-migration (e.g., Wiers-Jensen, 2008; Van Mol, 2011). In the general migrant figures in 2000, the largest age group that returned was those born in 1968 (aged 32 years at the time), and in 2005,

Table 3 General return migrant figures in 2000 and 2005 by age group

All Finnish citizens by age group in 2000 (n = 557)		Age when returning to Finland	All Finnish citizens by age group in 2005 (n = 617)	
Year of birth	n		Year of birth	n
1973	179 (32%)	27	1978	237 (38%)
1968	224 (40%)	32	1973	191 (31%)
1963	154 (28%)	37	1968	189 (31%)

Source: Statistics Finland 2014

Table 4 General return migrants figures in 2000 and 2005 by country

2000 (born 1963, 1968, 1973)		2005 (born 1968, 1973, 1978)	
1. Sweden	164	1. Sweden	230
2. Norway	73	2. Germany	50
3. Germany	39	3. Norway	49
4. Britain	32	4. Britain	61
5. Denmark	26	5. USA	32
6. Spain	20	6. Denmark	26
Other countries	203*	Other countries	169
All returnees	557	All returnees	617

*Includes 65 cases where the country was not known. In 2005, there were no unknown cases.

Source: Statistics Finland 2014

the largest age group was those born in 1978 (aged 27 years). These figures, therefore, point toward a similar conclusion that can be drawn from the cohort data: those who experiment with living abroad and then return to Finland are younger in the early 2000s than in the late 1990s.

The main countries from where Finnish citizens, born in the same years as our cohort data, returned from are listed in Table 4. In both years, Sweden holds the top position even though the popularity of Sweden as a destination has been in a steady decline. In 1995, when Finland joined the EU, 37% of Finnish citizens who moved abroad migrated to Sweden, compared with only 24% in 2013 (Statistics Finland, 2015). In both years, Norway and Germany alternate on the second or third places. In the year 2000, all the six most important countries where Finns return from are in Europe. In 2005, the USA enters the list on the fifth place. In both cases, Norway features high on the list at least partly due to the fact that Norway has attracted quite high numbers of nurses and other health care professionals from Finland. This migration phenomenon peaked between 1997 and 2003 when 800 to more than 1300 Finnish citizens moved to Norway each year. Since then, yearly migration numbers to Norway have again been reduced to an average of 400 to 500 migrants per year. In both years, the importance of the Nordic labor market is clearly visible: in 2000, 47%, and in 2005, 49% of all returnees originate from one of Finland's Nordic neighboring countries.

Historical Time and International Migration

Studying two groups of the same age at different times can be understood as context-related research into labor market changes. It stresses the impact of *historical time* and macro-level societal change on labor market behavior as different age groups encounter a multitude of different social, political, and economic conditions that shape their lives, expectations, and choices (see, e.g., Mott, 2002, 69–70; Mayer, 2004, 165–166)—and the life experience of a 26-year-old may be radically different depending on *when* one is of that age. This also applies to the experience of labor market entry and to the kinds of life choices one is able to, or at times forced to, make as well as the possible migration destinations one considers. While the main data of this article examine mobile individuals on both sides of the millennium and the time period between the two groups examined is only 5 years, we may refer to the results of Saarela and Finnäs (2009a, 2009b) for a longer view on the question of return migration to Finland.

Ettore Recchi (2013, 109) has noted that intra-European mobility patterns can be roughly classified into two modalities: the *channeled type* where the migrants from a particular country head toward a few, selected destination countries, and the *dispersed type*, where they head for a wider variety of countries. Migration from Finland has in the past been an example of the channeled migration type, as Sweden has continuously been the preferred migration destination of Finns in the post-war era. After the Second World War, approximately 580,000 Finns have moved to Sweden and around 310,000 of them have since returned to Finland (Korkiasaari, 2013, 165; Johansson, 2014). The peak of this migration phenomenon was in the 1960s and 1970s when Finland was still a country of emigration that sent manual laborers to its more prosperous neighboring country in the West (Korkiasaari & Tarkiainen, 2000; Wahlbeck 2015, 106–107).

