

## **LIVE HERE...? NO, THANK YOU! MIGRATION AND ITS CAUSES IN MOENCHENGLADBACH – A CITY FOR LIVING AND WORKING**

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### **Abstract**

One of the essential tasks and goals of local policy makers and administrations is to provide a high quality of life and work for citizens and employees in a specified location. This especially applies in times of demographic change, in which cities are increasingly facing the challenge of an aging and shrinking population in the inter-municipal competition. Hence, key questions arise, such as: Which factors determine choice of location of private households? How are these factors evaluated in the living and working area of Moenchengladbach?

In order to answer these questions, in a first step the migration processes of the city of Moenchengladbach are examined based on secondary statistics. In a second step, three primary statistical surveys are conducted in order to reveal information on which crucial factors influence the choice of residence for the observed migration processes and how the quality of Moenchengladbach as a residential location is evaluated.

**Keywords:** Migration, Urban development, Locational factors, Citizens' satisfaction, Job mobility

**JEL classification:** R21, R32

### **1. Introduction**

Urban population structures are in a constant state of flux. On the basis of migration analyzes, this study illustrates group differentiated results in regards to the development and structure of migration and the demands on the city of Moenchengladbach.

An attractive yet affordable apartment, an interesting job; the availability of excellent childcare, primary schools and secondary schools; as well as a variety of shops, clean parks and fresh air- this may well be the wish list of many a city resident, and this list poses great challenges for those responsible for making political and regional decisions. Especially in times of demographic change, when populations are aging and shrinking thus fueling competition amongst cities for residents and workers, it is important that the decision makers know which regional migration movements exist and which factors influence people's decisions when it comes to choosing a residential community. In light of this competition for residents, analyzes are useful for marketing regional strengths more effectively and for identifying points of weakness more efficiently.

This article describes substantial results in accordance with such analyses in the case of the German city of Moenchengladbach. In a project commissioned by The Development Society

of Moenchengladbach (EWMG: (Entwicklungsgesellschaft Moenchengladbach GmbH), NIRS conducted a group specific analysis of migration and the potential determining factors for living and working in Moenchengladbach. The following questions will be answered according to surveys and by a study of secondary information: How has migration flux developed within the past few years and how can this migration be explained? Which demands are being made on the city of Moenchengladbach? How happy are the residents of Moenchengladbach with their city?

Upon deeper analysis (s. *ibid*) Moenchengladbach can be viewed in one way as a unified city and in another way as a conglomerate of individual districts and neighborhoods with their own individual strengths and weaknesses. This multifaceted approach of examination is especially relevant considering the fact that Moenchengladbach is a city with two distinct city centers- Moenchengladbach and Rheydt. This regional peculiarity is exemplified by fact that it is the only city in Germany with two official central railway stations. However for the purposes of this study, the city is dealt with as unified whole.

#### **The young and searching- who is packing their bags?**

When a person packs their bags and voluntarily sets forth, they may do so alone or as a part of a group. In either case, one thing is certain; the person has decided to put their current existence behind them and to move on to a new place and a new start. Age plays an important role in determining decisions to migrate. Young adults, people between the ages of 20 and 30, move most often. During this period, people usually choose a location based on professional training and subsequently for the beginning of their career. People between the ages of 30 and 40 usually move with their families and migration tends to subside substantially with increasing age. However, there is an increase in migration which can be noticed at a much older age > 80 years of age. This is the so called retirement migration [see PROSKE 2011, p. 82].

Why do people migrate? Motivations for migration can be roughly categorized according to the following [see PROSKE 2011, S. 266 ff.]:

- Migration due to professional motivation
- Migration due to personal life situation
- Migration due to housing situation
- Migration due to infrastructure
- Migration due to subjective evaluation of soft locational factors

