
The academic mobility of university professors and researchers in the post-Covid-19 period: a qualitative study

La movilidad académica de los docentes e investigadores universitarios en el periodo post-COVID-19: un estudio cualitativo

Академическая мобильность университетских преподавателей и исследователей в период после окончания КОВИД-19: качественное исследование

后COVID-19时期大学教师和研究人员的学术流动性：一项定性研究

Sandra Arroyo Salgueira

University of Alicante
sandra.arroyo@ua.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0144-0182>

Marcos Jesús Iglesias Martínez

University of Alicante
marcos.iglesias@ua.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5206-2762>

Inés Lozano Cabezas

University of Alicante
ines.lozano@ua.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3800-259X>

Dates · Fechas

Received: 2023-10-30
Accepted: 2024-03-10
Published: 2024-07-01

How to Cite this Paper · Cómo citar este trabajo

Arroyo, S., Iglesias, M. J., & Lozano, I. (2024). The academic mobility of university professors and researchers in the post-Covid-19 period: a qualitative study. *Publicaciones*, 54(1), 221–234. <https://doi.org/10.30827/publicaciones.v54i1.20930>

Abstract

The social and health crisis caused by COVID-19 has made the academic mobility of teachers and researchers difficult. The objective of this qualitative research is to identify what strategies have allowed the academic mobility of teachers and researchers to develop in the post-pandemic era. The main results show that virtuality has allowed maintaining contact networks with other international institutions, but, at the same time, a break with the philosophy of teaching and research mobility has been identified, highlighting that presence is usually more productive for researchers. Virtual mobility is considered a useful tool for situations caused by the pandemic, however, an absence of access to the resources of foreign institutions has been identified, which confirms the presence of discriminatory situations or inequalities of access with respect to others. colleagues who have made the in-person stay. It is, therefore, necessary to rethink international mobility based on virtual environments and incorporate models that are more conducive to a scenario where the ecology of professional learning gains importance, compared to models that prioritize physical mobility as an economic source and source of internationalization for universities.

Keywords: COVID, academic mobility, teacher professional development, virtual mobility.

Resumen

La crisis sociosanitaria producida por la COVID-19 ha dificultado la movilidad académica de los docentes e investigadores. El objetivo de esta investigación, de corte cualitativo, es identificar qué estrategias han permitido desarrollar la movilidad académica de los docentes e investigadores en la era postpandemia. Los principales resultados muestran que la virtualidad ha permitido mantener las redes de contactos con otras instituciones internacionales, pero, a su vez, se ha identificado una ruptura con la filosofía de la movilidad docente e investigadora destacando que la presencialidad suele ser más productiva para los investigadores. La movilidad virtual es considerada como una herramienta útil para situaciones provocadas por la pandemia, sin embargo, se ha identificado una ausencia de acceso a los recursos de las instituciones extranjeras, lo cual constata la presencia de situaciones discriminatorias o desigualdades de acceso con respecto a otros colegas que han realizado la estancia presencial. Es, por ello, necesario repensar en la movilidad académica internacional basada en entornos virtuales e incorporar modelos más propicios para un escenario donde la ecología del aprendizaje profesional cobre importancia, frente a modelos que priman la movilidad física como fuente económica y de internacionalización de las universidades.

Palabras clave: COVID, movilidad académica, desarrollo profesional docente, movilidad virtual.

Аннотация

Социально-медицинский кризис, вызванный КОВИД-19, затруднил академическую мобильность преподавателей и исследователей. Цель данного качественного исследования - определить стратегии, которые позволили развить академическую мобильность преподавателей и исследователей в постпандемическую эпоху. Основные результаты показывают, что виртуальность позволила поддерживать сети контактов с другими международными учреждениями, но в то же время был выявлен разрыв с принципами преподавательской и исследовательской мобильности, подчеркивающий тот факт, что мобильность в очной форме, как правило, является более продуктивной для исследователей. Виртуальная мобильность считается полезным инструментом в ситуациях, вызванных пандемией; однако было выявлено отсутствие

доступа к ресурсам зарубежных учреждений, что подтверждает наличие дискриминационных ситуаций или неравенства в доступе по отношению к другим коллегам, которые провели очное пребывание. Поэтому необходимо переосмыслить международную академическую мобильность, основанную на виртуальной среде, и включить модели, которые в большей степени способствуют сценарию, где экология профессионального обучения становится более важной, в отличие от моделей, в которых приоритет отдается физической мобильности как источнику экономики и интернационализации университетов.

