

**Survey conducted among the graduates  
of the academic years 2012-2016  
of the Master programme  
„Democracy and Governance in Europe“ (MADRE)  
(in short: MADRE Graduate Survey)**

# Synopsis

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## Background of the graduate survey

The master programme “Democracy and Governance in Europe” (German: Demokratie und Regieren in Europa“; in short: MADRE) was established in the academic year 2012/13 at the Institute of Political Science. The programme, starting each winter term, has a capacity of 20 places. It was regularly evaluated via standardized surveys and via roundtable discussions with MADRE students. Based on these evaluations, the study programme was continuously developed and adjusted to students’ needs and expectations. In 2018 the course programme was reformed in order to include a Y-model that allows for specialization (either on EU in international relations or on public policy) via elective courses. This adjustment, the 2018 regulation for the conduct of the MADRE examination (PO 2018), received full accreditation in 2018.

The MADRE graduate survey aims to fill a gap in the previous evaluations, which focused on the satisfaction of students, whereas this survey investigates the transition from graduation to professional life. Until now, we had no systematic data for the first five years of graduates. This survey is a complete count of all 70 students starting between winter 2012 and winter 2016, who have graduated between 2014 to 2019. The survey was conducted via a standardized online questionnaire in September/October 2019. The questionnaire consists of five parts with a total of 53 questions, including some open questions. Contact information for 68 graduates was available of which 40 persons answered the questionnaire (i.e. 60% return rate).

The survey was carried out by Joshua Beer under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Gabriele Abels and based on the Evasys platform of the University of Tübingen.

## Summary of main findings

**Sociodemographic data:** Between 2012 and 2016 a total of 70 students were enrolled for the MADRE programme, 56% of them male (n=39) and 44% female (n=31). The gender balance in the groups of respondents is about the same. In terms of age the cohort is quite homogenous. The majority of respondents are between 25 to 30 years old, only eleven graduates are older than 30 years. The large majority of respondents has no children; only 10% has one or more children.

**General data on graduates:** The majority of graduates of the first five academic years studied longer than the required number of semesters for completion of the programme. The main reasons for an extension were internships, study visits abroad/exchange programmes and jobs. More than two-third have conducted an internship of a minimum of two months or longer. More than half of the respondents have studied or worked abroad for at least three months.

Internships as well as international experience are considered to be (very) relevant for the graduates' professional life and transition into the labour force. *Internships* were mainly realized in the EU institutions and other organizations related to EU affairs, in policy think tanks, NGOs, civic education, (political) foundations, but also in the private sector. Main advantages of these internships were to get practical experience and identify career aspirations, to specialize in certain fields, to gain new skills and to meet helpful contact persons. The main reasons for striving for *stay abroad* were to gain international experience, to gather practical experience, to get different perspectives, and to improve language skills. The main advantages of stay abroad for the professional career are language and intercultural skills as well as thematic relevance and specialist knowledge.

**Transition to professional life:** The majority of respondents report a “smooth” transition into professional life. About 70% started their first paid job shortly within three months after graduation. Yet, the majority of first jobs were temporary – often for longer periods of time. Some graduates had to accept several temporary positions, sometimes interrupted by phases of unemployment. About a quarter of respondents started a permanent position within the first year of graduation. The majority of respondents works in full-time positions. About two-third has a gross income of more than 2,500 Euro in their first position.

The graduates work in very different sectors ranging from research-based organizations (including think tanks), parliaments and political organizations, public administration, communication. The majority of respondents stays in these sectors. Also, the income situation becomes more consolidated. Almost half of the respondents today is in a better professional position from what they expected when starting the MADRE programme.

**Relevance of the programme for professional life:** The majority (58%) considers the knowledge and the skills acquired to be relevant or very relevant for their current professional position. The most important aspects are (1) comprehensive thematic knowledge, (2) knowledge about methods and systematic research, (3) general soft skills, and (4) theoretical knowledge. In the first case, knowledge about the functioning of the EU multi-level system, European law, political economy, and specific policy sectors are regarded as most important.

Some graduates recommend improvements of the programme with regard to practice related skills, support in career planning, more courses on methodological skills and research techniques, a wider range of policy sectors and interdisciplinary subjects. (These recommendations were already

adopted for the 2018 reform of the study programme.) Finally, also the study trips are assessed as very valuable in terms of making contacts and enriching in terms of knowledge gains.

**Gender differences:** By and large, there are hardly any gender differences in the experiences and assessment of the graduates. Women were slightly more active in terms of internships and had more jobs as research assistants. Yet, they were less likely to go for a stay abroad. Women were more often than men offered a permanent position after graduation. Also with regard to full-time and part-time positions no significant gender differences exist. Women earned as much as men in their first positions. However, over the course of time gender imbalances develop: about half of the female respondents but three-quarters of the male respondents have a monthly gross income of more than 2,500 Euro. Yet, more than one third of the female graduates have a monthly gross income of less than 1,500 Euro. This gender pay gap shortly after graduation is surprising as well as alarming. The reasons are not quite clear. The fact that twice as many women (20%) as opposed to men (10%) work part-time is certainly a key reason. Child care cannot explain this difference given that one very few graduates have children. This gap could also be linked to different sectors in which the graduates are employed and, thus, be the result of gender-segregation in the labour market. Men may be more employed in the private sector while more women work, for example, for NGOs. This aspect needs further attention in future surveys.

## Appraisal

In sum, the MADRE graduates are satisfied or very satisfied with their transition from student to professional life and labour market integration. The study programme is highly appreciated for its strong political science orientation and the diversity of components in compulsory and elective studies. The programme offers many options for specialization depending on individual interests and preferences, and it is well organized so that it can be studied within due time. Extensions in terms of the number of semesters until completion of the programme are often due to internship and stays abroad, which are considered to be a highly valuable experience. The acquired knowledge and skills are seen as part a valuable toolbox for professional life.

More than half of the graduates are today in a better professional position than they expected them to be at the beginning as well as at the end of their MADRE programme. Hence, the programme prepares students for future professional careers – without raising exorbitant or deceptive expectations. The content of the master programme, the taught competences and the options for specialization are rated as relevant and most relevant for a variety of professional sectors.

The scope of professional fields is surprising in vertical respect, with graduates working at communal, regional, national, yet hardly at international level, but also in horizontal, sectoral

respect. Many graduates work in the public sector or for civil society organizations, but also in the private sector. The gross monthly income is, as far as we can tell from the data, what we could expect and what is common for Master graduates. Also, we need to take into account that even those respondents who started in the academic year 2012 and graduated in 2014/15 are still in a fairly early stage of their profession career. Thus, further career steps are still possible – accompanied by salary adjustments. Future surveys would have to look into the career path. Clearly, the signs of an existing gender pay gap will need further attention.

As stated, a number of recommendations for improving the study programme were already taken up and integrated into the new curriculum since 2018. Especially the option for specialization (Y model) was included in the reform of the curriculum. If this will have an effect on future graduates transition into professional life and the labour market remains to be seen. A final point for future activities is to improve and intensify the exchange among the graduates in some kind of MADRE alumni network.

The full version of the study is available in German only and can be accessed via the MADRE homepage: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/madre>