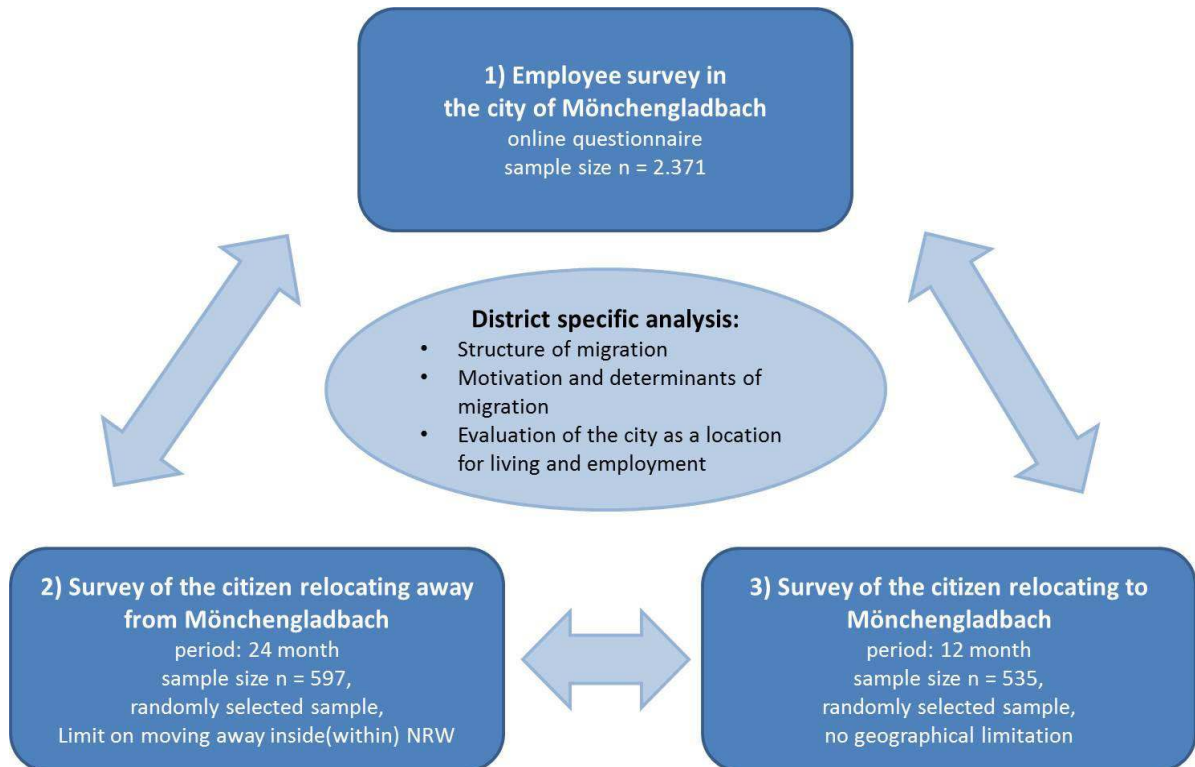
Hard migration factors directly affect the economic situation of the individual and ultimately their existence. This includes factors such as the labor market, standard of living costs and the availability of housing. In comparison, soft factors of migration are not existential; instead they determine the quality of life within a region. This includes factors such as the cultural and art scene, leisure activities, social environment, cityscape, shopping facilities and the availability of childcare [see GEIS 2004, S. 62].

#### **The methodological approach**

##### **How was it investigated?**

On the basis of certified secondary statistics from IT.NRW and from the city's citizen registry, the people moving to and from as well as net migration for the city of Moenchengladbach will be examined. Whenever possible, the total number will be differentiated according to sex, nationality and city district in order to give a more exact understanding of migration movements. Along with the purely empirical descriptive observation, the project titled 'MG Moves' should give additional information regarding which factors inspired people to either relocate to or away from the city. Ultimately, this will help to draw conclusions on the quality of life in Moenchengladbach. Different primary statistical surveys were conducted within the framework of the project. On the one hand, this was achieved through the use of an online questionnaire in which people who work in Moenchengladbach were asked which factors determine residency choice and how they would evaluate the quality of these factors in Moenchengladbach. On the hand, individuals who had relocated either to or away from the city were asked about their motivations for migration. In total a sample size of  $n = 3.503$  was collected and evaluated.