In their study, Saarela and Finnäs (2009b, 214) found that ‘(...) people categorized as return migrants have consistently lower employment rates than non-migrants.’ Because they focused on individuals who migrated in the 1970’s and 1980’s and returned to Finland by 1995, they assumed that the majority of them return from Sweden (Saarela & Finnäs, 2009a, 492).’ Those moving to Sweden at that time had relatively low education levels, and unemployment in Finland was an important pushing factor (Finnäs, 2003; Saarela & Finnäs, 2009a). In fact, two-thirds of the migrants who moved to Sweden in those decades sought work in relatively low-skilled occupations in factories, shipyards, and foundries, and many of them did not intend to settle in Sweden but rather moved back and forth between the two countries (Korkiasaari, 2013, 162).

In the past two decades, migration patterns from Finland seem to be changing toward the dispersed type of migration (Recchi, 2013, 115–116; Koikkalainen, 2013; Wahlbeck, 2015). The numbers of Finnish citizens moving to a variety of different European destinations have increased since Finland joined the EEA in 1994 and the EU in 1995. Nowadays, around 10,000 Finnish citizens move abroad each year and most of them head toward other EU member states. Since the early 1990s, the numbers of outgoing migrants from Finland have doubled. There has been a rise in the numbers of outgoing migrants in all age groups, but the rise has been highest in young adults, aged 25–34 years. In 1993, a total of 1511 Finnish citizens of that age moved abroad, while in 2012, the number was 2828 (Statistics Finland, 2015). The share of young people who are transnationally mobile is in fact even higher: all shorter term stays abroad, such as working at a summer



job or as a trainee, are missing from these figures, as are the over 4000 Finnish students who annually take part in the Erasmus student exchange (CIMO, 2014).

During the past 20 years, two important contextual factors have influenced permanent migration and shorter term mobility from Finland: the economic situation and the increased opportunities for international mobility. In 1993, Finland was in the midst of the worst depression since the country's independence in 1917. The rapid economic development of the 1980s was followed by the worst peacetime economic crisis the country, or indeed any Western European nation had faced since the Second World War. The banking sector had to be restructured, property prices plummeted, and the crash led to mass unemployment and numerous bankruptcies of previously profitable companies. From a record low level of unemployment in 1990 (3.1% of the labor force), the unemployment rate rose to a record high by 1994 (16.6%) (Kiander, 2001, 31, see also Koistinen, 2014, 30–32). Employee's flexibility and willingness to accept short fixed-term contracts and part-time employment, for example, were key to the country's survival of the recession and a factor fueling the following period of rapid economic growth (Koistinen & Sengenberger, 2002; Koistinen, 2014, 44; Suikkanen & Viinamäki, 1999). During the worst years of the recession (1990–1993), fewer people left Finland than what had been the norm in the late 1980s. The high unemployment rate did not cause a similar outflow of workers as was the case during earlier periods of economic insecurity when Finns sought work in Sweden *en masse*.

The recession coincided with a number of notable, general labor market trends that have since the 1990s been described with the concepts of, for example, *transitional* (Schmid, 2008; Suikkanen et al., 2001), *risky* and *individualized* (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991) labor markets. Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 147) noted that 'Working life is saturated with uncertainty' in his analysis on how the labor markets operate in the era of *liquid modernity*. The expectations of stable working careers, permanent employment contracts, and clear professional paths have been questioned, as the labor markets have changed and put increased pressures on employees to be ready to change course at a moment's notice. As the European labor markets became increasingly accessible to Finnish workers, many young and educated individuals grasped the opportunity of engaging in circular and temporary migration to European destinations. The ease of experimenting with living abroad within the European free movement area has been described by the concept of *liquid migration* (Engbersen, 2012). The concept of transitional labor markets, originally developed by Günter Schmid (e.g., 1998), highlights the dynamics of the labor market and individual careers. The different transitions from, for example, studying to full employment or from parental leave to part-time employment can be divided into three categories: integrating, maintaining, and excluding transitions (e.g., O'Reilly & Bothfield, 2002). Thus, engaging in liquid migration may fall into each one of these categories depending on the outcome of the transition in question and upon return to the country of origin.

The numbers of migrants moving away from Finland begin to rise again in 1994–1995 (see Fig. 1) after the deepest recession begins to subside and Finland joins the EEA/EU area of free movement. Thanks to the European free movement regime, cheap and easy modes of transportation, and new communication technologies and virtual services offering jobs in various locations, finding work abroad now becomes easier than ever before. European citizens do not need to apply for work or residence permits, they can look for work online or use the EURES (European Employment Services) network, and even commute between different countries on a weekly basis. As is evident from Fig. 1,

Figure 1: Outgoing migration from Finland.