Ключевые слова: COVID, академическая мобильность, профессиональное развитие преподавателей, виртуальная мобильность.

概要

COVID-19 引发的社会和健康危机使教师和研究人员的学术流动变得困难。这项定性研究的目的是确定哪些策略使教师和研究人员的学术流动性在后疫情时代得以发展。主要结果表明,虚拟网络交流允许教研人员与其他国际机构保持联系,但同时也发现了与教学和研究流动性理念的断裂,这突显了研究人员的存在通常更有成效。虚拟流动性被认为是应对疫情造成的情况的有用工具,但已发现无法获得外国机构的资源,这证实了对其他同事的歧视性情况或访问不平等的存在。因此,与优先考虑实体流动性作为大学经济和国际化来源的模型相比,有必要重新考虑基于虚拟环境的国际学术流动性,并在专业学习生态变得重要的情况下纳入更有利的模型。

关键词: COVID、学术流动、教师专业发展、虚拟流动。

Introduction

Academic mobility refers to any sort of geographical displacement of Teaching and Research Staff (TRS) designed to meet one or more of the following objectives: promoting social and institutional relations for teaching or research purposes; improving teacher professional development; teaching elsewhere than at the place of origin or affiliation; and acquiring or developing the elements necessary to conduct research or disseminate research results. ERASMUS mobility training programmes currently under development in European universities (Arujo, 2014; Karakus et al., 2017; Mizikaci & Arslan, 2019; Souto-Otero et al., 2013) present these characteristics and are raising a special interest among university teaching staff (European Commission, 2018; European Commission, 2020). They potentially include, among other experiences: attending a conference, course and/or training seminar; conducting an experiment; teaching at another institution; etc. Within this wide range of possibilities, we will focus on recognising, analysing, and deepening how academic mobility can be encouraged in the wake of the socio-health context generated by COVID-19. To do this, we analyse the narratives of the study participants and attempt to show how the pandemic context affected their mobility and influenced their professional development as teachers. We also explore how the situation can be improved in order to comprehend the phenomenon within university institutions and to seek joint solutions to new mobility scenarios in the near future.

In several countries, the experience of international research stays is almost a career requirement for certain academic positions. The 'obligation to leave in order to return' represents an important step forward in the careers of researchers, especially at an

initial stage, due to the benefits perceived by the institutions of origin: knowledge flows as well as collaboration and learning networks (Cañibano et al., 2020). This is why mobility is a key to the employability of teaching and research staff. It is also a pillar of EHEA convergence and the internationalisation process of European universities because it allows building a community that promotes the member states' advancement and joint development. In this sense, university internationalisation is regarded as an opportunity to achieve important objectives such as: strengthening or establishing links with other institutions that optimise research processes and resources (Rostan & Ceravolo, 2015); increasing institution prestige and international ranking (Rodrigues & Silva, 2015) through a higher number of publications, greater researcher visibility, and expanded fundraising; and building networks of international contacts that promote collaborative research projects (Ramírez & Ortega, 2019). Regarding professional development, university teachers are enriched by the promotion of new pedagogical methods (Barbosa et al., 2017) and the exchange of experiences between professionals (Vazirani et al., 2019). Thus, it plays a key role in the advancement of scientific knowledge, the construction of a European community, and the training of university teachers and researchers (Haug, 2010). In addition, academic mobility allows the acquisition of other competencies proper to the internalisation of university professors. According to Cortina-Pérez and Medina-Revilla (2019), the latter are related to "internationalising academic communicative competence and academic intercultural competence", which significantly enhances the international dimension of university professors.