**Figure 1: Primary statistical data within the frame work of the project MG Moves**



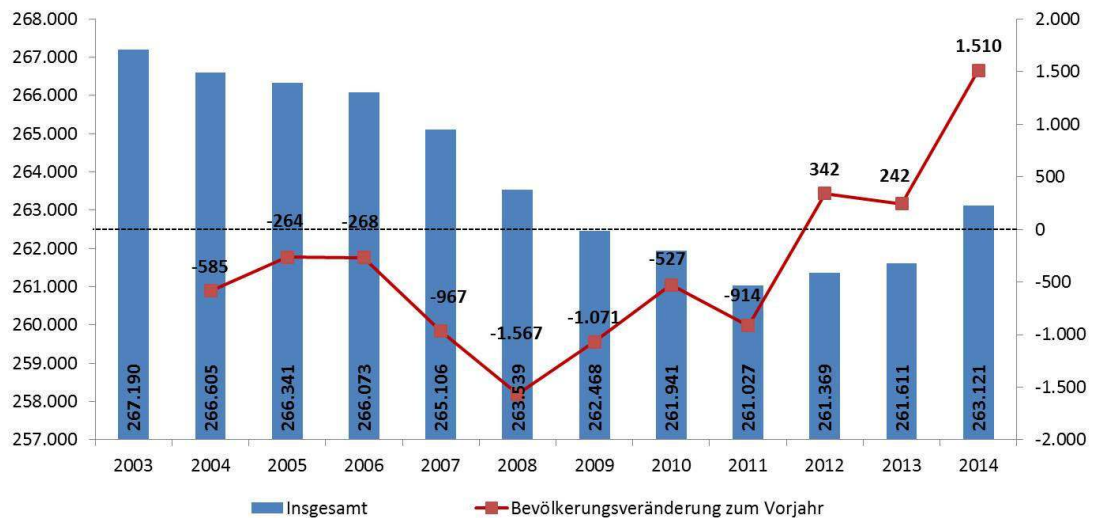
Source: Author's own graph

## 2. The residents of Moenchengladbach

### How many people are coming and going?

Since the year 2003 the population figure of the city of Moenchengladbach has reduced overall. In 2003 the city had a population of around 267,000 people and in 2004 the figure had dropped to 263,000 people. However, there is a noticeable interruption of this trend beginning in 2011. Within the past three years there has been a considerable increase in population. It should be determinable within the next few years if this is a long-term sustainable population increase which is capable of reversing the trend of demographic migration.

**Figure 2: Population figures and the development in Moenchengladbach between 2003 and 2014**



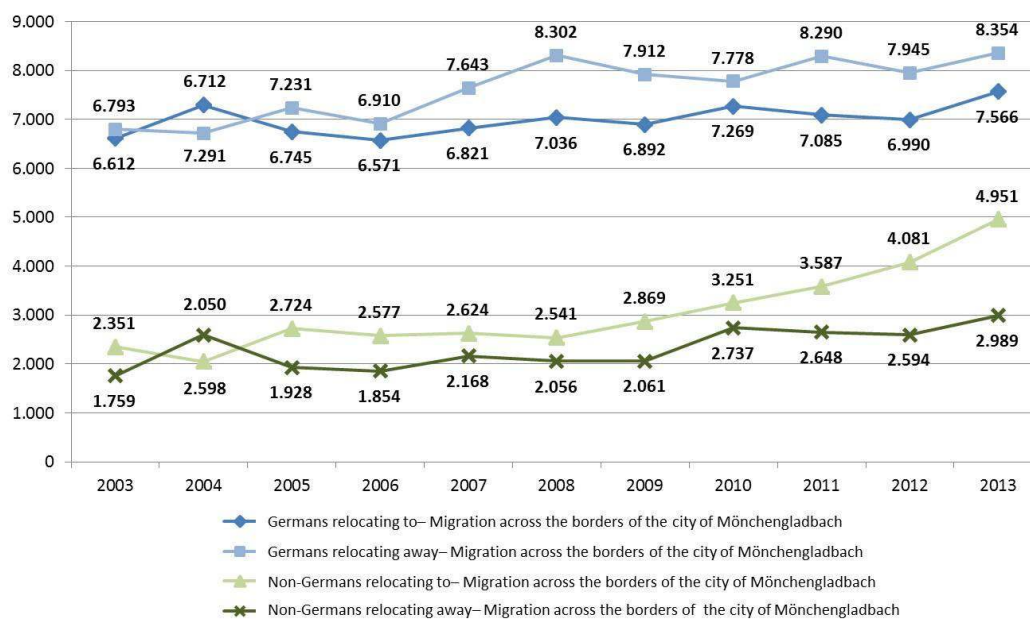
Source: Author's own graph based on data from the city of Moenchengladbach Department of City Development and Planning

### Who's coming and going?

When the movements of migration are differentiated according to the origin of the migrant (see figure 3) it can be seen that an exchange process has taken place in Moenchengladbach within the past few years. German citizens are moving away from the city in remarkable numbers according to net migration, whereas a large net number of foreign citizens are moving to the city. In total, Moenchengladbach has registered an increase in migration in contrast to other cities and communities. This structure of development, which has been noticeable over many years, has contributed to the fact that the city has a foreign population that is above average in comparison to the state of North Rhine Westphalia. In 2014 around 31,200 foreign citizens around 14.4 percent of the city's total population were living in Moenchengladbach, in comparison to 11.8 percent of the population of the state of North Rhine Westphalia. The two city centers of Moenchengladbach, as well as a few of the inner city districts, show an even higher foreigner population and a relatively high fluctuation of citizens. However, it can be noted that in the more peripheral, and often rurally influenced, districts of Moenchengladbach there is a smaller proportion of foreigners and a lower fluctuation of citizens.