Source: Statistics Finland 2015 (Official population statistics of Finland).

Finns have also taken advantage of this ease of mobility and (at least temporary) migration has been one response to increased labor market uncertainty and the need for flexibility. The migrants examined in this article are also a part of this migration flow from Finland toward foreign, mainly European destinations.

Labor Market Situation in Finland Before Mobility

Finland's economic depression of the early 1990s coincided with increased opportunities for transnational mobility, as the European free movement regime was already fully in place. Visa and passport-free travel within the Scandinavian countries has been possible since the 1950s, but after the EEA/EU membership, the area where one could easily move was much larger. The factors pushing these migrants abroad, therefore, coincided with a multitude of pulling factors that contributed to a rise in outgoing migrant numbers. The two groups of migrants examined in this article left Finland at different historical times when the economic situation, future prospects, and the general mood of the society were somewhat different. So, what was the labor market situation of our two groups when they were still in Finland? Can any factors contributing to mobility from the main activity they were engaged in while living in Finland be noted?

The years in which the individuals in our two groups leave Finland vary, but their labor market situation is here presented at a time when a clear majority of them are still in Finland. For the 1999 group, this year is 1997 (n = 190, 61% still in Finland) and for the 2004 group year 2002 (n = 310, 66% still in Finland). As a comparison, the labor market situation of the *whole cohort data* during the same years is also included. The data are drawn from the Statistics Finland classifications on the primary activity of each individual at the last day of the calendar year.

Table 5 serves three purposes. *First*, it shows the share of students, the unemployment and employment rate, and yearly taxable income in the overall cohort data in 1997 and 2002 so that these 2 years can be compared with each other. *Second*, it shows how

Table 5 Labor market situation before mobility in cohort data⁵

	Share of students	Unemployment rate	Employment rate	Taxable yearly income ⁶
		1997		
All members of cohorts 1963, 1968, 1973 (n = 194,750)	10.3%	15.5%	68.3%	18,862 € (mean) 17,616 € (median)
1999 group (n = 190)	10.5%	13.3%	68.4%	23,280 € (mean) 21,425 € (median)
		2002		
All members of cohorts 1968, 1973, 1978 (n = 181,860)	10.0%	10.7%	73.3%	21,049 € (mean) 19,392 € (median)
2004 group (n = 310)	19.4%	4.8%	64.5%	22,901 € (mean) 15,690 € (median)

Source: Statistics Finland cohort data

the 1999 group and 2004 group differ from their peers in the overall cohort data. *Third*, it allows for a comparison of the 1999 group and the 2004 group with each other: are their pre-migration labor market situations different? The first line of Table 5 thus includes the share of students, the unemployment rate, and the employment rate for all cohort peers (born in 1963, 1968, and 1973), and the second line the same data for the 1999 group. The second part of the table includes the same data for all cohort peers (born in 1968, 1973, and 1978) and the figures for the 2004 group.

In the overall cohort data, the share of students is almost identical in 1997 and 2002: about 10% of the population, at the time aged 24, 29, and 34 years, are students. The share of students in the 1999 group is also roughly at the same level (10.5%), while the share of students is almost double in the 2004 group (19.4%). The table also reveals a clear difference in the unemployment rates in the overall cohort data. The rates are consistently higher during the late 1990s than during the early 2000s, and during the 2 years listed in the table, they are 15.5% vs. 10.7%. Interestingly, the rate of unemployment is lower among both the 1999 group and the 2004 group members than with all corresponding cohort members: unemployment does not seem to be the primary factor pushing them abroad. The unemployment rate is, however, much higher for those in the 1999 group (13.3%) than those in the 2004 group (4.8%).

The data, therefore, show that there are differences in the primary activity prior to moving abroad. The share of those unemployed is consistently higher among the 1999 group than in the 2004 group, while the opposite is true for the number of students. Also, their employment rates differ: while the rates are almost identical for the 1999 group and their cohort peers (68.4% vs. 68.3%), the employment rate of the 2004 group is lower than the rate of the whole cohort (64.5% vs. 73.3%). The high share of students (19.4%) in the 2004 group accounts for much of this difference. In terms of income, the 1999 group is at a better position than the situation of all rest of the matching cohort members: both their mean and median taxable yearly income before leaving Finland are significantly higher.

