Suddenly I Felt Like a Migrant: Identity and Mobility Threats Facing European Self-Initiated Expatriates in the UK under Brexit

Journal:	*Academy of Management Discoveries*
Manuscript ID	AMD-2020-0162.R3
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue: Migration Management
Keywords:	Expatriates < International Business, Social Identity Theory, Identity and Categorization < Interpersonal & Team Processes, Qualitative Research Methods (General) < Research Methods
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Acknowledgments: All authors contributed equally to this work.
We are grateful to editors Joana Vassilopoulou and Yuka Fujimoto, and our anonymous reviewers, for their engagement and guidance throughout the review process. We would also like to thank our interview subjects for sharing so many personal experiences and insights into their work and lives.

SUDDENLY I FELT LIKE A MIGRANT: IDENTITY AND MOBILITY THREATS FACING EUROPEAN SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES IN THE UK UNDER BREXIT

ABSTRACT

In recent years, several countries have undertaken political initiatives aimed at reducing immigration. At present, we lack a clear understanding of how self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) living in these countries interpret and respond to such initiatives. The United Kingdom's 2016 "Brexit" referendum decision to leave the European Union presents an example of one such initiative potentially impacting the mobility, UK identification, and future aspirations of European SIEs living in the UK. We draw on 41 in-depth interviews with SIEs from 18 European countries who had voluntarily chosen to relocate to the UK and analyze how they interpreted the Brexit vote, as well as its impact on their identities and migration plans. We identify four types of SIEs based on their perceived mobility and identification with the UK prior to the Brexit referendum, each of which was associated with a distinct reaction pattern related to the outcome of the referendum. Our findings have implications for the study of SIEs, as well as for talent managers charged with their retention. We suggest directions for future research in SIE management.

Keywords: Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), mobility, identification, identity threat, identity work, Brexit

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, increasing globalization has contributed to a 77% increase in international migration (IOM, 2020). While benefiting many, growing migration has more recently led to a populist backlash in many countries, exemplified by former US President Donald Trump's attempts to build a wall with Mexico, or the rise of anti-immigration parties in many countries in the EU and Asia. The United Kingdom (UK)'s 2016 "Brexit" referendum decision to leave the European Union (EU) was similarly driven in part by concerns about migration (Miller, 2019; Kerr & Sliwa, 2020). For the EU citizens living in the UK at that time, the referendum result and its aftermath represented a significantly unsettling event (Ryan, 2019), suggesting an end to their ability to seamlessly migrate to, work in, leave from, and return to the UK. It led some to rethink their relationship and identification with the UK (White & Goodman,

2021), although the nature of these reactions and any related consequences for their residency or employment decisions are only starting to become clear.

This paper analyzes how macro-political initiatives encouraged by anti-immigration movements impact highly-skilled resident foreigners who might not have envisaged permanent migration, that is "self-initiated expatriates" (SIEs). SIEs' more international mindsets and skillsets make them attractive to many employers, although their high degree of international mobility can make them challenging to retain (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013). Given the importance of SIEs' contribution to their 'host' countries and the reliance of many employers on them (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), we believe a deeper understanding of how changing national sentiments and rules related to immigration may impact SIEs is needed.

The Brexit referendum presents an instructive opportunity to examine how an immigration-limiting national initiative might impact SIEs. We studied 41 highly skilled European SIEs from 18 countries who had previously relocated to the UK and were living there at the time of the Brexit referendum, and analyzed how they interpreted and responded to the vote—including any plans to leave their employers or the UK altogether. In contrast to widely held assumptions that SIEs are highly mobile (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty, 2013) or strongly influenced by home country identity (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), our study reveals that neither mobility nor home country identity considerations fully explained the way EU SIEs interpreted and reacted to Brexit. Rather, mobility and identity considerations interacted in surprising ways that have not been the focus of academic study to date. We found a high level of diversity in how informants reacted to the Brexit. SIEs with high levels of host country identification were far more affected than SIEs with low UK identification. Informants' reaction patterns, however, were also closely linked to their perceptions of mobility. These findings

suggest that SIEs should not be regarded monolithically. In particular, we found that SIE 'host' country identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum, combined with their perceived mobility opportunities and constraints, allowed us to discern four discrete types of SIEs—each associated with a distinct reaction pattern to Brexit. Considering the combination of host country identification and mobility perception in parallel allows us to make sense of why and how SIEs' reactions to anti-immigration movements differ. Our typology of SIEs and their subsequent reaction patterns gives rise to further theoretical and practical insights regarding how SIEs are impacted by immigration-related decisions in their host countries, helping us make sense of puzzling and seemingly contradictory SIE reactions. We also anticipate that our findings might assist employers to better understand how SIEs are impacted by such decisions, and allow them to develop more effective responses to improve employee morale and retention, despite the severe limitations imposed by such political initiatives.

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)

Research on self-initiated expatriates in the broader field of migration studies builds on prior studies on 'skilled migrants' and 'expatriates'. As with many skilled migrants, SIEs tend to have university degrees and move to other countries seeking international work or education experiences (e.g., Ceric & Crawford, 2016; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). However, while migrants usually seek to stay permanently in their host country, SIEs typically envisage a temporary stint (Zikic, 2015; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014).

SIEs choose to move to another country for an indefinite duration and on their own initiative—rather than through an employer (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014). In contrast to other migrants, the status "self-initiated" signals a high degree of agentic power, as SIEs take advantage of employment opportunities outside their home country to prioritize their personal development (Al Ariss &

Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, Pattie, & Hippler, 2020). Unlike employer-assigned expatriates, SIEs tend to adapt more readily to their foreign environment by developing greater language proficiency and increased cultural empathy, and by better adjusting to the local host culture overall (e.g., Peltotkorpi, 2008; Zhang, Harzing, & Fan, 2018).

Past reviews of the academic literature on skilled migrants have offered limited insights into the inclusion of SIEs in the host country workplace or their management (e.g., Hajro, Stahl, Clegg, & Lazarova, 2019; Shirmohammadi, Beigi, & Stewart, 2019), leading to calls for more research to understand SIEs in particular (Andresen et al., 2020; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor, & Al Ariss, 2018; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). Notably, very little research has examined the extent to which SIEs might be threatened by the recent backlash targeting "immigrants" and transnational "elites" in many countries (Kerr & Sliwa, 2020). We thus lack a more refined understanding of how such political and legal shifts might impact their decisions on whether to stay or leave their host countries.

SIEs and mobility. In a migration context, 'mobility' is often depicted as the ability to move freely, independent of an organization (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). The literature on SIEs suggests that they are highly mobile (Doherty, 2013), often motivated by lucrative work opportunities (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) and/or a desire for exploration and excitement (Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen, & Tornikoski, 2018), and may treat national and international contexts as having little importance (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). International mobility is largely viewed as desirable, as it contributes to positive professional and self-development through the accumulation of cultural, social, economic, and career capital (Brimm, 2018; Halvorsen, Treuren, & Kulik, 2015). Indeed, 'internationality' (i.e., international education and work experiences combined with willingness to be mobile) is a commonly used

metric for recruitment and selection criteria and career progression (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). As a result, moving to another country has become increasingly popular both within Europe and elsewhere, with some scholars viewing recent times as the "Age of Mobility" (Skeldon, 2015: 2356–61).

Mobility can be enhanced or constrained through legal and regulatory policies. In the European context, EU passport-holders have the freedom to make choices regarding the member state in which they live—rights that extended to the UK when it joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The Brexit vote to leave the EU thus threatened the ability of British SIEs to live in continental Europe, and of European SIEs to relocate to the UK. EU SIEs residing in the UK at the time of the vote faced a particularly delicate situation, in which they were largely made to choose whether to settle in the UK permanently or to leave the UK without the facilitated ability to return. Although this referendum result created mobility-related conflict for these SIEs (Bräuchler & Ménard, 2017), it remains unclear how mobility considerations impacted their ultimate reaction patterns (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021).

SIEs and identity. An individual's identity is informed by roles, relationships, and memberships of broader groups or "social identities" (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Individuals can *identify* with collectives—including national collectives—in cognitive, affective, and evaluative ways (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), ultimately developing a sense of "we-ness" or "one-ness" with those collectives with which they identify. An individual's various social identities can be nested within each other, or they can be cross-cutting, with different social identities cued by various events that can lead their salience to shift (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001).

The additional complexity of managing an international career means that SIEs often find themselves in situations where their *national* affiliations or identities can become particularly salient, although their relationship with national identity and identification may be complicated (Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020). Miller (1995) notes that national identity is not a particular state, but rather a subjective affiliation driven by the self-identification that individuals develop between themselves and one or more national groups. More specifically, individuals can identify with either "ethnic" or "civic" aspects of a national identity, with "the latter referring to the ability to 'choose to which nation they belong'" (Kunovich, 2009: 590). Civic notions of national identity can thus largely be considered 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed', meaning they are based on decisions that are voluntary in nature (Petriglieri, 2011). Identification with a national identity can therefore be highly complex and multidimensional (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), with considerable variation in salience across individuals.

It is unclear to what extent EU SIEs based in the UK at the time of the Brexit vote would have interpreted the referendum result, and its aftermath, as threatening to any identification they had with the UK (Botterill & Hancock, 2019). Identity "threats" are "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri, 2011: 644). The literature on identity threats suggests that if an individual's national identity or sense of identification with a nation is threatened, they might respond in a number of ways, including by criticizing the source of the threat, concealing or otherwise 'protecting' this identity, or by altering the meanings, importance or even existence of the identity, i.e., 'restructuring' (Petriglieri, 2011; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). These responses, particularly identity restructuring, constitute "identity work" (Brown, 2015; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), that is "processes whereby people strive to shape a

relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity, and struggle to come to terms with … the various social identities which pertain to them" (Watson, 2008: 129). Identity work can therefore involve changing one's association with a collective or changing the meanings that one associates with that collective (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018), including altering one's level of identification with a nation. For international migrants, such identity work processes may evoke emotional aspects of identification with national identities, as highlighted by some scholars of transnationalism (Conradson & McKay, 2007:167). In her study of Romanian migrants to Spain, Marcu (2015), found informants' initial experiences of home country longing and loss were often supplanted—through their very mobility—by a stronger sense of European identity. Quassoli and Dimitriadis (2019) noted considerable home country identification, and minimal host country identification, amongst Southern Europeans living in London and Berlin in their study. It is thus unclear to what degree SIEs—as highly agentic and employment-driven individuals—might experience identification with their host country, their home country, or the EU, and to what extent such identification might impact their reactions to events such as Brexit.

