

Editorial

Transnational Social Protection: Inclusion for Whom? Theoretical Reflections and Migrant Experiences

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Abstract

With migration being a reality within and between nation-states worldwide, transnational social protection has become a concern on various levels. This thematic issue focuses on nation-state conceptions and policies, migrants' experiences with regards to accessing social protection, as well as the social inequalities resulting from the nexus of transnational social protection and migration.

Keywords

inequalities; migration; social inclusion; social protection; transnationalism

Issue

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1. Positioning the Topic

Until recently, the questions regarding the crossroads of transnational social protection and migration have been treated within different scholarly debates that remained, for the most part, separated. Although migrants make up a good part of populations, scholars of social protection may have viewed them less as core to their interests than the so-called majorities in nation-states.

Migration is still often conceived as comprising one-time movements from a given nation-state to another—a concept that in recent years has been widely discussed in terms of methodological nationalism (Scheibelhofer, 2011; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). As such a perspective is often incompatible with empirical reality, heterogeneous mobility patterns (not only one-time movements) have been included in the empirical studies on migration and social protection of the last years. The increasingly transnational quality of migration and mobility across Europe and other regions of the world has also contributed to the emergence of various forms of cross-border social membership. The latter manifest themselves in the form of such phenomena

as migrants' simultaneous use of social security arrangements in their sending and receiving countries. If welfare institutions assume responsibility for migration management and, in doing so, influence the production of differentiated life chances, then a closer analysis of social stratifications is of great importance. On top of migration management, welfare institutions in Europe and other regions of the world have become the main pillar for the articulation of citizenship, and thus one of the essential media of social inclusion and exclusion. Belonging has thus become a major issue in terms of policy instruments and their application through street-level bureaucrats.

2. A Global Perspective vs. the European Model

As migration increases globally, so does the need for social protection for migrants over their life course. Research has emphasised the presence of a clear South-North divide in terms of provisions for transnational social protection worldwide (Avato et al., 2010; Barglowski et al., 2015; Faist et al., 2015; Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2011; Sainsbury, 2006). While many bilateral agreements have been concluded globally

(Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2011; Sainsbury, 2006), it is the EU that is usually referred to as the best-practice example in the seminal literature in such diverse disciplines as law, economics, and the social sciences (Blauberger & Schmidt, 2014; Carmel et al., 2011).

We approach social security as referring to social membership in the context of migration and mobility within a cross-border supranational community (Kivisto & Faist, 2009; Soysal, 2012). Social security is treated as primarily based on and provided through institutional structures, e.g., unemployment insurance coverage, old-age pension funds (private and public), etc. Yet we agree with Peggy Levitt et al. (2017), as well as with Thomas Faist and his research partners (Faist, 2017; Faist et al., 2015), that a broader approach is necessary than is usually discussed when referring to social security.

This thematic issue is one of the publications based on a long-term collaboration among four researchers. Anna Amelina (Germany) initiated our first meeting in Frankfurt in 2014, leading to a Norface project—TRANSWEL—in which we studied in a multifaceted way the questions addressed above (for a brief description of the overall project see Scheibelhofer, 2022).

3. Contributions to the Thematic issue

Inaugurating this thematic issue, in her article “Migrants’ Experiences With Limited Access to Social Protection in a Framework of EU Post-National Policies,” Elisabeth Scheibelhofer advocates that we should no longer think of welfare chauvinist policies (targeted at excluding migrants from social rights) as opposed to post-national policies (that frame belonging in terms of inclusion). Based on a transnational, comparative research project, she argues that the social protection of EU migrants portrays the intertwining of both inclusionary and exclusionary strategies, with the effect of three different mechanisms limiting access to social protection.

Jean-Michel Lafleur and Inci Öykü Yener-Roderburg put the perspective held by sending states at the centre of their analysis in “Emigration and the Transnationalization of Sending States’ Welfare Regimes.” While the literature has continued to describe a variety of political, economic, and/or institutional aspects that are decisive for the approaches of the sending countries towards their emigrants’ welfare, these authors propose the concept of welfare regime transnationalization in an attempt to take into account the complex effects that emigration as a social process in itself has on sending-state welfare politics. Empirically, they use the health care policies of Turkey and Mexico as transnational examples.

Ewa Palenga-Möllenbeck sheds light on the complicated public discourse surrounding so-called “benefit tourism” in her article “Making Migrants’ Input Invisible: Intersections of Privilege and Otherness From a Multilevel Perspective.” Based on two empirical research

studies, she shows how care work migration can only be adequately understood if we also take racism and gender into account. Institutional and everyday-life discrimination reinforce one another such that social inequalities become hidden.

In “Welfare Paradoxes and Interpersonal Pacts: Transnational Social Protection of Latin American Migrants in Spain,” Laura Oso and Raquel Martínez-Buján analyse the relationship between migration, care work and welfare provision based on narrative interviews with Latin American migrants in Spain providing formal and informal transnational social protection. They introduce the concept of “interpersonal pacts” to the debate as a way systematically underprivileged immigrants forge out forms of social protection involving their significant others—also across generations in their transnational families.

Nora Ratzmann and Anita Heindlmaier concentrate on the role of street-level bureaucrats when interacting with unemployed EU migrants in their article “Welfare Mediators as Game Changers? Deconstructing Power Asymmetries Between EU Migrants and Welfare Administrators.” Based on their analysis, they propose to differentiate between various types of existing power asymmetries and how administrators act differently upon asymmetries.

“Who Belongs, and How Far? Refugees and Bureaucrats Within the German Active Welfare State,” by Katrin Menke and Andrea Rumpel, also thematises the relationship between migrants—in this case, refugees—and street-level workers. They compare two policy fields (health and labour market policies) and show, against the backdrop of theories of belonging, how administrators can regulate refugees’ rights in everyday practice. Such comparative work opens up new questions around the inconsistencies within as well as in between social policy fields.

In her single-authored contribution, Nora Ratzmann concentrates on one of the most debated questions in migrant provisions and the welfare states—language proficiency. In “‘No German, No Service’: EU Migrants’ Unequal Access to Welfare Entitlements in Germany,” Ratzmann focuses on stratification techniques that are usually beyond the scholarly radar—as a part of informal practices administrators need to engage in. Thus, the barriers to legally valid social rights come into view through this analysis based on data collected in German job centres.

Finally, Maarja Saar, Bozena Sojka, and Ann Runfors draw on 48 expert interviews (with policy advisors, legal experts, officials from ministries and policy experts) from eight EU countries. In their article “Welfare Deservingness for Migrants: Does the Welfare State Model Matter?” the authors propose an analysis of the connections between various welfare state models as established by Esping-Andersen (1990) on the one hand, and specific discourses on migrant deservingness on the other hand. These discourses build upon four rationales

of belonging, put forward as a conceptual framework for the study of the politics of migrant rights (Carmel & Sojka, 2020).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author



Elisabeth Scheibelhofer is an associate professor of sociology (University of Vienna) working on migration, mobility, and qualitative methods. She is currently leading the research project DEMICO (2021–2024) which is looking at dequalification from a qualitative longitudinal approach. This is a follow-up project of a broader international collaboration (transwel.org, 2015–2018) covering EU migrants' transnational access to social security rights. She has published extensively on a range of issues within migration research and qualitative methodologies.