

## International academic mobility and social stratification (0308)

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International mobility among highly skilled “knowledge migrants” is a rapidly growing phenomena at a global scale. Furthermore, international research mobility is increasingly seen as a crucial component in the competition between nation states and institutions for the best brains, and the enhancement of individual academic careers.

Our concern here is to look at changes in the academic body , through the lens of theories of academic stratification and diversity, and with an eye on how such changes can be understood. In this way this paper aims to problematize or get behind ideas of mobility as a simple ‘good’ in higher education, and the idea of mobile researchers as a ‘global elite’; both these views neglect issues of positional hierarchy and stratification (based on gender/regional background) within the academic field. More fine grained analysis on large scale data is therefore needed, that takes account of hierarchical and fragmented academic world, and can link these research areas addressing internationalisation and social stratification.

Norway provides an interesting case for such an approach for several reasons. As a smaller nation, with ambitions to ‘punch above its weight’ in science and research, Norway has accepted it needs to recruit foreign researches, to reach any kind of critical mass, particularly in certain disciplines and areas. In a short period of time: the number of foreign researchers has increased rapidly in academia as well as other sectors of the economy requiring skilled workers. On a central policy – as well as an institutional level – it is argued for the need for creating better quality and more research intensive environments by recruiting more talented foreign researchers. Accordingly measures to stimulate import of foreign researchers has been undertaken, such as information portals, financial aid, earmarked recruitment positions, support for integration. As in many countries, the issues of internationalisation has also been linked to a desire to build international collaboration, especially in research areas linked to ‘grand challenges’ or ‘global problems’ e.g. climate science, cancer research. The overall share of those working as researchers in the higher education sector in Norway born outside the country has increased rapidly, from 14 percent in 2001 to 22 percent in 2009, and it remains on strong upward trajectory.

### Method/sample

We use population data. The data set covers all persons who started as researchers in the higher education sector in Norway in 2001, 2003 or 2005, and is based on data from the database on researchers at the Nordice Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) and matched employer-employee register data. We differentiate between Norwegian and foreign researchers, and examine whether there are differences in the mobility

patterns between these two groups in the higher education sector. Foreign researchers are defined on the basis of information about country of birth.

Preliminary results shows for instance that the foreign researchers are (not surprisingly) dominated by those born in other Nordic and European countries, but also substantial numbers from China, the USA, Iran and India. Overall, 60% of foreign researchers are male and 40% are female, but the balance varies between regions. Those coming from the Nordic countries are fairly balanced, as are inflows from Russia and the USA, but European flows are less so and those coming from Asia and Iran are male dominated. Women are best represented in humanities, social science and health areas, and more weakly represented in maths, natural sciences and technology. Furthermore, country of birth is strongly linked to the seniority of researchers. Researchers from south – men and women – are less likely to achieve senior positions

### Theoretical perspectives

Historically, recruitment to research positions in academia has been marked by homosocial reproduction: a strong tendency to recruit people similar to oneself. The existence of homosocial recruitment practices can in itself help to explain the composition of staff in academic positions and prestigious professions. Academia is not a neutral field with regard to gender, class and ethnicity but is a social system in which non-academic criteria – colour, sex, sexual orientation, geographic, cultural and social background – may affect the assessment of professional suitability. As a result recruitment patterns reveal low and unequal representation of women, people with a non-western background, people with a skin colour other than white, and so on.

The processes of recruitment are often characterised by unconscious (socially and culturally imposed) selection mechanisms – ‘unconscious bias’. Colour blindness interacting with gender blindness requires an intersectional perspective on the lack of diversity in academia, to clarify how gender, ethnicity and class interact in selection processes.

Recruitment patterns are not only a product of supply and demand in a neutral market logic: they also involve subjects’ knowledge theme; thematic, theoretical and methodological traditions; and their social and intellectual status in academia and society, associated to varying degrees with e.g. women and men, as reflected in the distinctive cultural features as regards academic/professional roles and practices which develop and are maintained in different professional cultures. In this perspective it is also reasonable to believe that different types of knowledge and academic cultures are also open in varying degrees to non-white/non-western researchers.

Any such practices are typically characterised by silence. As the practices are not talked about, they are, for this and other reasons, seldom within the awareness of professional circles.

### Policy impact

This project is partially part of a greater contribution commissioned by the Norwegian Committee for Integration in Research as well as part of cooperation with scientists from other Nordic countries to compare migration patterns in academia.