These professors have had to adapt to new working dynamics in order to pursue their research (De Barros et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the inequalities affecting the collective have been accentuated by the SARS-COVID 2 pandemic (Barbosa, 2020). In addition to the shift in research strategies, COVID-19 has brought about many teaching model alterations, which in turn have many implications for the university community in terms of efforts and accessibility to resources. They have generated new teaching and learning scenarios linked to virtual teaching, the use of technological resources and the establishment of a novel Learning Ecology that must be integrated efficiently — via additional and more efficient teacher training — into the lives of our protagonists. The objective is that they show their full potential in improving the digital teaching-learning process, the creation of closer teacher collaboration networks and the removal of the spatio-temporal barriers raised during the pandemic (González-Sanmamed et al., 2020).

The field of academic mobility has also been affected by these alterations, including restrictions implemented by the various countries and the visible daily health consequences of the pandemic. As a consequence, the *internationalisation of higher education* (De Wit, 2011; De Wit, 2020; Kahn & Agnew, 2017) has been relegated to the background. In fact, mobility participants are concerned about resuming their visits, and are showing a preference for neighbouring countries as research stay destinations (Xiong et al., 2020). Likewise, fear and uncertainty have led university institutions to cancel planned mobility programmes or to reschedule them, to redirect their efforts and resources towards distance learning, and to rethink long-term mobility policies. In this scenario, some solutions are based on promoting changes in curricula and teaching-learning processes and/or facilitating *virtual mobility* or *virtual exchange* until presencial interactions can be recovered (Gómez, 2020) or as an alternative (financial and knowledge generation) means to physical mobility (Rizvi, 2020). The phenomenon also raises the need for a paradigm shift in the domain of conference-organising (Goebel et al., 2020). We still do not know whether these changes are here to stay, but it is

worth raising questions in order to foresee the panorama to come. In this sense, our main objective was to identify the strategies that would allow re-launching academic mobility in the post-COVID-19 era, and how Higher Education teachers and researchers would face this new challenge. The research questions that arose were thus: What importance do participants attribute to mobility for their professional and research development? And what strategies do they consider would be the most appropriate to resume teaching and research staff mobility in the pandemic context?

Methodology

A total of 82 teachers and researchers participated in this study. During our initial participant selection phase, we searched the grant lists corresponding to the calls for mobility of the University of Alicante for Teaching and Research Staff (including doctoral students). From this initial selection, we eliminated people who were not currently employed by the institution and obtained 253 potential participants who were invited to participate in this research. Finally, 82 interviews were obtained from university professors assigned to one of the seven University of Alicante centres. The sociodemographic characteristics of the group included people with different links to the institution: new teaching and research staff (34 people); associate professors (11 people); and teaching and research staff (37 people). The first group, new teaching and research staff, was represented by staff with training contracts and staff categorised as assistant lecturers and doctoral assistant lecturers with less than 5 years of experience. The second group consisted of associate professors, i.e., professors with partial links to the university. Finally, the TRS group was made up of university staff with fix contracts and temporary lecturers with more than 6 years of experience. Regarding gender, 51.21% of the participants were men and 48.78% were women.

The methodology used in this research was qualitative. Personal interviews were used as an information-collection instrument, allowing the exploration of participant opinions based on an analysis of their narratives. The instrument consisted of a single question that covered all the issues we raised: How would you encourage mobility in today's socio-health context?

The information was processed using the AQUAD 7 software (Huber & Gürtler, 2013), a programme that allowed classifying the data thematically and structuring a code map validated by three experts. The 3 emerging categories underlying the classification were identified following several review and analysis processes.

Analysis and results

Category 1 grouped together narratives that expressed concern or difficulties in encouraging mobility until the majority of the population was vaccinated and the situation was under control.

Table 1

Category 1 codes. Not encouraging mobility

Category 1. Not incentivising mobility	AF	%AF
Code 1.1 Fear and uncertainty	41	35.97%
Code 1.2 Restrictions	31	27.19%

Category 1. Not incentivising mobility	AF	%AF
Code 1.3 Lack of Access	42	36.84%

Code 1.1 Fear and uncertainty collected the narratives that expressed fear of possible contagion and that their loved ones could be affected. This was found more frequently in the narratives of the teaching and research staff. Indeed, they were older professionals who often had family members in their care. The share of associate professor narratives under this code can be explained by the fact that they represented the lowest number of participants in the study (11 people). No significant gender differences were found in any of the 3 groups.