With the 2004 group, the mean taxable income is higher, but there is greater variation within the group, as the median figure is considerably lower than with their peers, at least partly explained by the high share of students with low income levels. But what about after returning to Finland: is there a payoff in gaining international experience? Or is living and working abroad rather a risk when they return to Finland, as was the case for earlier migrant generations (Saarela & Finnäs, 2009a, 2009b)? And again, how do the two groups compare with the whole cohort, of which the vast majority stayed behind in Finland?

Labor Market Situation in Finland After Mobility

The two migrant groups of interest in this article return to Finland at some point during the years 2000 and 2005. In Table 6, their situation is examined during the second and third years (2001, 2002, and 2006, 2007) back in Finland and compared with their cohort peers in order to see what kind of implications international mobility has for their situation.

Table 6 Labor market situation after mobility in cohort data: year 2

	2 nd year back in Finland			
	Share of students	Unemployment rate	Employment rate	Taxable yearly income
All members of cohorts 1963, 1968, 1973	2001			
	3.7%	10.8%	78.6%	25,257 € (mean) 22,539 € (median)
1999 group (n = 310)	6.5%	11.1%	77.4%	34,062 € (mean) 27,556 € (median)
All members of cohorts 1968, 1973, 1978	2006			
	4.3%	7.7%	80.8%	27,059 € (mean) 25,024 € (median)
2004 group (n = 470)	12.8%	5.7%	70.2%	31,905 € (mean) 23,330 € (median)

Source: Statistics Finland cohort data

There are some key differences in the primary activity of the two groups in the years following their transition back to Finland. Interestingly, the skewed student *versus* unemployed ratio noted already before mobility seems to prevail. In the first full calendar year when both groups live in Finland, the share of those unemployed among the 1999 group (11.1%) is again significantly higher than among the 2004 group (5.7%), while the opposite applies to the share of those studying: 12.8% of the 2004 group are students, while their share among the 1999 group is only 6.5%. The high share of students among the 2004 group is also reflected in the employment rate in both the second and third years back in Finland: only 70.2% of the group is either in salaried employment or working as an entrepreneur, while the figures for the 1999 group are higher at 77.4% and 80.6%. This is also reflected in the salary levels, as the 1999 group earns more than the 2004 group in light of both the mean and median taxable income. The ways in which the two groups initially regain entrance to the Finnish labor market, therefore, seems to somewhat differ.



But what about the situation of the returnees in comparison with the general cohort data? During the second year back in Finland, the unemployment rate of the 1999 group (11.1%) is slightly higher than with the whole cohort (10.8%). However, during the third year, it (7.4%) falls below the rate of their cohort peers (10.1%). The same phenomenon is visible in the employment rates: in the second year in Finland, the 1999 group's rate is lower than with the whole cohort (77.4% vs. 78.6%), but in the third year, their rate is better (80.6% vs. 79.2%). The unemployment rate of the 2004 group falls below the level of the whole cohort already during the second year back to Finland (5.7% vs. 7.7%). Migration does not, therefore, seem to have negative effects on the labor market status, as in the third year back in Finland, the rate is even lower (2.9%). The employment rates of the 2004 group (70.2% in both years) are lower than with their peers (80.8% and 82.3%), but the difference is largely explained by the high rate of students.

In terms of salary, there also seems to be a payoff to living abroad. Whereas the 1999 group was already earning higher salaries before mobility (Table 5), after returning the difference with their cohort peers continues to increase (Tables 6 and 7) both in terms of taxable mean and median income. In the third year back in Finland, their mean income is 37,413 € compared with 25,868 € in the overall cohort. The 2004 group does equally well when taxable income levels are examined at mean levels (36,242 € vs. 28,675 €), but falls below their peers in median income as the high share of students lowers that figure.

Table 7 Labor market situation after mobility in cohort data: year 3

	3 rd year back in Finland			
	Share of students	Unemployment rate	Employment rate	Taxable yearly income
All members of cohorts 1963, 1968, 1973	2002			
	3.6%	10.1%	79.2%	25,868 € (mean) 23,261 € (median)
1999 group (n = 310)	6.5%	7.4%	80.6%	37,413 € (mean) 26,434 € (median)
All members of cohorts 1968, 1973, 1978	2007			
	3.7%	6.5%	82.3%	28,675 € (mean) 26,146 € (median)
2004 group (n = 470)	12.8%	2.9%	70.2%	36,242 € (mean) 25,599 € (median)