When viewed from a positive perspective, the outlined developments show that Moenchengladbach enjoys great popularity amongst foreign citizens- the city expresses an air of internationality and open-mindedness. When viewed from a more cautious perspective, these developments show that the need for integration in Moenchengladbach has increased tremendously over the past few years and with ever increasing speed.

**Figure 3: Migration out of the city limits, classified according to Germans and Non-Germans between 2003 and 2013**



Source: Author's own graph on the basis of data from the city of Moenchengladbach Department of City Development and Planning.

An observation according to age group differentiation of migration for the year 2012 shows that there was a net migration amongst all age groups. The only exception to this is people in the age group over 65 years old. According to average age, a comparatively young population is currently living in the city center, whereas the average age in the peripheral city districts is much higher.

### Why are they coming and going?

The secondary statistical population analysis was supplemented by a survey of people relocating to and away from Moenchengladbach as well as of professionals working within Moenchengladbach. This survey shows the reasons for the movement of migration and allows an assessment of the quality of life in Moenchengladbach. In general, it shows that the majority of people relocating to or away from the city are doing so on account of a combination of personal, career and housing related factors of influence. In the specific case

of Moenchengladbach, housing related factors as a motive for relocation is of noticeably less significance than that of the first two factors.

Along with these principle similarities, there are also noticeable differences as to why people decide to relocate to or away from the city. These differences could be a result of the specific locational conditions of the city and could therefore be the first clues as to why people choose to leave or to come to Moenchengladbach. Being closer to family and friends, job changes and housing prices are all motives for moving to Moenchengladbach. Reasons for moving away from Moenchengladbach tend to be for professional training and studies, buying residential property, the prices for building and purchasing a new house and for better rental apartments.

#### **A city's population is switched**

Also, social demographic qualities of those relocating to and from the city show some similarities, initially. Younger people (between the ages of 18 and 29) are more often a part of the migration process; the same is also true for well qualified individuals with a degree or with vocational training. There are also tends to be differences between those relocating to and from the city. Generally, employed people and married households tend to move away, where as those searching for work and the retired tend to move to the city. Employees with a household income under 3,000€ a month tend to relocate to the city and those households who tend to make more money, over 3,000€ a month, generally tend to leave the city. In summary, a trend towards a process of exchange can be noticed. More often young people and employed people with a very high household income and with a university degree tend to leave Moenchengladbach. Groups of people requiring governmental financial assistance for example the unemployed, the retired and people in the process of professional training tend to move to Moenchengladbach. Therefore, the fact cannot be ignored that the city's internal buying power has developed unfavorably due to the process of this population switch.