I think it's a complex question because I'm afraid to go, and you can't go if you're scared. (P072)

[...] factors that are truly limiting or overwhelming about setting off on a research visit today in this pandemic context; Especially because of what I have just said, because you have no guarantee, you don't know what kind of assistance you will receive at any moment in that country. (P073)

The second most widespread code was *code 1.3 Lack of access*, which reflected difficulties of access to the resources available in the country or receiving institution. This code collected the narratives which reflected that research visits during the pandemic would restrict the following: access to data, samples, archives, laboratories, etc.; the possibility of enjoying quality time and conversations with other colleagues; and the availability of space and time for adequate mentoring by their hosts. They also found it difficult to move freely and enjoy leisure and culture in the host country.

I don't know the extent to which mobility will give you the opportunity to attend classes, or get involved in research groups, or get to know the real culture. (P008)

I don't think it's a good idea to use virtual mobility to replace real mobility, but my ideas are based on my own experience, I think it's difficult to learn what you need to learn. (P052)

Code 1.2 Restrictions indicated that the TRS found it difficult to encourage mobility due to the limitations imposed by countries on physical mobility, such as the closure of borders, services, quarantine requirements, etc.

There are some countries you can't go to because they have closed their borders. If the country doesn't let you in, it doesn't matter whether Valencia's Regional Government allows mobility or not. (P002)

I think it's impossible, you can't travel, not even to Cuenca. Right now, I think mobility is impossible until the whole thing subsides. (P080)

Category 2 collected the narratives according to which teaching and research staff mobility could be encouraged by adopting a series of promoting measures. These narratives expressed the need to maintain mobility with individual, administrative, and organisational protection measures.

Table 2*Category 2 codes. Incentivise mobility by adopting measures*

Category 2. Incentivise by adopting measures	AF	%AF
Code 2.1 Freedom of access	43	27.39%
Code 2.2 Financial support	9	5.73%
Code 2.3 More information	6	3.82%
Code 2.4 Punctual collaborations	6	3.82%
Code 2.5 Virtual mobility	62	39.49%
Code 2.6 Streamlining of procedures	2	1.27%
Code 2.7 Geographical limits	14	8.92%
Code 2.8 Professional motivation	15	9.56%

Code 2.1 Freedom of access included the narratives in which participants demanded that foreign professors and researchers be allowed to access universities while complying with the established security measures. These people requested that they be allowed to continue with mobility to pursue their work, because they perceived that universities were safe environments capable of adopting pandemic prophylaxis measures responsibly.

But I believe that the necessary measures that prevent the situation from becoming a problem can be taken, because I think that these mobility initiatives play a major role in professional development and they should not be abandoned. As long as you have your PCR with you, it's fine. (P004)

Provided the control measures are respected and you adapt to each country's regulations, there shouldn't be any problem. (P012)

Code 2.5 Virtual Mobility presented a high frequency in the narratives. It included the need to promote communication, work, and the telematic exchange of information between research groups. Virtual communication allowed them to maintain contacts, promote them, and access data, as well as to conduct research and joint collaborations.

Why not encourage virtual mobility from the beginning; being mobile in the future is perhaps to be mobile now but virtually. We should generate these kinds of synergies, to see what it's like working that way, because it's easier than ever, that's for sure. (P028)

[...] what I do is to contact the professors of these universities, that is, create *online*, virtual bridges, and tell them "look, I'm a researcher so-and-so, I need this database, but I can't come right now, how can I gain access?" They respond positively in 30% to 40% of the cases, on other occasions they tell you that you have to be physically present, but sometimes they give you database access or keys so that you can carry out reviews. (P049)

This code was more widespread among TRS narratives, and with an almost equal gender distribution: 22 narratives were from men and 20 narratives from women. But

the latter did not apply to the narratives of the new teaching and research staff: 14 corresponded to men and only 6 to women, for whom virtual mobility played a smaller role. The associate professors came last, although they were the group with the lowest number of participants in the study (11 people), and of this group only men highlighted virtual interactions in their narratives.