Organizational responses. The interplay between globalization, the international nature of businesses, and increasing international mobility has increased the complexity of human resource management (HRM) for many organizations (Scroggins & Benson, 2010). Hiring SIEs is a way many organizations choose to access skilled workers and address labor shortages (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). SIEs' high levels of talent, and human and social capital can be central to the internationalization process of international companies (Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Compared to individuals rooted in a single national context, individuals with multiple national affiliations have been shown to display greater cognitive flexibility, adaptive capacity, and relational understanding (Brimm, 2018), making them good cultural brokers and

facilitators of knowledge sharing and innovation (Doherty, 2013; Levy, Lee, Jonsen, & Peiperl, 2019). Due to their high levels of skill, human and social capital, SIEs have become sought after in the global marketplace for talent.

However, SIEs can be challenging to manage due to their highly individualistic, self-reliant, and self-directed tendencies (Brimm, 2018). The boundaryless careers of many SIEs can raise questions about the employment relationship, with employers encouraged to provide additional mentoring and administrative support (Sarpong & Maclean, 2019). Managers often find it difficult to develop a long-term retention strategy for SIEs (Doherty, 2013; Hussain & Deery, 2018), as they can be tricky to socialize and retain (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; Crowley-Henry, Benson, & Al Ariss, 2019). Inkson and colleagues (2008) suggest that the relationship between SIEs and companies can be understood as a mutually beneficial partnership. However, some companies avoid employing highly skilled migrants as they are seen as a "potential threat to organizational norms and practices" (Risberg & Romani, 2021: 1). Even if they do hire SIEs, employers frequently lack a strategy to manage them that generates benefits for both parties (Guo & Al Ariss, 2015).

As European SIEs in the UK absorbed the impact of the Brexit decision, their employers were forced to confront potential issues related to workforce morale and ultimately retention in a context that was largely unprecedented. Relatively few scholars have studied how organizations might best manage SIEs in such macro-political contexts where, among other things, they face the possibility of expatriation. As such, we respond to calls for more contextualized study of international talent management (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018), by providing employers with additional insights into SIEs and how they respond to macro-political events induced by immigration concerns.

METHODS

Research Context

The Brexit referendum resulted in 51.9% of UK voters supporting the country's departure from the European Union, potentially ending the right for British citizens to live and work freely in the other 27 EU member states, while calling into question the right for EU nationals to freely move to and live in the UK. The referendum result had broad repercussions in politics and business in general, but it was particularly salient to the 3.6 million Europeans living in the UK and the 1.3 million British citizens residing in the EU. In a widely reported speech in 2016, Theresa May, then British Prime Minister, appeared to target an international and mobile elite living in the UK with her statement that "*If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.*" By questioning the loyalty or commitment of international professionals living and working in the UK, this comment appeared to go further than other elements of the Brexit campaign focused on stopping the movement of low-skilled European workers, so called "migrant workers". Ultimately, this speech and other Brexit-related political developments following the referendum led the authors to begin to investigate the potential impact on SIEs' national identity affiliations, as well as if and how the informant's perception of their mobility was impacted.

Data Collection

Informed by the above-mentioned definition of SIEs (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen, et al., 2014), we sampled EU nationals with university degrees who had moved to the UK for an indefinite period. We thus focused on highly educated professionals who had personally initiated their relocation to the UK (Andresen et al., 2020).

We recruited an initial group of participants through our network of SIE acquaintances, and then engaged in snowball sampling by asking our informants at the end of each interview if

they could suggest others who fitted our criteria to be interviewed. As our data collection progressed, emergent theoretical ideas informed our sampling criteria in an iterative fashion, consistent with principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, in the early stages of our study we interviewed six non-European SIEs (from Canada, China, and Australia) living in the UK. We noted a significant difference in identity threat levels stemming from the Brexit referendum result between non-EU and EU citizens, and realized this difference may have been due to the different ways these groups were impacted by the referendum. We thus decided to focus our data collection exclusively on EU citizens and omitted non-EU citizens from our dataset. Further interviews caused us to question whether age or stage of life factors might impact informants' perceived mobility, and thus influence how they viewed the referendum result. At this point, we directly sought out informants at different career stages (e.g., early, mid, and late career), having different personal circumstances (e.g., whether they lived in partnership with a British or non-British partner, had family in or outside the UK, owned property or had other investments in the UK), working in different industries and locations in the UK (we sought informants in London, larger cities such as Edinburgh, and regional areas). Later in our data collection, we noted that, although much discourse surrounding the Brexit referendum focused on migrant workers from central and Eastern Europe (Miller, 2019), our sample included a preponderance of informants from Western Europe. We thus sought out more informants from Central and Eastern EU countries, ultimately interviewing eight. In total, we conducted interviews with 41 SIEs from 18 EU countries living and working in the UK at the time of the referendum. We note that our sampling method may have led the SIEs in our sample to have above average levels of education, with nine holding PhD degrees at the time of our interview. However, although we cannot claim that our sample is fully representative of EU SIEs living in

the UK, our sample is considerably broader than other studies of this population (Kilkey & Ryan, 2021; Rzepnikowska, 2019).

Our participants included 18 males and 23 females ranging from 25-55 years of age (see Table 1 for informant information). These EU citizens had lived in the UK between 3.5 and 20 years, having an average of four years of UK work experience. Participants worked in a range of industries, including consultancy, banking and finance, public sector, health care, research institutions, and universities. At the conclusion of our study in March 2020, 33 of our informants continued to live in the UK, while two split their time between the UK and another country, and six had left the UK permanently. The breadth of home countries, age, personal circumstances, work experiences, and industries in our sample helped us gain insight into how reactions and coping mechanisms developed within and across a variety of backgrounds. Our participants had different language skills, willingness to move, and job market opportunities in their home or other countries, factors which in many cases were interlinked. For example, linguistic considerations were considered particularly important for participants working in healthcare, due to the importance of strong local language skills in this field.

Insert Table 1 here

With our research focus cutting across a number of different theoretical perspectives, and little knowledge of how macro-political developments impact individual identity and subsequent reaction patterns including migration intentions, our approach to data collection and analysis was exploratory and drew on principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), anchored in a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006). Following other scholars who integrated contextual

and personalized information from informants (Inal & Karatas-Özkan, 2011), we sought to understand our participants' experience of living as EU citizens in the UK during a time when questions of national identity had been pushed to the forefront.

We began by developing and pilot testing an initial semi-structured interview protocol that was quite broad, focusing on informants' professional backgrounds, national identity affiliations and the potential evolution of these over time, as well as on their reactions and those of their employers in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. As we asked about national affiliations, we noted that some (but not all) informants stated that they also identified with the UK. We explored this question in greater detail with subsequent informants. As our project advanced, we further refined our protocol to explore other emergent areas of theoretical interest, such as reasons to remain or leave in the UK and changes in informants' local social networks. The interviews were conducted between November 2018 and March 2020. One was conducted in person, with 40 conducted by video on Skype, Facebook, or WhatsApp. Each interview lasted between 30 and 105 minutes and all were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

We uploaded our interview transcripts into NVIVO software, and divided up the first 30 transcripts between the three co-authors to conduct a preliminary analysis of 10 interviews each, independently generating a set of initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). We then discussed these codes and developed a preliminary shared code dictionary, which guided our coding of the remaining interviews. Subsequently, we shared the transcripts between us for a second round of coding and again discussed areas of convergence and difference across team members, at times updating code definitions or adding entirely new open codes as we progressed. Each interview was independently coded by at least two members of the research team.

Working in the constructivist tradition, our overall coding approach involved attempting to understand the way our informants interpreted their lives and careers in the UK, before and after the Brexit vote. Following Charmaz (2006), we engaged in constant comparison as we moved back and forth between emerging data codes and categories related to identities and reaction patterns. For example, we began to discern connections between changes in national identity affiliation and responses such as making plans to leave the UK or applying for a British passport. As we worked back and forth from the data to the codes and emergent categories, at times we merged or split categories. For example, we merged codes related to mortgages, dual careers, and school-aged children into the category of "reasons to stay in the UK".

We began to notice that while some informants perceived themselves as quite mobile, others felt much less so. Our constructivist approach led us to focus on mobility as it is perceived by our informants, rather than attempting to analyze tangible indicators such as legislative constraints or foreign job offers. For example, *"Both me and my partner, we have moved around a lot and lived in many different countries. […] We want to continue that"* (#14, Swedish) was coded as "high" in perceived mobility, while, *"I mean, in a sense, we have a very good deal here. Because we both have found work here […] That's what made us stay"* (#41, German) appeared to indicate a lower level of perceived mobility. We linked our category of "reasons to stay in the UK" to this overarching theme of perceived mobility.

Mobility considerations were repeatedly mentioned, especially by interviewees who could move any time if they wanted. Some of these were considering or preparing to move in the near future, while others saw their mobility limited due to professional or personal circumstances. At this point, we returned to the literature on SIEs and identified 'mobility' as an important theme, although our data also led us to consider factors not normally associated with

mobility in other studies. For example, we also noticed that when many informants discussed Brexit they reacted quite emotionally and personally which, when we turned to the literature, appeared to indicate elements of a perceived identity threat. For example, the following passage was coded as "high identity threat":

> *"Before that---we were just all Europeans. And now---It's almost like a divorce. You know? It's like your partner saying, 'Oh, I don't want to be with you anymore.' […] It's a good comparison, actually. Because also when you go through a breakup, you have to re-establish your identity. Because you are no longer part of a couple. You are single again. You know? So you have to re-establish your identity, and you have to frame it. And it has to change."* (#19, German)

In the same vein, we also noticed that informants expressed varying levels of identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum, and so we began to code for this. For example, "*I see myself as being 100 percent Danish. Obviously, I've lived in the UK for quite a while, […] but I don't identify myself as British in any way*" (#24, Danish) was coded as "low" in UK identification, whereas the following informant was coded as "high:" *"I feel still Italian, and part of me also feels British. I can operate in both cultures"* (#1, Italian).