#### **Or instead being relocated to the booming cities of the Rhine-Ruhr region?**

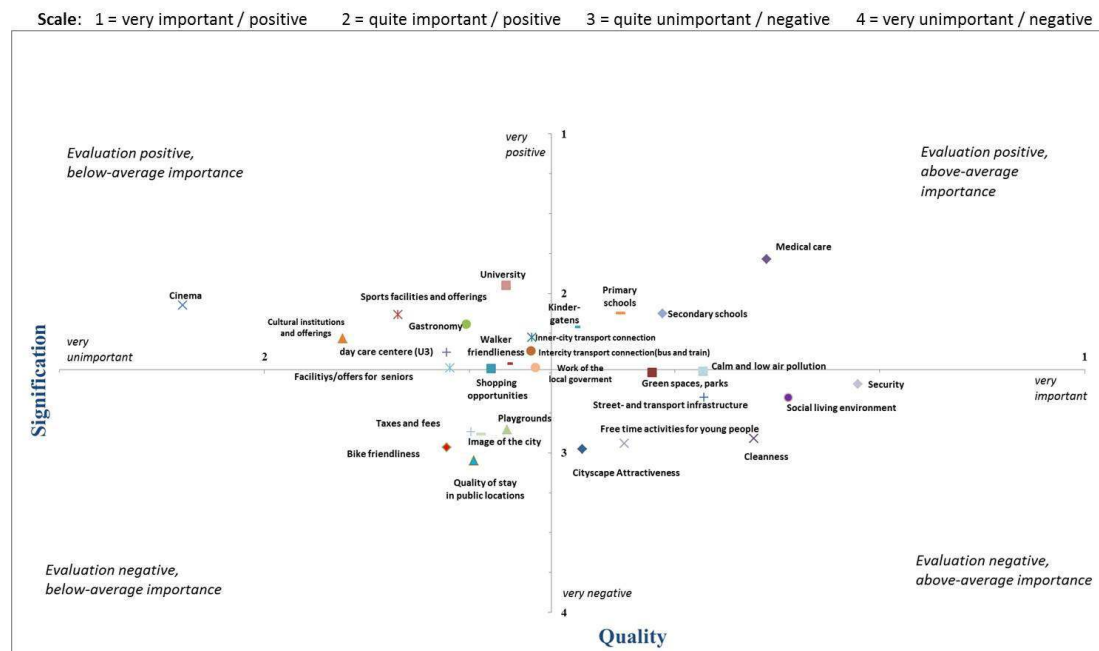
The analysis of the house hunting process shows that Moenchengladbach has reached a positive net migration in the immediate surrounding areas (relocation distance of 5 to 15 kilometers), however, when it comes to a relocation distance of 50 to 100 kilometers a negative net migration is noticeable. When it comes to the immediate surrounding areas more people move to Moenchengladbach than move away, the city however loses residents to the Rhine-Ruhr metropolitan area with its large cities such as Cologne, Bonn, Aachen and the additional cities within the Ruhr urban area. At the same time, more than 40 percent of those who relocated to Moenchengladbach found the search for housing difficult because it wasn't easy for them to find an apartment that met their individual expectations in terms of price or quality. The largest portion of those who have relocated into the city move into a rental apartment- only a few purchase their own home.

#### **The soft factors make a difference**

A survey of employees working in Moenchengladbach show that people who work within the city limits but do not live in the city are generally happier with their living situation (factors such as city, neighborhood, housing) than those who both live and work in Moenchengladbach. The survey shows similar results in the case of the satisfaction of those who have relocated to and from the city after their move. People who moved to Moenchengladbach admit that they were happier with their city and their neighborhood from which they came than they are with Moenchengladbach. Only housing is rated more positively in Moenchengladbach. People who have moved away from Moenchengladbach admit that they are happier in their new city, as well as happier with their housing, neighborhood and with the city in general than as they were before they moved. These results, which were sobering for the city, were proven by a series of qualitative statements regarding the city's shortcomings from surveyed individuals. The main points of criticism included in the open ended question are street conditions and traffic infrastructure, the unattractive cityscape and the lack of cleanliness, as well as a feeling of a lack of personal security, weaknesses in social structures and an unattractive downtown area. Along with these negative assessments, there are also a series of positive aspects ascribed to the city of Moenchengladbach. These strengths include the amount of parks and green spaces as well as the city's scenic surroundings, its central location and good transport connections and moderately priced housing.

These results are supplemented by a deeper examination of housing location factors according to the framework of a portfolio-analysis (see figure 4). Here the assessments of location factors are shown according to the level of importance to the surveyed individual (on a scale from 1 = not important to 4 = very important) as well as their quality in Moenchengladbach (on a scale of 1 = very good to 4 = very poor). A classification of factors in the bottom right quadrant shows a negative assessment with a level of high significance. This analysis proves that the city's largest weaknesses, and therefore its largest potential for action, lies within the failing attractiveness of its cityscape, cleanliness, leisure activities for youth, street and traffic infrastructure, social environment, condition of parks and green-spaces as well as its residents feeling of security. Medical treatment, availability of day-care, primary schools and secondary schools, tranquility and limited pollution are all positively assessed.

**Figure 4: Significance and Quality of the locational factors in Moenchengladbach**



Source: Author's own depiction based on all realized inquiries; axis meeting point at the respective mean value of all factors

### **The basic requirements have been met- it's the icing on the cake that's missing...**

Moenchengladbach fulfills the 'must-have' factors required for a city. This is one of its strengths. This is due to the fact that Moenchengladbach is a convenient place to live and work. The city has good supply structures and an excellent infrastructure connection. However, these aspects can hardly influence human behavior or reactions like suggested in the case of this article's title 'Live here...? No, thank you!' Moenchengladbach shows deficits in every aspect which could make the city a more attractive and livable community: leisure activities, cleanliness, an attractive cityscape, and a positive and secure social community. In light of an increasing demographic migration and increasing competition amongst cities, it is doubtful that the city's amenities are enough to reverse the current trend of population exchange or to impede related unfavorable economic trends.

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