Narratives were also identified in which interest was shown in collaborating with universities or research centres willing to carry out joint projects and mobility visits, in times of lower COVID-19 incidence (*Code 2.4 Punctual collaborations*).

So, in times like these, if there are periods where the pandemic allows us that mobility and the risk is lower, then being able to travel for two or three weeks a month is not the same thing as going there for three or four weeks (P063)

And with occasional collaborations too, in science at least, you know that you can do something and when you finish it you can send it to someone in Germany or the United Kingdom so that they can continue to study the subject, and after that it will probably end up being published or whatever you want. (P022)

It is interesting to note that in some narratives, greater financial support was demanded in order to be able to cover cancellation or lockdown costs and to finance COVID-19 diagnostic tests as well as quarantines in the destination country (*Code 2.2 Financial support*). This revealed the problems that teaching and research staff had to face during the pandemic to maintain mobility for professional or work purposes and the real interest of certain researchers in maintaining mobility despite the security measures imposed by different countries.

I would encourage this by reassuring teachers that in the event of cancellation or lockdown, they will be refunded the money they have already spent on hotels and flights. [...] Above all, make sure that it does not hurt them financially. If they assure me of that, I am willing to apply for a grant again. (P015)

And also consider financing the accommodation for an extra 14 days (quarantine) or the PCR tests to fly, since these costs are not currently contemplated, and the expense falls on the person who is doing the research visit. (P016)

Category 2 also included narratives indicating that mobility for professional reasons could be allowed (*Code 2.8 Professional motivation*), and other narratives that propose that it be incentivised but applying geographical limitations (*Code 2.7*).

Nor can you overlook the fact that your contract has an end-date. In other words, if you have been unlucky and your opportunity of research visits coincided with the pandemic, it's complicated. Because if you do not ask for them, your contract will come to an end, and you will not be able to ask for them and the rest. So you have to take advantage of the opportunity. (P003)

I would encourage them to do so, rather than finish their PhD without having completed any research visit. Above all, because apart from that, you are in contact with them. Both you and the receiving university are committed to working together, and those five months can become three articles. (P001)

For these participants, it was a priority to enrich their CV and to comply with the requirements of the contract or PhD programme. They felt the need to carry out research visits to meet administration demands or to be able to compete on equal terms with colleagues who had completed research visits in their professional careers. The

group that mentioned this issue the most frequently was the new teaching and research staff.

For their part, *Code 2.7 Geographical limitations* narratives indicated that the participating teaching and research staff preferred to limit mobility to regions they considered safe (Spain and/or Europe) and geographically near (in case they had to return home for a family emergency), that applied similar pandemic control standards, and where they believed they would be better cared for (health domain) in the event of contagion.

So in my case, in countries where ... in Europe, because you are three hours from anywhere and also because we, as Europeans, have the right to everything or almost everything - all is half agreed at least - it's as if you were still in Alicante, I don't see the problem. (P048)

I think that I would encourage it, perhaps, with more internal mobility, within Spain, because we are always going to other European countries or abroad, forgetting perhaps about teaching exchange within the country itself, within our national borders. We could perhaps encourage it because it's less complicated to organise. (P051)

Category 3 grouped the narratives in which participants requested complementary actions by the administrations to facilitate the resuming of research visits and in better conditions for the participants.

Table 3

Category 3 codes. Complementary actions

Category 3. Complementary actions	AF	%AF
Code 3.1 Allow Postponement	10	40%
Code 3.2 Do not penalise	7	28%
Code 3.3 Promote mobility	4	16%
Code 3.4 Self-criticism exercise	2	8%
Code 3.5 Change evaluation system	2	8%

Code 3.1 Allow postponement included narratives in which participants requested that their visit be postponed, which was granted by means of a final programme decision, until the administrations considered that the health situation was to under control. This was the most- demanded measure by participants.