After having coded our full dataset, including the final rounds of interviews, our categories largely stabilized and we reached the point of theoretical saturation, with our final interviews not providing significant additional insights. It had become clear that perceived mobility combined with identification with the UK pre-Brexit referendum—rather than with home country—combined to produce a four-quadrant typology enabling a richer understanding of the reactions of UK-based EU citizens in the aftermath of Brexit. We returned to the literature on identity, identity threats, and the mobility of migrants and expatriates a final time and realized that these theoretical lenses had not previously been inter-linked to effectively explain the reactions of SIEs to anti-immigration political movements. This insight gave rise to our typology as well as our organizational-level implications for talent management of SIEs.

FINDINGS

The 41 skilled SIEs from EU countries in our study represent a broad range of national backgrounds. The vast majority of our informants came to the UK in pursuit of attractive educational or career opportunities, with some moving to the UK initially to undertake study at well-regarded universities and staying on after graduation for professional or personal reasons. Others chose to move to the UK directly to take up more varied and attractively paid job opportunities. Many interviewees claimed that they could not have realized the same professional opportunities and experience, job security, and/or ability to work with their partner in the same city as easily in their home country as in the UK.

Nearly all informants stated that they were affected in some way by the result of the Brexit referendum, with the majority commenting extensively on how the vote had impacted them on a personal and professional level. Nonetheless, we also noted that the magnitude and duration of the reaction to the Brexit vote varied among informants, which subsequently led to different ways of dealing with the result. We identified two key dimensions that together helped explain differing ways that the Brexit vote was interpreted and acted upon by EU SIEs in the UK: 1) the degree to which they identified with the UK prior to the referendum (and thus perceived the vote as an identity threat), and 2) the extent of their perceived mobility (e.g., professional opportunities or concrete job options abroad). These two interpretive dimensions gave rise to four different categories of SIEs (see Figure 1), with each category reacting to Brexit in different ways. We note that while these two dimensions each indicated distinct factors related to identity and mobility, they were also interlinked, that is, SIE perception of an identity threat was intrinsically connected to their degree of perceived mobility, and their perceived mobility informed the way they interpreted and dealt with the identity threat. In addition, although we present the four categories as distinct for the purposes of clarity, we acknowledge that the

boundaries between them may in some cases be blurred or evolutionary, for example, when an SIE's perceived mobility changes over time due to receiving new job opportunities in the UK or abroad. Nonetheless, we believe the four SIE types we describe next, along with their reaction patterns, offer analytical insights useful to SIE scholars and practitioners.

Insert Figure 1 here

Revived Europeans (high mobility and identification with the UK pre-Brexit referendum)

Identities and mobility. We refer to the first group of informants (12 interviewees) as "Revived Europeans." These SIEs were characterized by high levels of identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum, and perceived few restrictions on their personal mobility: "*When I talk about 'home,' I always think about London and the UK because I've spent the last 15 years in the UK"* (#22, German). The informants in this group also identified with their home country and to a large extent with the European Union. The majority of these informants had come to the UK for educational opportunities—often at prestigious universities— and had then stayed to live and work in the UK. A few of them faced restrictions in their mobility, such as having children in school or mortgages in the UK. Some had previously worked or studied in other countries than the UK. Overall, this group can be described as mobile within Europe with a considerable pre-referendum identification with the UK, the EU, and their home country.

Reaction pattern

The UK's perceived skepticism towards European immigrants expressed by the Brexit vote led many Revived Europeans to doubt whether or not they wished to continue to live in the UK: *"And then Brexit happened. And I felt so insulted that my first reaction was, 'So, if you don't want me, I don't want you back. I don't need you'"* (#16, Portuguese). Revived Europeans

reported a clear sense of rejection as a result of the vote: "*So if they don't want me, I am so ready to go. And I would take my passport and leave* (#10, German). This sense of personal rejection and hurt was closely connected to the realization that their status in the UK had changed from that of citizens enjoying equal rights to British citizens, including unlimited freedom of movement, to that of more restricted migrants from any third non-EU country:

> *"I think when the […] political situation changes, your own perception of yourself and your role in the country changes. For example, I think I am less willing to give a lot of my time and life, now, to this country, because it has so strongly expressed its view against having European migrants."* (#30, German)

Some informants clearly stated how appalled they were by the prospect of being treated "like a foreigner" in the future: *"Working here and contributing and then still being treated like a foreigner or having, maybe, needing visa or something like that. No, it's not going to happen. I just feel, 'No.'"* (#19, German). As a result of the Brexit vote, Revived Europeans explicitly distanced themselves from Britain and their prior feelings of identification with the UK. As these interviewees explained: *"I definitely don't feel British…I could say I feel European first, before anything. And that has a lot to do with Brexit. I wouldn't say I'm English anymore"* (#20, Belgian). Some participants commented that they became more aware of differences between the UK and other European countries after the Brexit vote.

> "*I think Brexit increased the awareness of being in a country that is different from continental Europe. And since Brexit happened, I started to notice even more the differences that exist between the UK and the rest of Europe."* (#21, Italian)

One informant in this group had decided to leave her job in a mainly British workplace outside of London, after her colleagues joked that she would "have to leave soon". Although the informant reported this behavior to her manager and received some support, she reported not feeling comfortable working in what she described as a "very British workplace" and took a new job in London. Other interviewees expressed their

disidentification with the UK after the Brexit referendum by an explicit refusal to apply for a British passport, even though most of them met the legal requirements or had considered it previous to the referendum:

> *"When the referendum happened, I had already been here for six years. So, I could have applied [for a British passport]. And I actually thought I would, just for the potential benefits...And then Brexit happened...I decided not to apply for a passport. That was the big one."* (#16, Portuguese)

Many Revived Europeans also experienced a growth in their identification with an "EU identity" following the vote:

> *"Since Brexit, I really have this feeling of 'I am European, and you are not European.' And 'you' being British, of course. And not just because I feel like I don't belong, but really, it's kind of a reaction to you guys, the British people, saying, 'We don't want to be in the EU, and we don't feel European.' So, I have this counter reaction of, 'Great. I agree.' You know, it's very childish, but I actually feel it quite strongly."* (#13, Dutch)

The combination of a strong sense of threat to their previous UK identification and a high degree of perceived mobility meant Revived Europeans, more than those in the other three groups, had either left the UK, started the process of migrating to a new European country, or contemplated doing so in the coming years:

> *"Job wise, we always were planning to move to the Netherlands. But I think this [Brexit] gives us a little boost. I'd say more than giving a boost, it reduces the appeal of staying. Because, if you see it as a push and a pull, the pull to Europe was always there, to the Netherlands, to Portugal, was always there."* (#13, Dutch)

Others actively considered leaving as an option for the near future:

> "*There are many factors that I started to be aware of only after Brexit. Before Brexit I knew them, but I never paid attention to them. After Brexit, I started to realize that Europe—continental Europe or the European Union—is actually a good place to live*." (#21, Italian)

Among the Revived Europeans, two informants had moved back to their home countries by 2020, while six others had taken steps to move to another European country (e.g., France, the

Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland). For example, a German informant who had completed all her studies, including a PhD, over 15 years of living in the UK, decided to move to France:

> *"I think it changed the way I felt about the people in the country. You know, I always felt welcome in the UK...And then suddenly I felt like a lot of people were so proud about being British, and it came up in the news every single day, that it's such a great nation. And I don't know, I just started thinking, 'Well, I pay taxes there,' and I thought, 'You know, I'm a good citizen. So why do people suddenly start questioning why I'm in the country?'...For me, it became very personal very quickly…And then in April, I was offered my new job in Paris. At that point, I knew I was leaving. And I think on top of that, there was this, a bit of like resentfulness, that I felt like, 'Okay, if you make it so difficult for me to stay here, then you know, I don't have to stay here. I can go somewhere else,' basically."* (#22, German)

Their reported disidentification with the UK following the Brexit vote led most Revived Europeans to strengthen their identification with the supra-national EU identity, thus widening the number of countries they identified with at the expense of the UK. From this perspective, their renewed sense of identification with something larger than the UK may at least partly explain the fact that many explicitly chose *not* to take British citizenship, despite their eligibility. Combined with their high levels of mobility, many of the Revived Europeans either planned to leave the UK or had already done so.

Local Cosmopolitans (low mobility and high identification with the UK pre-Brexit referendum)

Identities and mobility. As with the Revived Europeans, the "Local Cosmopolitans" (13 interviewees) identified with the UK before the referendum:

> *"I felt much more British two years ago. [Laughs.] Just because it was a positive choice, and I think, you know, I felt very comfortable with British society. And where the values were… I was quite comfortable with both identities."* (#8, French)

Beyond sharing high pre-Brexit identification with the UK with the Revived Europeans many had similarly moved to the UK for career opportunities. However, Local Cosmopolitans perceived their mobility to be more restricted than that of the Revived Europeans: *"We are more*

tied down…We have a very good deal here, because we both have found work. That's what made us stay…I see us staying here for quite a long time, because we have two interesting jobs here" (#41, German).

In terms of mobility, informants in this group had frequently lived in different host countries before moving to the UK, such as the US, Switzerland, or France. While they often had the experience and language skills to move, these interviewees indicated that they needed to stay in the UK for personal reasons. They raised one or more of the following factors restricting their mobility: 1) dependent school-aged children who could not easily be moved to another national school system; 2) a mortgage and/or property in the UK, on which they would lose money after Brexit; 3) the informant's partner did not speak the same non-English languages, making a move together to one of the two 'home' countries or another EU country problematic for one of them; 4) both partners had successful and satisfying careers in the UK, which would be difficult to recreate in another European country, 5) or they did not want to commute between their work and home in two different countries. Overall, these informants had identified with the UK before the Brexit referendum, but also felt they had limited options to move countries at the time of the data collection.

