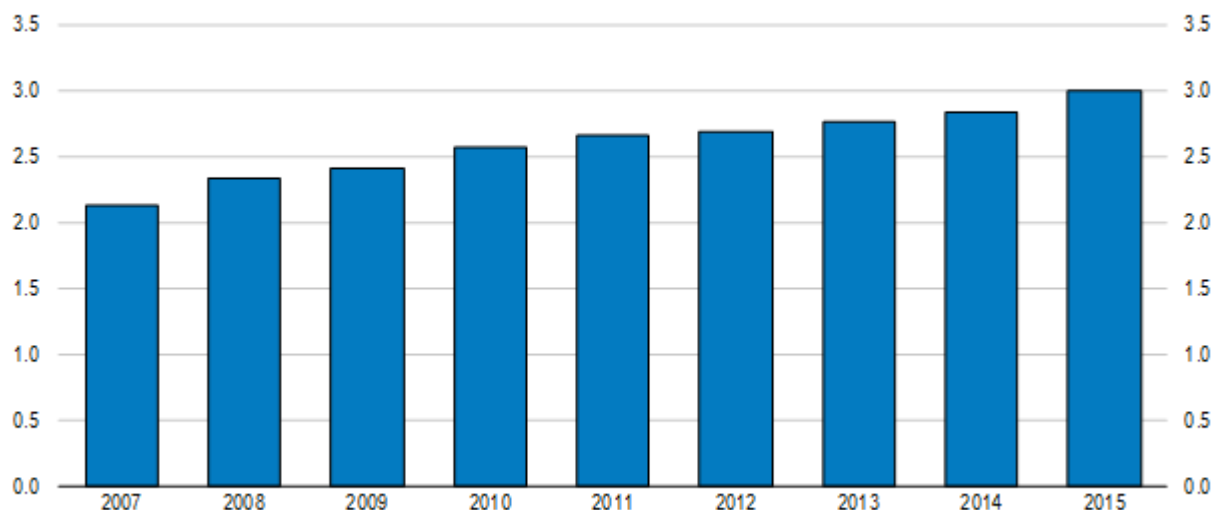


# Labour mobility in the European Union: a need for more recognition of foreign qualifications

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Labour market mobility in the European Union is increasing (Figure 1), but it remains too low to provide sufficient adjustment in the face of diverging labour market developments. This situation reflects non-policy factors, such as linguistic and cultural differences, but also policy barriers. In particular, difficulties in the recognition of professional qualifications are still a major hurdle.

Figure 1. Share of migrant population within the European Union  
Population that are citizens of another EU28 country, as a percentage of total population



Source: Eurostat (2015), "Population on 1 January by five year age group, sex and citizenship", Eurostat Database.

Improvements in foreign language proficiency take time and require long-term policies. Publicly funded language courses aimed at cross-border workers are a useful tool, and should be provided. Even more important is to improve foreign language proficiency at an earlier stage, for example by considerably expanding the Erasmus student exchange programme that

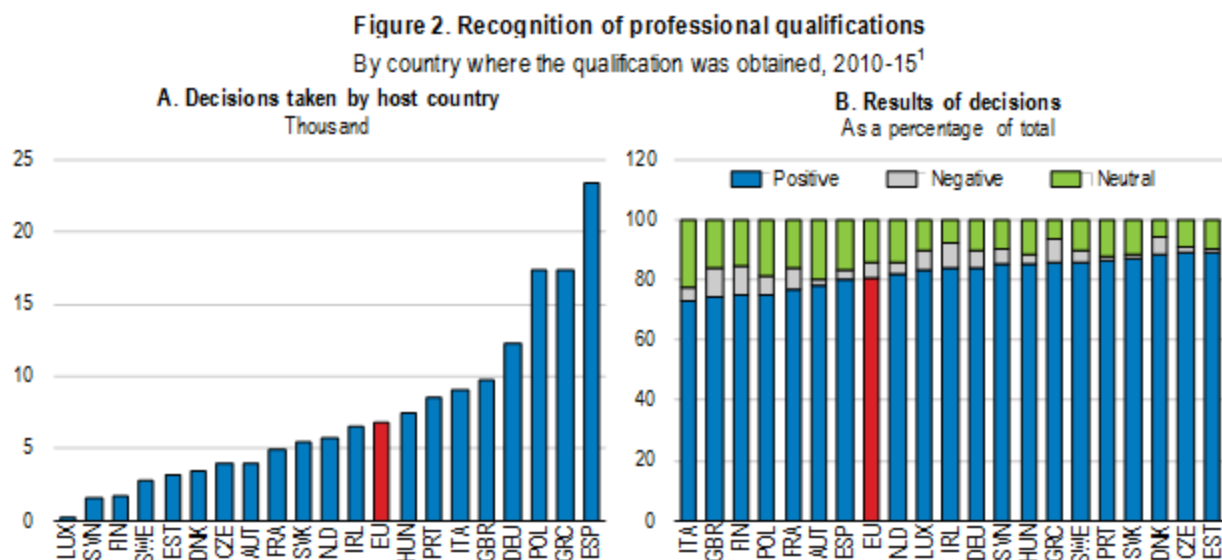
currently benefits only about 5% of European graduates.

Policy barriers to labour mobility in the EU have been reduced by a broader use of electronic procedures, such as the European Professional Card and the planned electronic passports for services. However, more is needed. The European Professional Card needs to be extended to other qualifications, such as engineers. Countries should be restricted in their ability to invoke “public interest” to discriminate against foreign suppliers of regulated professional services. Regulatory barriers arising from diverging legal form and other organisational requirements should be addressed. Most reforms in services between 2012 and 2014 took place in countries under financial assistance, while other countries did not act on their recommendations.

The differences in regulation across the EU remain high and affect also the number of recognitions of professional qualifications. Some countries have awarded a large number of recognitions, while others did not, despite being parties to the same mutual recognition directives (Figure 2, panel A). Moreover, countries with the lowest barriers to entry into professions may face the highest barriers to providing services abroad. For instance, when engineering is not a regulated profession, the barriers to entry are low for nationals and foreigners alike. Countries that regulate engineering through licensing, however, often create insurmountable obstacles to engineers from unregulated countries.

Although in the EU as a whole only some 5% of applications for recognition of qualifications eventually get rejected, there are considerable differences in rejection rates across the member states (Figure 2, panel B). Slow and overly heterogeneous procedures can still constitute a barrier to labour mobility, even if decisions are eventually positive. The EU should monitor improvements and best practice and develop further the possibility of partial recognition instead

of rejection, complemented by shortened additional education. Bolder changes to the existing process would involve extending the scope of automatic recognition to other professions and making wider use of the European framework for comparison of national qualifications.



1. Within European Union applications only. The European Union aggregate is an unweighted average of data for the 28 member countries.

Source : European Commission (2016), *Regulated Professions Database*, <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof> (accessed on 11 May).

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