I would postpone the possibility of visiting those places, if you have been granted the visit, the grant should not be withdrawn, and you should be allowed to complete the research visit when the context allows it. (P002)

It is essential that the administration be flexible, and that the dates can be changed, extending the deadline to carry out these research visits. (P016)

The participants requested that the administration take into account the temporary impossibility of mobility together with its implications in terms of accreditation and/or access to vacancies, postdoctoral fellowships, etc. (*Code 3.2. Do Not Penalise*). This code was very much in line with the demands found under *Code 3.5 Change evaluation*

system, where participants requested that the sum of several short visits count as a credit in the accreditations.

The accreditation system of progression is constantly pursuing productivity, the generation of transfers, six-year terms and publications and teaching, that is, the system itself hasn't come to a halt. So for me, to see myself stopping equates to being counter-productive regarding my own future, my own reality. Logically, you could say: - but it's my health. Of course, obviously, but work, our obligations don't stop and they're going to be demands, maybe not immediately, but perhaps within 4, 5 or 6 years, when we have to present the corresponding accreditations or six-year terms. We will be asked to show what we have accomplished. (P073)

Because evaluation agencies award credits for research visits, they always have minimum deadlines, "minimum stays of so many months". If they allowed that to be the sum of different visits, [...]. (P063)

Also notable was the *Code 3.3. Promotion of mobility* in which the participants requested that once the health situation was under control, mobility should be given "the spotlight" so that the entire educational community become aware of the mobility programmes and the fact that they are being resumed.

In this sense, give a lot of information, that is, clearly publicise mobility programmes on university websites so that they know that they have been re-launched, because right now, we don't actually know very much about what's going on. (P034)

The issue of grants always helps a lot, that is, I believe that grants should be maintained, and above all promoted. They should reach recipients. Because often, grants are available but no one knows about them. You might know about them because someone used one, but we receive a lot of emails and you can't keep up with all of them. (P033)

Finally, in some narratives, participants requested that the lack of mobility be used as an opportunity to examine the mobility agreements established with universities (*Code 3.4. Self-criticism exercise*).

[...] Use the current stalemate situation to critically assess the destinations that currently exist and see what they are. The university, especially the Polytechnic university, has carried out a much-needed policy that is mostly expansive or quantitative in nature. This was necessary because some degrees were assigned very few destinations. Now that we have these destinations and they have been consolidated, we should take a step back and determine which destinations make the biggest contributions to certain degrees. (P039)

Discussion and conclusions

The results revealed that participants were highly concerned about possible contagion, leading them to prefer not to travel until herd immunity was achieved through mass vaccination. Some narratives showed a preference for neighbouring countries (Xiong et al., 2020) as research visit destinations, because these latter destinations adopted similar pandemic measures and had health resources that the participants believed were adequate. Lack of access to resources and the impossibility of enjoying social relations during research visits were two major reasons for not encouraging mobility. There were even more influential than fear. For example, it was regarded as

impossible to learn certain class dynamics, new methodologies (Barbosa et al., 2017) and to enjoy exchanging experiences between professionals (Vazirani et al., 2019) via online communication. Thus, the mobility of some university teachers and researchers could be conditioned by the opening of the hospitality industry, the possibility of international mobility for work purposes, and face-to-face work in the destination institutions.