Reaction Pattern

Local Cosmopolitans' responses to the referendum began with difficulty in accepting the Brexit decision. Like the Revived Europeans, they often interpreted the vote as a threat to their identification with the UK:

> *"I do struggle to understand how I can be here and not agree with the country trying to detach itself from, well, Europe, in the first place. But especially, the reasons for the retreat from others, the 'We are special.'"* (#2, Romanian)

This second group of SIEs reacted in a seemingly paradoxical manner. While disidentifying with the UK and, in particular, "little England," their reaction involved narrowing their focus of identification to a particular city (e.g., London or Edinburgh) or region (e.g., Scotland) that had not voted for Brexit and/or were perceived as cosmopolitan: "*I do think that one sort of snuggles into a London identity these days, because England has changed. It's a different place"* (#41, German). Local Cosmopolitans reported an upsurge in the importance accorded to a more localized identity after the Brexit vote:

> "*It [my identity] has evolved…depending on how the political environment changes. Because at the moment, with Brexit, I don't necessarily want to be associated with being pro-British, because, yeah, they have chosen Brexit, and I don't agree with that…So this is why I call myself a Londoner, rather than a British citizen."* (#6, German)

These narratives often described London as the epitome of a global cosmopolitan city clearly distinct from "the rest of Britain," or Scotland as not being England and therefore continuing to be a viable place for them to live in the future. This reaction frequently included statements that an informant would "happily apply for a London passport." Somewhat paradoxically, many SIEs reacting along these lines obtained British citizenship, in spite of the fact that they were appalled by the Brexit vote. They explained this as a purely instrumental and pragmatic action to ensure "*that I will continue to have the work options I used to enjoy before*" (#5, French). Another informant expanded on this:

> *"I am acquiring it [British citizenship] because, from a professional perspective, I don't want to be in the situation where I don't have the right to work here. Because the UK is facing a difficult political future, and while they are negotiating the Brexit deal at the moment, it doesn't provide me with any certainty how people who don't have a British passport will be treated in the future. So, it is basically just to secure my status quo."* (#6, German)

Many in the Local Cosmopolitan group openly admitted that they would never have applied for citizenship without the Brexit vote: *"Would I have gone for the British passport*

without Brexit looming over my head? I wouldn't have done it. No, I wouldn't have done it" (#40, Austrian). As with the Revived Europeans, the narratives of Local Cosmopolitans clearly revealed how the Brexit vote had changed their sense of identification with the UK. A French-British citizen who had taken British citizenship two years *before* the Brexit referendum explained how the vote had affected him and triggered a shift in his identity:

> *"I felt like I am lucky to have a British passport, and I'm happy I did it when I did it, before it was a political choice...I would say I am still going through a disconnect with the sense of British identity...I have felt more disenfranchised from the British, my British side, since Brexit…While before I was quite happy to say, 'I'm French and British,' I would now say that 'I am French, with a British passport.' Which is not the same."* (#9, French)

To cope with the threat to UK identification created by the vote, Local Cosmopolitans actively reinforced their cosmopolitan lifestyles by surrounding themselves with like-minded people, constructing a global city identity in which they could co-exist, despite an overall environment that had shifted against immigration and foreigners. These "Londoners" also constantly reiterated to themselves that London or Edinburgh continued to be the global, welcoming, and international places they had been attracted to in the first place, long before the referendum. Their identity work and actions were geared towards the re-creation of their personal status quo before the Brexit decision. One of the Local Cosmopolitans moved to a more international employer with more international colleagues, thereby reinforcing their cosmopolitan identity.

Many informants in this group consciously claimed they lived in a cosmopolitan "bubble," which did not require them to make changes in their professional life since their work environment continued to be very international and cosmopolitan:

> *"Well, the first thing is I have not really been in situations where I was directly confronted with people who are clearly against this kind of multicultural way of*

> *thinking. So, most of the people I see, most of the people I interact with, are still very much in that kind of logic. So, I'm not having to adapt in any way."* (#5, French)

While living in a cosmopolitan bubble, some informants were aware of the changing environment around them. They became more conscious of having a different nationality and speaking a different language:

> *"On paper, it [Brexit] hasn't bothered me. But I feel inside, I guess, it is all much more conscious now, about the fact that I'm not British, but living with a Brit. Um, for example, like I tried to raise my kids bilingual. And now if I speak with my daughter on the train in German, I'm just aware of it. I'm aware that there might be some people around me who might have voted for Brexit."* (#40, Austrian)

Many noticed hostility directed towards them that they had not experienced before the Brexit referendum:

> *"We live in London. We've been living here for 15 years, but I never heard anything against me being Italian. And after the referendum, there were some people on the street, they had a conference about me, talking Italian to my children. That never happened to me before…Almost like, 'Go away' and things like that. It happened three, four times. That's after the referendum."* (#1, Italian)

Aside from ensuring their rights to stay in the UK by applying for a British passport, Local Cosmopolitans also lived out their disagreement with Brexit in their personal lives:

> *"I clearly feel that Brexit has shaken something. I still can't tell you exactly how and where. But that's why I gave you the example, because when I realized that I'm cheering for any football team that opposes England, and I do it on a regular basis, that tells me something about how much…Probably it explains my gut reaction to, 'You do this, then I can do this.'"* (#2, Romanian)

Aside from ensuring their rights to stay in the UK by applying for a British passport, Local Cosmopolitans developed ways to cope with the tension of living in a country where a majority had voted for Brexit. They lived out their disagreement with this decision in their personal lives. Some reported not inviting children's classmates with Brexit voting parents to their birthday parties, or systematically supporting *any* soccer team playing against the UK.

Unlike the Revived Europeans, interviewees who perceived their mobility as limited, yet who experienced an identity threat resulting from the Brexit vote, tended to narrow their identities to the more geographically limited area in which they lived. These Local Cosmopolitans coped by identifying with cities inhabited by other like-minded internationals, in which they could still find a place for themselves, while at the same time disidentifying with the UK. These more novel collective identities (e.g., "Londoners") permitted Local Cosmopolitans to redefine themselves in a way that allowed them to continue to live in a country that in their opinion had ostentatiously rejected them, seeming to move away from the values and beliefs they held by embracing more ethnic than civic notions of UK national identity (Kunovich, 2009). While applying for citizenship of a country with which they were disidentifying may seem paradoxical, their perceived lack of mobility compelled many Local Cosmopolitans to apply for British passports as an "insurance policy" to safeguard their rights, rather than any lingering identification with the UK.

Reconciled Migrants (low mobility and low identification with the UK pre-Brexit referendum)

Identities and mobility. The third group of informants we identified were characterized by low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum and low mobility, i.e., fewer opportunities to move, a group we labelled "Reconciled Migrants" (eight interviewees). Although most had lived in the UK for many years, Reconciled Migrants remained rooted in their home country, in terms of their national identity: "*I was born in Hungary. I was raised in Hungary. I'm definitely a Hungarian"* (#36, Hungarian). Their identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum was minimal to non-existent:

> *"Definitely not English. No, I have lived here a long time, but I can fully tell you that I feel like I'm a Spanish person living in the UK...I don't think it is a transference of national identity."* (#17, Spanish)

However, of all informants we interviewed, these SIEs were most inclined to accept that they were migrants in the UK: "*I'm Italian and that is my main identity. And I feel that I am a migrant here in the UK"* (#18, Italian).

Compared to the two previous groups, the Reconciled Migrants identified much less with the UK before the referendum, nor did they strongly identify with the EU or any other global or supranational identity. Their strongest identification and national affiliation remained to their home country. Although these interviewees welcomed the opportunities they felt the UK offered, they sought to stay connected with their home country nationality through the local community in the host country, the varieties of restaurants and stores offering the cuisine of their home country or sharing of home country habits with colleagues and friends. Many of these interviewees had initially come to the UK either to gain a particular educational experience (*"I wasn't thinking so much about why I wanted to come to England. It was more because I wanted to do that particular [Master's degree]"*, #17, Spanish), or for professional opportunities (*"I'm in a very good job. I wouldn't be in as good a job in Ireland. So, I'm here to get some experience to craft my profession"*, #28, Irish).

Regarding mobility, most interviewees in this group had only lived and worked in their home country and the UK, and they would not consider relocating to another (EU) country. For example, *"I don't plan on staying here. I plan on going home"* (#28, Irish). Most of them fully expected to stay in the UK for the near future due to superior job opportunities compared to their home country. Some would consider returning to their home country once they had enough

experience to gain a senior level position back home. Yet they also voiced doubts about how realistic such a move might be. Ultimately, they perceived their mobility options as limited.