Source: Statistics Finland cohort data

Discussion

The recession of the early 1990s in Finland was followed by 'seven good years' (1994–2000); the economy grew, the mobile phone company Nokia became a global player in the ITC business, and the country began to recover from its crisis (Kiander, 2001, 61–68;

Koistinen, 2014, 32). The recovery from the recession also coincided with an increase in the share of the higher educated among the Finnish labor force, or what has been called the massification of higher education in Finland (Välilä, 2001). The recession changed the labor market toward favoring those with a higher education: for the first time in Finnish history, the number and share of employed wage earners with only basic education was lower than the share of those with a university or polytechnic education (Suikkanen et al., 2002). As Asko Suikkanen et al. (2002, 89) conclude: 'The only group whose employment has clearly increased after the recession is that of the highly educated, whose current share of the employed wage earners is 23 percent.' The jobs requiring a highly educated workforce were not all based in Finland: Finnish companies became interested in operating globally and offered opportunities for those were willing to be mobile.

The share of highly educated among those moving from Finland has been on the rise. For example, in 1990–1993, on average 25% all Finnish citizens who moved abroad each year had a university or a polytechnic degree, but by 1996–1999, their share had risen to 35%. In the past 20 years, the share of educated migrants has been the highest among those moving to China (57.0%), Luxembourg (54.5%), and Belgium (54.4%) and the lowest among those moving to Greece (21.2%) and Sweden (22.4%) (Statistics Finland, 2012; Koikkalainen, 2013, 26). The cohort data also reveal that those who experiment with living abroad are predominantly of lower or higher level employees, rather than manual laborers who might be classified as the traditional migrant laborer-types. In fact, the share of manual laborers is higher among the overall cohort data than with the mobile groups (1999-group: 11.1% vs. overall data 40.0% and 2004-group 21.7% vs. overall data 42.2%)⁷. On the basis of this evidence, those who experiment with living abroad are therefore higher on the socioeconomic scale than their peers who stay in their home country.

Globalization opened doors to a new generation of migrants: highly educated professionals who were moving more as a career choice than due to economic necessity or unemployment. In the latter half of the 1990s, international mobility had become one form of labor market flexibility, available to a portion of young workers with the necessary language skills, education, and competence. For a variety of reasons, older workers are less likely to adopt behaviors that help them adapt to changing labor market situations and negotiate the flexible labor markets (Lippman, 2008, 1263–1264). Those leaving Finland are clearly taking advantage of the ease of mobility in Europe: on average, more than 80% of Finnish citizens moving abroad have in the past 20 years headed to the other EU/EEA countries (Statistics Finland, 2015). In the post-EEA/EU membership era, the destinations of Finns moving abroad have diversified, and the blue-collar worker looking for a factory job (in Sweden) is no longer the only or the prevailing migrant type. Qualitative research into migration motivations has also noted that the motivations and life paths of Finnish migrants are increasingly diverse and that mobility has been used as a response to labor market uncertainty in Finland (e.g., Heikkilä & Koikkalainen, 2011; Koikkalainen, 2013).

The two migrant groups examined in this article consisted of young adults who were making active life choices and used international mobility as a way of navigating under changing labor market conditions (see also Koikkalainen, 2013). The 1999 group and the 2004 group had somewhat different situations before migration, and they differed in terms of what the main activity was after return. The pre- or post-migration



labor market situation did not follow any clear gendered pattern, so in this article, the gender dimension was not examined in more detail. The share of students was around 10% of all cohort members in 1997 and 2002, before the time the two mobile groups leave Finland. In the 1999 group, the share of students was similar, while in the 2004 group, the share is almost double at nearly 20%. In the 2004 group, the share of students (12.8%) remains high during their first years back in Finland, while the share of those studying in the overall data is rather low (4.3% and 3.7%). This is a significant difference, especially taking into account the fact that the individuals are already 29, 34, and 39 years of age (in 2007), thus past the phase of life when young adults typically study toward a degree.