Code 2.5. Virtual Mobility highlighted the organisational and methodological changes faced by teachers and researchers during the pandemic (De Barros et al., 2020). It also reflected the international debate that has arisen on the use of virtual exchanges and conferences as a means to maintain links of knowledge, research and relationships within university institutions. An additional issue was the need to redirect institution internationalisation processes to promote *Internationalisation at home* (De Wit, 2011), especially in virtual environments and with significant curricula and teaching-learning process modifications. The latter would include models that are more conducive to scenarios that give a greater role to Learning Ecology (González-Sanmamed et al., 2020) as opposed to models that prioritise physical mobility as a source of university financing and internationalisation (Rizvi, 2020). Some viewed these changes positively, and serving as an instrument to forever change our conception of *Networking* and research methodologies (Goebel et al., 2020). For others, virtual mobility represented a prelude to physical mobility and a useful tool in these circumstances (Gómez, 2020). Participants felt that it was useful given the lack of access to resources from foreign institutions, but that it was then necessary to return to face-to-face exchanges because they are much more productive and motivating than virtual ones. Thus, despite the advantages over the virtual congress model alluded to in some studies (Goebel et al., 2020), the results of our study showed the need to maintain face-to-face conferences — at best opting for a mixed model — due to the *networking* benefits they provide. Another reason was the difficulties they expressed today in maintaining close relationships with colleagues following this dynamic. Although the causes of these difficulties remain to be unravelled, some influential factors may include: participant lack of knowledge about virtual exchange dynamics (González-Sanmamed et al., 2020); and the fear of change or a lack of trust in the professional development potential of virtual environments.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to highlight the virtual mobility benefits underscored by many participants. Indeed, virtual mobility allows maintaining links with other institutions, even if it does not contribute to strengthening or establishing new links (Barbosa et al., 2017). Moreover, research resources, especially databases and virtual repositories, continue to be shared (Rostan & Ceravolo, 2015). In addition, they allow to maintain international contact networks that promote collaborative research projects (Ramírez & Ortega, 2019), increasing the institution's prestige and international ranking (Rodrigues & Silva, 2015).

Finally, our findings support Barbosa (2020) regarding the fact that the pandemic has been more detrimental to novice teaching and research staff, especially doctoral students, who need mobility opportunities to advance in their professional careers (Cañibano et al., 2020). Owing to the impossibility of international mobility during COVID-19 restrictions, these people are at a disadvantage with respect to peers who did not complete their PhD and postdoctoral research visits during a pandemic. For them, mobility is necessary to be able to compete on equal terms regarding access to grants, projects, positions, etc. That is why that was the group that demanded that mobility be encouraged the most, with freedom of access to universities, because

they considered that their time was limited or conditioned by their PhD programme. These inequalities could be alleviated by allowing to postpone mobility grants that were already approved. Another possible measure to adopt was that administrations stop awarding credits for research visits conducted as of March 2020, or refrain from penalising lack of mobility in doctoral programmes, until all free mobility is resumed.

Finally, some contributions expressed the need to promote mobility and to perform an exercise of self-criticism regarding the programmes offered by the institutions. The latter was not among the most frequent ideas in the study, but we believe it is worth highlighting. The situation presents an ideal opportunity to work towards adapting university mobility to its participants, expand horizons, and promote inter-institutional relations that improve the mobility experiences of university teaching staff. Likewise, given the benefits of academic mobility for the professional development of university staff and Higher Education internationalisation, it is worth engaging in additional efforts to (re)think promotion strategies and, as mentioned, to re-assess the suitability of mobility programmes.

Despite the limitations of this study due to the absence of research on the subject, some approaches should be (re)considered in the near future in Higher Education. The professional development of university teachers and researchers has been affected by the lack of mobility and universities need to promote and (re)think academic mobility as an indispensable means of internationalisation. The quality and availability of resources for virtual exchanges – research, teaching and professional relations – are not equitably distributed. Moreover, the training of teaching and research staff present shortcomings in these domains.

References

- Araujo, J. C. (2014). Formación continua a través de programas educativos europeos. *Revista e-CO. Revista Digital de Educación y Formación del Profesorado*, 11, 113–118.
- Barbosa, B., Santos, C. A., Filipe, S., Pinheiro, M. M., Simões, D., & Dias, G. P. (2017). *What makes a mobility champion? Qualitative insights on teachers' mobility experiences*. Paper presented at the Ninth International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies (EDULEARN 2017). 10.21125/edulearn.2017.0359
- Barbosa, R. B. (2020). Covid-19 and doctoral research in Brazil and Portugal: who pays the bill for confinement and remote work in research? *Fennia* 198(1–2) 239–242. <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.99208>
- Cañibano, C., D'Este, P., Otamendi, F. J., & Woolley, R. (2020). Scientific careers and the mobility of European researchers: an analysis of international mobility by career stage. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00536-z>
- Cortina-Pérez, B., & Medina Rivilla, A. (2019). La competencia de internacionalización del profesorado universitario. Un reto para la educación superior. *Publicaciones*, 49(5), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.30827/publicaciones.v49i5.11228>
- De Barros, A. P., Guerreiro, A. D., Mascarenhas, M. F., & Reis, R. (2020). And now what? Changing fields and methodologies during the Covid-19 pandemic: from international mobilities to education. *Fennia*, 198(1–2), 234–238. <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.99236>