Reaction pattern

Although they expressed general displeasure with the referendum result, this third group of informants did not interpret the Brexit vote as personally targeted at them. With a low level of identification with the UK in the first place, the vote was not perceived by them as a form of identity threat, and they came to accept the result more easily. As one interviewee explained:

> *"I don't think it is personal hatred for people of certain nationalities. I think it is a reaction to a situation, to a number of factors, institutional factors, or to the economy. But it hasn't affected my identity, because I can separate things. And I do not think that suddenly people here hate you because you are Spanish."* (#17, Spanish)

Members of this group expressed their worry about the Brexit vote in terms of what this meant for their future in the UK, and for the future of Britain's economy. However, they did not experience any personal rejection or hurt, nor did they feel the need to revert to a local, global or European identity. This group thus did not engage in any identity work:

> *"I mean, it doesn't feel personal in the sense that…the only way it can feel personal is to the extent that it's about immigration. But to the extent that it's about immigration, every time you talk to a leaver or someone who is anti-immigration, they always say, 'Oh, you're Danish. That's fine.' Because you're not Eastern European or whatever. And equally, 'You have a job. So that's fine. You're paying your taxes' and things."* (#24, Danish)

Informants from this group largely accepted the idea that they were 'migrants', and hence found it easier than any of the other SIEs to refer to themselves using this term. If Reconciled Migrants applied for citizenship, as with the Local Cosmopolitans, they considered it a means of ensuring they could remain in the country without facing any disadvantages, with one explaining her decision to apply for a UK passport the following way:

> *"The political situation in the world is so uncertain. The British politicians don't seem to know what they want…So because of that, anything can happen. And it is*

> *so that we know that whatever happens, we can stay. Or leave on our own terms."* (#35, Hungarian)

Some of these informants reported that they were aware that they had enjoyed certain privileges and they preferred not to talk about Brexit and politics with others:

> *"I'm very much of the opinion that the UK voted to leave, so they should leave. I know some friends of mine are very, you know, 'Oh, our rights. And are we going to have the same access to health care and whatever?' But I mean, at the end of the day, I am actually really strongly of the opinion of that that we chose to move here, and we are, you know, as EU citizens, we are all from very well-functioning countries. So, at the end of the day, we can just move home. I only have sympathy for the people who have properly settled with kids and things. But people like me are very independent and don't have any responsibilities to other people… It's an issue for the British people to sort out."* (#24, Danish)

Despite their broad acceptance of the referendum result, not all Reconciled Migrants were willing to tolerate all work situations. One Reconciled Migrant, who had worked for a local business with mainly British colleagues at the time of the Brexit vote, subsequently moved to a European employer to decrease her discomfort with pro-Brexit colleagues, and to feel more included in the workplace:

> *"It was worse in my past workplace, when the referendum came…The majority of my colleagues voted for Brexit. And so, there were a lot of discussions about, 'Should we open another office in XY or in ZY?'…I didn't actually enjoy these conversations."* (#18, Italian)

The perceived low levels of mobility and UK identification left the Reconciled Migrant largely unperturbed by the result of the Brexit referendum. Unlike the Revived Europeans or the Local Cosmopolitans, Reconciled Migrants had not developed a deepened sense of identification with Britain; hence, the referendum did not trigger any identity work. While they assured themselves that the Brexit vote was not directed against them personally, they nevertheless took pragmatic actions to secure their legal status, especially because they felt they lacked the mobility to seize options abroad or in their home country.

Global Citizens (high mobility and low identification with the UK pre-Brexit referendum)

Identities and mobility. The "Global Citizens" (nine interviewees) were characterized by low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum and a high perceived mobility. This group strongly identified with cosmopolitanism or being a global citizen. *"This is a tricky time for people like me and like you who recognize themselves as citizens of the world" (#8, French).* They also typically identified less with any national identities:

> *"I don't really care how people perceive me, when it comes to national identity. I don't care how I perceive them. If that makes sense. It just doesn't seem important to me. I don't see how that's relevant." (#15, Dutch)*

The majority of interviewees in this group grew up in an international context, either as children of expatriates, having moved countries often during their childhood or grown up with parents of different nationalities, and/or having attended international schools. One stated: *"I also went to an international school at the age of 10. So, from 10 to 18, I lived in an English-speaking environment, where I spoke more English than German"* (#34, Austrian). This often resulted in a more global mindset: *"I actually identify myself as Eurasian because I have Asian values but a European mindset. I find that a lot of my friends are Asian, a lot of my friends are Europeans"* (#23, Austrian).

These informants often had extensive international experience, or a skillset that allowed them to find jobs anywhere in the world. Global Citizens believed that, if needed, they could easily move to another country for work, as they felt little attachment to any particular national identity or geographic location:

> *"I am not that invested in staying here or moving anywhere else. I don't mind the uncertainty too much. And especially in my field, in IT, I am pretty flexible and can work anywhere. If anything were to happen, it never seems like they would just throw people out of Britain, like, back to Europe. If anything like that happened, I would just be ready to get a job somewhere else. I wouldn't be too fussed."* (#29, Czech)

As with the Local Cosmopolitans, many Global Citizens felt an attachment to London or Edinburgh, as these locations allowed living in an international bubble:

> *"I mean, certainly, living in London, until Brexit, you really felt that you were a citizen of the world...Then, you know, obviously, things changed. But I don't think that the current tension is going to continue. I think we will come back. I think the only possible evolution is towards more fluidity and more multi-culturalism, and less of a focus on individual citizenships."* (#14, Swedish)

They perceived London as a city for global citizens:

> *"London is a melting pot type of a thing. So I feel most at home here in London. Everything here seems to be constantly shifting and moving. I see London as a metropolis of a bazillion moving parts. And that is something that I would identify with…Here in London there is always new things happening. And always new people that I'm interacting with.* (#15, Dutch)

Due to their international experience, language skills, and having developed a desirable and transferable skillset, the interviewees of this group perceived their mobility as high while having low identification with the UK before the Brexit referendum.

Reaction Pattern. Similar to the Reconciled Migrants, the Global Citizens did not perceive the outcome of the Brexit referendum as a threat to their identity. They clearly and proudly identified themselves as "global citizens" or "citizens of the world," sometimes commenting on the recent negative connotation of these terms and how this perception was simply a lack of understanding:

> *"When she [Theresa May] said, 'Citizens of the world are citizens of nowhere,' as if that was a bad thing…I thought, 'How short-sighted.' I felt, throughout history, diasporas have often been the people who brought innovations, who brought cultural influences, who kept things moving, who kept things dynamic. So I thought, you know, 'Those citizens of the world, people who moved from one culture to the next, who speak multiple languages, are the ones able to pass on new ideas, new trading techniques, new innovations.' So, I thought citizens of the world actually had a very important role in human progress."* (#7, French)

Since this fourth group felt little threat to their identity from the Brexit referendum, they did not engage in a lot of identity work.

> *"I feel quite settled in all these different identities. It has revealed a lot about how other people in this nation feel about each other's identities. So, it's been more of a revelation of other people than of myself."* (#15, Dutch)

Although they did not take the decision personally, many of this group expressed their disappointment in the British: *"I mean, I had some respect for them, before they voted for Brexit. Now I have no respect"* (#23, Austrian).

Global citizens reported being largely uninterested in Brexit, and simply avoided conversations about it, especially as they did not want to be drawn into lengthy and possibly confrontational exchanges:

> *"Obviously, it's a long story, a complicated matter, and at some point, when you live in the UK and London, you can't hear it anymore, right? But as soon as this personal, personal/professional issue was resolved on my side, I stopped caring about Brexit."* (#34, Austrian)

Members of this group would express their worry about the Brexit vote in terms of what it meant for future diversity and inclusion in Britain, and the impact on the economy. With little identification with the UK and the certainty that they were mobile if required, they did not feel any need to get a British passport:

> *"Like, 'Would you want to be British?' And I was always like, 'No.' I just---I don't---love this place, but---first of all, I was in London, which I feel is not representative of the UK. It's like a bubble. And it feels very international. I felt cosmopolitan, in that sense, but I didn't feel British."* (#26, Swiss)

Reflecting on their future, many expressed the possibility of moving again and exploring places where they had not lived before: *"I'm not comfortable to move back. I think I would be more interested in exploring a place where I haven't lived"* (#29, Czech).

Unlike the Reconciled Migrants and Local Cosmopolitans, the Global Citizens felt highly mobile and largely free to move to many places across the world. The Global Citizens felt connected to a bigger, more globalized international identity largely detached from the UK, which shielded them from experiencing a Brexit-related identity threat. Many lived in London,

which they considered a world city largely separated from the rest of the country. Since they had not identified much with the UK even before the referendum, they did not feel any need for identity work. See Figure 2 for a summary of the reaction patterns for the four SIE types.

Insert Figure 2 here

Organizational responses. The employers of the SIEs in our study reacted to Brexit in a number of ways, ranging from doing nothing to offering advice and loans to their European employees for securing their status in the UK. While the vast majority of our interviewees were impacted by the Brexit vote, most of their employers did not react immediately, and often lacked a strategy to deal with the changing circumstances for their European employees (see Table 1): *"Our management waits. And there is no feeling that there is a plan in place"* (#25, Portuguese). With a lack of (re)action by their employers, our informants felt that their employers were not on top of the administrative aspects of dealing with Brexit.

Some employers inquired about the passports and statuses of their employees who were EU citizens after the Brexit referendum, emailing them information about their settled status process[1]. While these employers appeared to try to provide assistance, many informants— particularly the low-mobility Local Cosmopolitans and Reconciled Migrants — perceived their employers as disorganized and unprepared to help them deal with Brexit.

A few organizations provided occasional administrative support: "*We were advised as employees to do it [apply for settled status] as soon as possible*" (#23, Austrian). Another informant reported a sense of general goodwill: "*HR organized meetings for Europeans with the message,*

[1] The EU Settlement Scheme allows EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens to apply for settled status to continue living and working in the UK after it officially leaves the EU as a member state.

'Well, we can't tell you very much right now, because we don't know yet what is going to happen. But we are here for you"" (#37, German).

Some employers also offered their employees additional support to cope with the consequences of the Brexit result: "*We will support you in everything that needs to be done for you to stay here*" (#29, Czech). Examples of such support included information sessions by external experts to inform on political developments:

> *"I think [employer] was much more pro-active than most. There was a lot of information and they were on top of it. They sent emails about what they were doing, saying, 'We don't know, but we've got your back. We stand by this, by that,' etc. My current employer hasn't done that, which is a failure on their part. People have criticized them for it. If nothing else, some sort of message, saying, 'We'll help you as much as we can, if it comes to the worst-case scenario,' and that sort of thing. It hasn't happened."* (#25, Portuguese)

Some employers offered loans to help SIEs pay for British citizenship applications, thereby acknowledging the financial burden created by the political change of the UK leaving the EU:

> *"And what [the employer] did, is they offered critical support [in information sessions, loans]. And it all was emphasized, that you are valued, you are all valued, and they would do their best [with Brexit]."* (#41, German)

This administrative and financial support provided by some employers was generally well received by their European employees. However, other informants reported that their employers expressed more concern about their company's prospects, with many putting recruitment of European employees on hold until the future legal situation for recruiting Europeans became clearer. While most of our informants were not directly affected by such restrictions, some of their friends were, and news of such recruitment pauses/restrictions was transmitted through the social networks of many informants.