Those returning thus use studying as the transition back into the Finnish labor markets: while studying is less common among the 1999 group (6.5%) than with the 2004 group (12.8%), the share of students in the 1999 group is still notably more than in the cohort comparison (3.7%). There were also notable differences in the unemployment rates prior to moving abroad: the rate of both mobile groups is lower than the rate of their respective cohorts. Contrary to the findings based on previous migrant generations returning mostly from Sweden (Saarela & Finnäs, 2009a, 2009b), the labor market situation of our two groups was better than what the situation of the whole cohort was after the mobile individuals returned to Finland. Our data suggest a rising trend in the numbers of Finns using mobility as a labor market transition and as a way of adapting to the existing labor market conditions. Yet, this conclusion has to be taken with a grain of salt: the difference in the time when our two groups lived abroad is only 5 years and thus further data of those who lived abroad in, for example, 2009 and 2014 at the same age as our two groups would be needed to ascertain that this is indeed the case and to tease out more nuanced interpretations of how this migration phenomenon develops.

Conclusion

Research based on longitudinal register data, such as the Statistics Finland data used in this article, cannot reveal the personal choices of why the two groups examined moved to their countries of destination, nor why they decided to return to Finland. The data can, however, reveal general trends at the population level and confirm that migration from Finland belongs to what Steven Vertovec (2007; see also Meissner & Vertovec, 2015) has termed *super-diversity* in international migration: the trend of worldwide diversification of migration channels, legal statuses and the gender, age, ethnicity, and skill levels of those who migrate. Thus, rather than following such *channeled migration* routes as those moving to Sweden as manual laborers in the guest-worker era of the 1960s and 1970s, the migrants leaving Finland in the 1990s and 2000s belong to the *dispersed migration* type where the migrants move to a wider variety of destination countries (Recchi, 2013). However, within this diversity of destination countries, the Nordic labor market still has a great appeal for Finns looking for their fortunes abroad. Of all Finnish citizens moving abroad during the past 5 years (2010–2014), 32% to 36% moved to one of the other Nordic countries each year (Statistics Finland, 2016).

The labor market behavior of youth and young adults is an indicator of future working life trends, in regard to work orientation and participation in paid labor, for example. Young workers are more vulnerable to economic trends than older workers

who have more work experience and an established career (see, e.g., Lippman, 2008). Young Europeans, such as the Finns in our study, may react to difficult employment situations as well as to the desire to follow an individualistic life course by seeking alternatives to paid labor. In addition, they may look for transitions that lead to work and study opportunities abroad if life in the home country is not satisfactory. When understood as liquid migration (Engbersen, 2012), the move abroad does not necessarily signify leaving permanently, but may be a temporary phase in one's life. Yet alternating between studying and working, either in one's home country or abroad, requires a readiness to adapt to changing situations. Research into the labor market choices and behavior of certain young age groups, such as the young flexible workers in this article, can, therefore, contribute to our understanding of the nature of the transition from steady work careers and clear professional paths toward flexible labor markets and adaptation requirements.

In light of these data, and contrary to the findings based on earlier migrant generations (Saarela & Finnäs, 2009a, 2009b), international migration does not deteriorate the returnees' labor market status. As this article demonstrates, migrants who leave Finland move to a wider variety of countries and are younger, more educated, and have a better socio-economic status than before. This is perhaps the most important reason why their labor market outcomes upon return differ: having been relatively well-placed already before migrating, their return with added skills and experiences was not a 'failure', but rather the next step along a life-path that happened to include a temporary transition to living abroad. While their re-entry to the Finnish labor market may take some time and flexibility, mobility seems to pay off and have beneficial consequences: return migrants earn higher taxable incomes and have lower unemployment rates than their peers who only stayed in the national labor markets.

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Notes

- ¹ The 1999 group lives in Finland at least during 2000–2003, and the 2004 group during 2005–2007.
- ² That is, in the year 1996, 230 individuals (74%) of the 1999 group (n = 310) and in 2001, 340 individuals (72%) of the 2004 group (n = 470) are still living in Finland.
- ³ Educational levels in Finnish: Keskiaste, alin korkea-aste, alempi korkeakouluaste, ylempi korkeakouluaste, tutkijakouluaste, tunteaton. See: www.stat.fi/meta/luokitukset/koulutusaste/001-2010/index_en.html
- ⁴ Statistics Finland Classification of Socio-economic Groups.
- ⁵ The percentage shares of students and the employed refer to the whole population, while the unemployment rate is calculated as a share of those belonging to the labor force.
- ⁶ The income figures in Tables 6 and 7 have been deflated to match the value of money in the year 2007.
- ⁷ It is noted at a time when a majority of the individuals still lived in Finland: for the 1999 group in 1995 (90% still in Finland) and for the 2004 group in 2000 (74% still in Finland).