- De Wit, H. (2011). Globalización e internacionalización de la educación superior. *RUSC. Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 8(2), 77-84. <http://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v8i2.1247>
- De Wit, H. (2020). Internationalization of higher education. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), I-IV.
- European Commission. (2018). *The EU in support of the Bologna Process. Education and Training*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2020). *Mobility Scoreboard: Higher Education Background Report 2018/19. Eurydice Report*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Goebel, J., Manion, C., Millei, Z., Read, R., & Silova, I. (2020). Academic conferencing in the age of COVID-19 and climate crisis: The case of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). *International Review of Education*, 66, 797–816. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-020-09873-8>
- Gómez, A. (2020). ¿Qué sucederá con la internacionalización de la educación superior y la movilidad estudiantil después del COVID-19?. *Revista Digital de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria*, 14(2), e1348. <https://doi.org/10.19083/ridu.2020.1348>
- González-Sanmamed, M., Estévez, I., Souto-Seijo, A., & Muñoz-Carril, P. C. (2020). Ecologías digitales de aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional del docente universitario. *Comunicar*, 62 (XXVIII), 09-18.
- Haug, G. (2010). La internacionalización de la Educación Superior: más allá de la movilidad europea. *La cuestión Universitaria*, 6, 21.
- Huber, G. L., & Gürtler, L. (2013). *AQUAD 7. Manual del programa para analizar datos cualitativos*. Günter Huber.
- Kahn, H. E., & Agnew, M. (2017). Global learning through difference: Considerations for teaching, learning, and the internationalization of higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(1), 52-64.
- Karakus, F., Uyar, M. Y., & Balbag, N. L. (2017). Determining Teachers' Educational Needs Regarding School Education Projects within the Scope of Erasmus+ Programme. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5(11), 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v5i11.2653>
- Mizikaci, F., & Arslan, Z. U. (2019). A European perspective in academic mobility: A case of Erasmus program. *Journal of International Students*, 9(2), 705-725. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i2.1138>
- Ramírez, A., & Ortega, J. C. (2019). El impacto institucional de la movilidad internacional estudiantil. El caso de la Universidad Veracruzana. *Revista de Investigación Educativa*, 28, 208-233. <https://doi.org/10.25009/cpue.v0i28.2605>
- Rizvi, F. (2020). Reimagining recovery for a more robust internationalization. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(7), 1313-1316. [10.1080/07294360.2020.1823325](https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1823325)
- Rodrigues E., & Silva, S. (2015). Temos de fazer um cavalo de Troia: elementos para compreender a internacionalização da investigação e do ensino superior. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 20(60), 77-98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782015206005>
- Rostan, M., & Ceravolo, F. A. (2015). The internationalisation of the academy: convergence and divergence across disciplines. *European Review*, 23. [10.1017/S1062798714000763](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000763)

- Souto-Otero, M., Huisman, J., Beerkens, M., de Wit, H., & Vujić, S. (2013). Barriers to International Student Mobility: Evidence from the Erasmus Program. *Educational Researcher*, 42(2), 70–77. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12466696>
- Vazirani, S., Carmona, C., Hernaiz, N., & Shuali, T. (2019). El impacto de las estancias internacionales en el desarrollo de competencias en estudiantes de doctorado y su transferencia en diversos contextos. *Publicaciones*, 49(1), 79-91. 10.30827/publicaciones.v49i1.9854
- Xiong, W., Mok, K. H., Ke, G., & Cheung, J. O. W. (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education and student mobility: Student perspectives from mainland China and Hong Kong*. Centre for Global Higher Education. <https://www.researchcghe.org/publications/working-paper/impact-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-international-higher-education-and-student-mobility-student-perspectives-from-mainland-china-and-hong-kong/>