A few employers saw the political change as a threat to their core business model, leading them to rethink aspects of their business. *"My employer had to re-strategize and think about 'Where will we get the money from now on?'"* (#22, German). The significance of the change

created new opportunities for some businesses, but also held uncertainty for their employees. The employers of some of our informants took the opportunity to restructure their British subsidiaries and move some of their staff to other locations in Europe:

> *"Suddenly it was, 'We need to check everything. We need to get everything back in order.'…Suddenly we were put on the side. And there was a risk that we would either need our visas to be sponsored, or potentially we would be asked to move somewhere else...A lot of the business decisions were made, like to move certain activities to Ireland, rather than keeping them in London. Interestingly, a lot of the people that were asked to move to Ireland were people that supported multiple countries, so therefore were not British, because they were Europeans from other European countries and spoke multiple languages. And therefore, they were the ones who were asked to leave*." (#26, Swiss)

Although the majority of the employers in our study did not respond on an organizational level, those that did react and offered support were seen as helpful, particularly by the Local Cosmopolitans and Reconciled Migrants. However, if such support was viewed as unprofessional, many informants interpreted it as a waste of their time, or as a sign of employer's lack of competence or appreciation for their employees. On a personal level, however, some managers and colleagues offered emotional support to our informants, which often made them feel like valued colleagues and members of British society. Some informants had a positive recollection of receiving emotional support from colleagues and managers after the referendum, with one recalling: *"My British manager literally made the EU flag her screen saver on the day that Brexit was voted for---so that was nice*" (#35, Hungarian). Showing such empathy and emotional support are simple measures managers can take to offer an individual response to SIEs during political changes. Such emotional support was highly regarded by most of our informants from all four groups.

Overall, our informants viewed employer responses as limited, disorganized, or entirely absent. EU SIEs reacted positively to those managers and colleagues who expressed empathy for

their situation, especially the Local Cosmopolitans, Revived Europeans, and Reconciled Migrants. Other employers took advantage of the political change to move staff to other locations in the EU—even in cases where these SIEs had expressed an interest in staying in the UK. Most employers appear to have been caught off guard by the referendum result, and had little time to develop measured and tailored approaches to dealing with their EU employees.

DISCUSSION

By shedding light on the impact that anti-immigration political initiatives can have on SIEs, our study contributes to a much-needed contextualization of SIEs' experiences (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) in situations where the environment for immigrants has become less hospitable. While SIEs facing such circumstances are clearly influenced by mobility considerations (Doherty, 2013), we found that integrating 'host' country identification with mobility allows for richer insight into the way they interpret and react to such initiatives. While many SIEs are assumed to be influenced by identification with their 'home' country (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), our informants revealed that this factor was far less important than host country identification. Many SIEs in our study had integrated into, and begun to identify with, the UK. These SIEs interpreted the referendum result as a threat not just to their perceived mobility but also in part to the way they saw themselves, leading many to subsequently express a desire to distance themselves from the UK. Their sense of perceived mobility at this point affected the way in which this desire could be expressed. In other words, identity threats and perceived mobility interacted in ways that have not been explored in other research, yet importantly these factors gave rise to different outcomes in terms of identity work and reaction patterns related to migration. These interrelated factors were particularly salient in a context where SIEs encounter anti-immigration political movements in their host countries.

While scholars have studied the impact of changes to identification when ethnic identities come under threat (Ethier & Deaux, 1994), we note that the host country identification described by many informants was grounded in a civic, as opposed to ethnic, form of national identity (Kunovich, 2009). In this regard, identification with the UK might be viewed as a form of 'invisible' social identity (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005), one that is less immediately apparent to colleagues or managers but nonetheless makes SIEs vulnerable to identity threats and thus potentially strongly impacted by anti-immigration political initiatives. Unlike ethnic identities, which are more impervious to change, it may be that civic national identities are more fragile and make an individual more amenable to identity reinterpretation or even exit (Petriglieri, 2011).

In interpreting SIE reaction patterns, we found the most vociferous responses were evident in the two groups who identified strongly with the UK before the Brexit referendum and thus interpreted the result as an identity threat (Revived Europeans and Local Cosmopolitans). Both groups sought to reprioritize their social identities and engaged in other forms of identity restructuring work (Petriglieri, 2011), in contrast to responses favoring strengthened identification with a social group in the face of threats found in other studies (Ellemers et al., 2002; Branscombe et al., 1999). We further note that the specific form of this identity work depended on their perceived mobility. The highly mobile 'Revived Europeans' largely shifted the focus of their identification from the UK to the supranational EU level—a collective identity that to some extent embeds mobility (see Marcu, 2015). On the one hand, these informants had a relatively convenient alternative identity resource available on which to draw, as they were already 'Europeans', and this supranational identity may have offered a lower cost means of exiting an identity (Petriglieri, 2011). However, this move is also somewhat surprising given that lower order social identities tend to have higher salience levels (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001), and

moving to a higher order and more 'abstract' social identities may be expected to lead to more distal and ambiguous identification. Follow-up studies might usefully examine whether the European identity adopted by the Revived Europeans was a transitional stop on a journey to another strengthened national identification, or if their EU identification remained more firmly entrenched over time. Our empirical results thus extend earlier theoretical work on identity threats while raising new questions about how they are handled in contexts of international mobility as experienced by SIEs.

The identity work engaged in by the far less mobile "Local Cosmopolitans" was considerably more complicated, as their continued presence in the UK and low perceived mobility made exiting this national identity much more difficult. These informants shifted the focus of their identification 'down' to a sub-national level nested within it (e.g., defining themselves as "Londoners"), which was perceived as carrying less anti-immigration stigma. Perceiving a lack of options to leave the UK, Local Cosmopolitans may have suffered the highest levels of cognitive dissonance due to their decision to remain in the country, despite interpreting the Brexit referendum as an identity threat. This resulted in a more original form of identity work, involving a narrowing of scope to international cities or regions thought to be inhabited by like-minded internationals while at the same time dis-identifying with the UK. This interpretive exercise to imagine and make salient a novel collective identity to replace an existing national identification is particularly noteworthy, as it goes further than simply changing or reinterpreting one's identification to one or more existing collective identities (Caza et al., 2018). Furthermore, by surrounding themselves with like-minded SIEs, these informants sought to maintain the idea that their city or region remained an internationally minded, welcoming place, and collectively reinforced the creation of this new identity. Nonetheless, we observe that identity work in this

group was accompanied by what many informants self-consciously described as "childish" or "silly" coping mechanisms in their private spheres, such as systematically supporting England's soccer opponent or not inviting children of Brexit voters to their children's birthday parties, to compensate their feelings of hurt and rejection. We might speculate that psychological reactance may be driving some of these responses (Brehm, 1966). While reactance theory implies that perceived restrictions to freedom (such as one's mobility) may trigger a desire to 'fight back', our findings indicate that not all low mobility SIEs reacted in this way—instead it only occurred amongst those SIE types who perceived identity threat. Although it has been suggested that reactance can contribute to identity formation (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), we note in our study that identification may not be the result but also a precursor of reactance. The relationship between identity and reactance may thus be more complex than indicated by the literature, and we suggest future research may explore this potential connection in greater detail.

Our study further helps explain why those who identified least with their host country, the UK, chose to stay. By taking the identity dimension into account, we can understand why some SIEs did not feel impacted by the vote. With their initial weak level of identification with the host country, Global Citizens and Reconciled Migrants were largely immune to interpreting the anti-immigration sentiment as a personal rejection directed against them. By not interpreting the referendum result in identity terms, these SIEs reacted less emotionally to it, and adopted a reaction pattern largely dictated by their perceived mobility. Those who were highly mobile—the Global Citizens—knew they could continue to move seamlessly between countries and continents and felt no pressure to make changes to how they saw themselves or how they lived in a cosmopolitan bubble. They refused to apply for a British passport and tried to avoid Brexit news and discussions. These SIEs bore the closest resemblance to the often-portrayed "global

cosmopolitans" or "citizens of nowhere" frequently targeted by populist voters. Those with fewer mobility options, the Reconciled Migrants, took pragmatic actions to secure their legal status and accepted their long-term status as migrants to the UK, while retaining links and a possible desire to retire to their home countries.

Overall, our findings therefore offer a more differentiated look at SIEs than previous studies (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty, 2013). While some had extremely high levels of perceived mobility, akin to employer-designated expatriates (Zhang et al., 2018), others perceived their mobility possibilities as extremely limited and did not envisage moving for the foreseeable future, similar to typical migrants (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). We also noted that while levels of host country identification varied significantly across this group, more than half of our informants reported high levels of UK identification pre-Brexit—at far higher levels than what might be expected amongst expatriates or even skilled migrants (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). This variation indicates that SIEs should not be regarded monolithically. Considering the combination of host country/UK identification and perceived mobility considerations allows us to make sense of why and how SIEs' reactions to anti-immigration movements differ, and to tailor practical recommendations how employers should deal with these different sub-groups (see below). This interplay also allows us to make sense of puzzling observations, such as why so many SIEs (i.e., Revived Europeans) who previously identified strongly with the UK and were legally entitled to a British passport firmly rejected getting British citizenship after the vote. It also helps explain why others who were most appalled by the vote obtained British citizenship after the referendum (i.e., Local Cosmopolitans), and chose to remain in the UK.

Our study also highlights the need to better understand how organizations might more effectively manage SIEs impacted by anti-immigration political events. While previous research has mostly focused on company features and activities to support SIE integration and retention (e.g., Doherty, 2013; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020), our findings underline the need for employers to consider the impact of higher-order, national factors on individual meaning making that shape SIEs' identification with their host country. In that respect, our findings have important implications for international talent management and follow calls for further study in this field (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018). For the purposes of SIE retention and management, host country identification should be considered a relevant dimension affecting SIEs' decisions to stay or leave. While the perceived mobility of their staff has always been, at least implicitly, a concern for organizations trying to accommodate their need to retain talent, dealing with questions of identity and identification may appear more daunting. Beyond helping employees to deal with any additional administrative hurdles they may be facing, employers should try to understand how strongly their SIEs might identify with their host country and how they make sense of political developments impacting immigration. Some SIEs may feel more alienated and personally targeted by such changes, while others less so. For SIEs, their decision to return to their home country or a move to a third country may be influenced by identity-oriented questions combined with a realistic assessment of alternative mobility options.

Meuer, Tröster, and Angstmann (2019) found that workplace embeddedness was a critical influence on the repatriation intentions of German SIEs working in Switzerland. Although our findings indicate that such embeddedness may not be able to override the impact of an identity threat, it may be possible for employers to tailor their actions more effectively based on our typology. The administrative support and empathy for their EU employees offered by

some employers of their SIEs was generally appreciated. However, our typology might assist employers to develop more robust approaches to dealing with SIE employees facing such situations, acknowledging that changing regulatory constraints may limit some of these organizational responses. We now turn to discuss how this might happen.

Insert Figure 3 here

Practical implications and future research

Most employers of SIEs have limited ability to influence the course of macro-political events driven by anti-immigration sentiments, although our findings may indicate directions for developing more effective retention plans (see Figure 3 for examples of such a targeted approach). Employers should begin by exploring the degree to which their SIEs identify with their host country (indicators might include the length of stay in the host country, whether they have a partner from a host country, the nature of their social circle), as well as how they perceive their mobility options (desire to move back to the home country, international experience, children, mortgage). SIEs with high host country identification and high mobility, the Revived Europeans in our study, may experience a strong desire to leave the country. These employees might consider options of companywide transfers abroad. While this may only be realistic for employers with other overseas operations, it could offer a viable means of keeping talent from exiting the organization. More challenging to manage may be the less mobile but highly identified equivalents of Local Cosmopolitans, who, in spite of their mobility constraints, would be likely to consider leaving in the medium or longer term. These SIEs should be reassured that the workplace recognizes their contributions and will continue to employ and embrace international talent to reinforce their belief that they can continue to live in the cosmopolitan

environment they value. Reinforcing an organizational sense of belonging may help to counteract the impact of feeling anti-foreigner backlash in the wider macro environment.

For Global Citizens and Reconciled Migrants who experience minimal (if any) identity threat, practical considerations such as reducing administrative barriers to their continued stay might be an important way of ensuring their continued commitment. This might include assistance in terms of legal support to deal with paperwork, or help with additional fees, which would signal an important commitment from the employer's side. It is also likely that Global Citizens would be attentive to any messages and signals demonstrating that workforce diversity continues to be valued by their employer. Reconciled Migrants represent the least risky group for employers, as they plan to stay in the host country medium or longer term, and do not suffer from identity threat. Employers may try to leverage their contributions, such as their adaptive capacity (Brimm, 2018), cultural brokerage skills (Levy, et al., 2019), and knowledge sharing (Harzing, Pudelko, & Reiche, 2016), to ensure that the workplace remains attractive to them.

Although beyond the focus of our study, we note that from a public policy standpoint the groups most likely to stay were the ones who had made little effort to integrate or identify with the UK, i.e., those with few other options retained a strong home country identity and never intended to "become British" (i.e., Reconciled Migrants) and "citizens of nowhere" who easily move between countries (i.e., Global Citizens). These were the individuals targeted by many pro-Brexit voters and the Brexit campaign yet they were the least impacted by the Brexit vote from an identity perspective. Among those who previously identified strongly with the UK and had attempted to integrate, outright departure and other reactance-driven behaviors were very high, and their decision to stay (and begrudge the local population) or leave was made entirely for mobility reasons. Our findings may therefore also hold some relevance to policy makers.

Future research may explore possibilities of if and how organizations might compensate for macro level anti-immigration sentiment perceived as unfavorable by SIEs. Merely recognizing that some employees are less mobile may prove insufficient to convince these SIEs to stay in the medium and longer term. This raises another direction for future research. We have seen that host country identification and mobility perception should not be considered "fixed", as personal and professional changes such as new job opportunities abroad or in the current host country, marriage or divorce, children or sick family members, might also trigger changes in one's perception of mobility or identification. We recommend longitudinal studies to improve our understanding of how identity and perceived mobility considerations play out over time, particularly during and following significant anti-immigration events, both from the perspective of SIEs and also their employers.

Future research might further examine the interplay between identity work and perceived mobility with larger samples and different populations outside of Europe who face challenges comparable to Brexit. For example, SIE immigration has become more contentious in the United States (US) and other European jurisdictions in recent years, and scholars may explore the extent to which SIEs in these jurisdictions are similarly impacted by identity and mobility considerations. Scholars might also explore any underlying factors that might help explain *why* some SIEs come to identify with their host country, as well as why they interpret anti-immigration political events as more of an identity threat than others.

Conclusion

This study examines how EU SIEs living in the UK coped with anti-immigration sentiments surrounding the Brexit referendum. It builds a typology drawing on perceived mobility considerations combined with host country identification to shed light on SIE reaction patterns to this macro-political event. Its findings provide a new lens for understanding SIEs in

general and in the context of anti-immigration initiatives. We offer future research directions that may refine current theories on migration and identity work. Our proposed typology also offers practical implications for how HRM managers might develop targeted retention strategies for the four different identified groups of SIEs, and how they can adapt their retention strategies when significant political changes take place.

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TABLE 1: Summary Profile of Interviewees and their Employers

Informant	*Gender*	*National Identity(s)*	*Profession*	*Employer Operations*	*Employer's Reaction to Brexit*
#1	Female	Italian	Consultant	International	Email communication, administrative support
#2	Female	Romanian, British	Academic	Mixed	Email communication, administrative support
#3	Male	French, British	Consultant	International	N/A
#4	Male	Belgian	Public Relations	International	Email communication, administrative support
#5	Female	French	Academic	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#6	Female	German	Banker	International	Email communication, administrative support
#7	Female	French, American	Academic	International	Email communication, administrative support
#8	Male	French	Banker	International	Email communication, administrative support
#9	Female	French, British	HR Manager	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#10	Male	German	Coach	International	N/A
#11	Male	Spanish, British, French	Consultant	International	None
#12	Female	German, British	Academic	International	Information session, email communication, administrative support
#13	Male	Dutch, Indian	Consultant	International	Administrative support
#14	Male	Swedish, Venezuelan	Entrepreneur	International	None
#15	Male	Dutch, Indian	Graphic Designer	Mixed	None
#16	Female	Portuguese	Health Professional	Mixed	None
#17	Female	Spanish	Economist	Mixed	None
#18	Female	Italian	Economist	Mixed	None
#19	Female	German	Consultant	International	None
#20	Male	Belgian, British	Consultant	International	Administrative support
#21	Female	Italian	Academic	Mixed	None
#22	Female	German	Economist	International	Email communication to apply for settlement
#23	Female	Austrian, Turkmen	Manager	Mixed	None
#24	Male	Danish	Economist	Mixed	None

#25	Female	Portuguese	Manager	Mixed	Relocation of some employees None
#26	Female	Swiss, Italian	Consultant	Mixed	None
#27	Female	German	Researcher	Mixed	None
#28	Female	Irish	Health Professional	Local	Administrative support and statement that they will provide visas
#29	Male	Czech	Software Tester	Local	None
#30	Male	German	Program Director	Local	None
#31	Male	German, British	Marketing Executive	International	Seminars, extensive administrative support from HR and legal department
#32	Female	Bulgarian	Fashion Designer	Mixed	None
#33	Male	Hungarian, Chinese	Architect	International	None, relocation of employees
#34	Male	Austrian, Bulgarian	Banker	International	None
#35	Female	Hungarian	PR Manager	Local	None
#36	Male	Hungarian	Medical Professional	Mixed	None
#37	Female	German, Czech, British	Lecturer	Local	Information sessions
#38	Male	British, Polish	Security Contractor	Local	None
#39	Female	Czech	Architect	Mixed	None
#40	Female	Austrian	Researcher	Mixed	None
#41	Male	German	Academic	Local	Emails informing about the process, information sessions, and providing loans for British citizenship application

FIGURE 1: Typology of EU SIEs in the UK at the time of the Brexit referendum

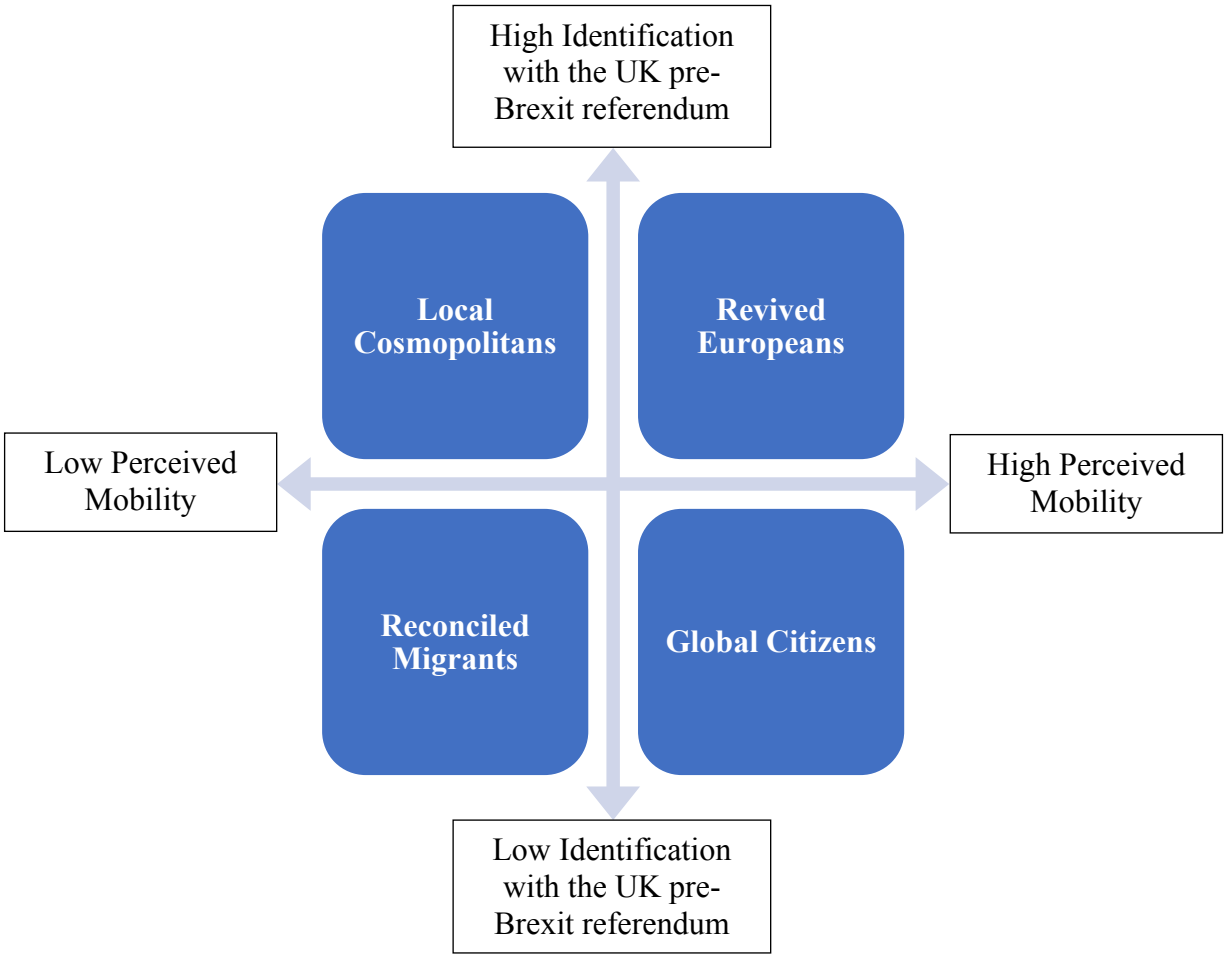


FIGURE 2: Coping patterns of EU SIEs at the time of the Brexit referendum

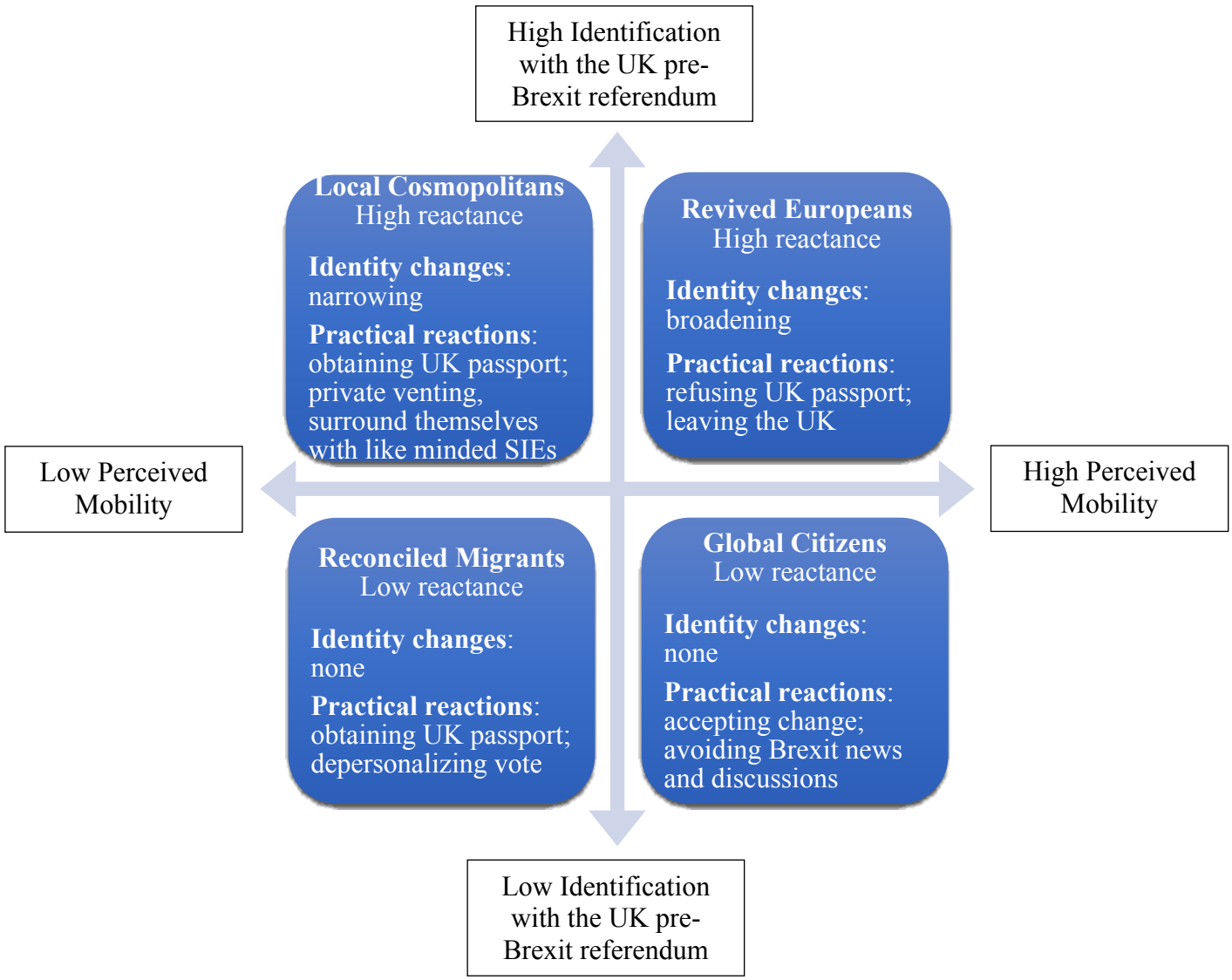
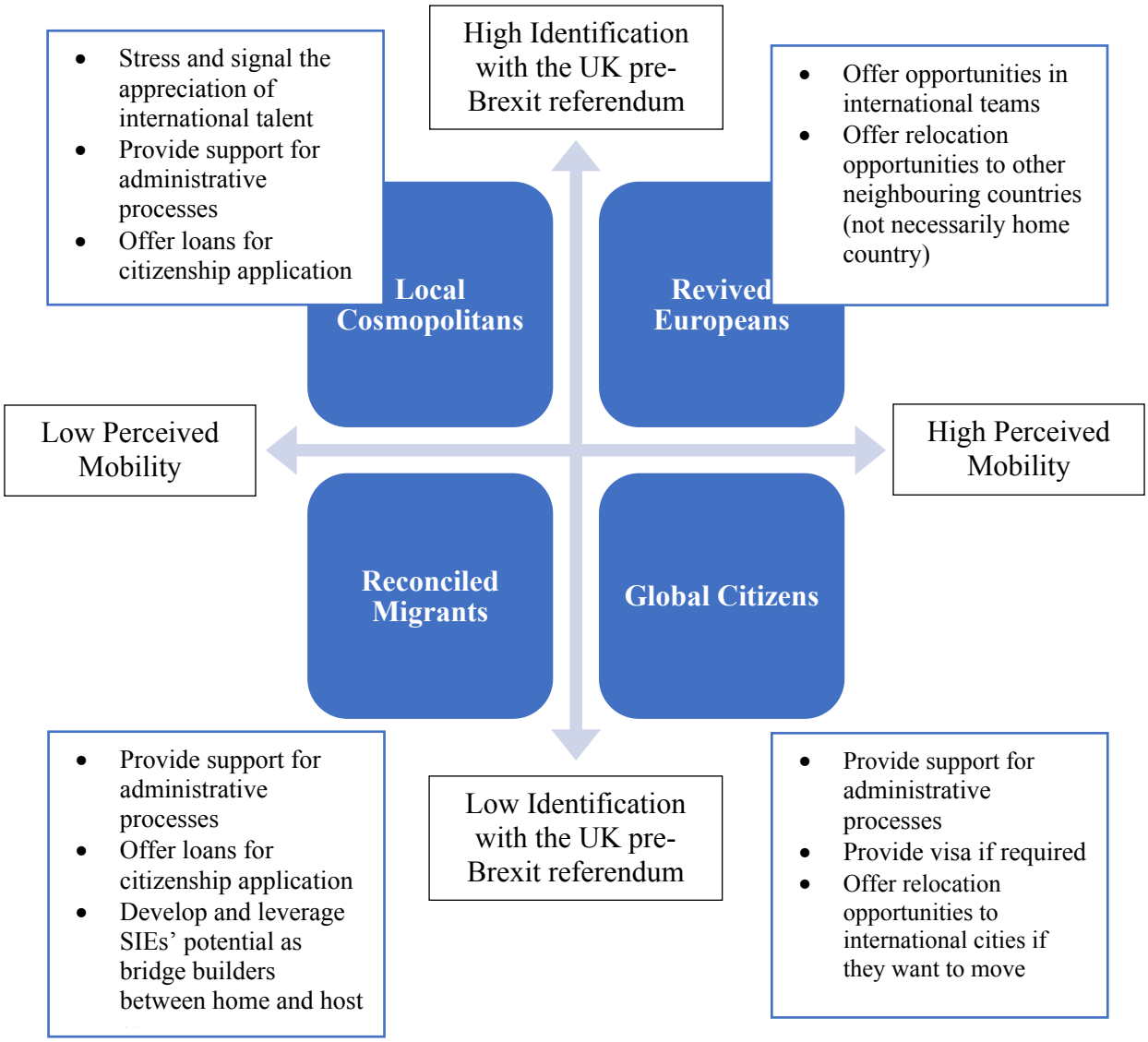


FIGURE 3: Targeted HRM responses to anti-immigration sentiment for each SIE profile



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