



On the transnational social question: How social inequalities are reproduced in Europe

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Abstract

What are the consequences of cross-border employment and social protection practices for social inequalities in Europe? The transnational social question is a multifaceted one: it is linked not only to inequalities generated by heterogeneities such as class, gender, ethnicity, legal status and religion, but also to the perception that cross-border interdependence has grown and that transnational interactions themselves have become a criterion for differentiation. International migration is of strategic significance for an understanding of the transnational social question, because it reveals the cross-connections of the fragmented world of social protection. In particular, it provides a window into the social mechanisms that support social protection across borders and how these mitigate old and generate new social inequalities.

Keywords

Europe, migration/mobility, social inequalities, social protection, transnationality

Cross-border social protection and mobility

Social inequality in Europe has been growing, or at least has remained at a persistently high level. This inequality refers to the growing disparities between incomes – wage incomes and profit incomes, earned incomes and investment incomes – on the one hand, but also to disparities between life chances in the different regions of Europe (e.g. International Labour Organization (ILO), 2008). The following contribution examines the extent to which public and private social protection strategies and cross-border mobility influence the distribution of life chances.

To this end, two examples of transnational migration are presented which concern different dimensions of inequalities. The first example is of care

workers from Ukraine and Romania who are employed in Italian or German households to earn incomes for themselves and their families. Some commute between their places of origin and their places of work, and are involved in various cross-border transactions such as financial transfers to pay for school fees, healthcare or property, and for childcare close at hand or from a distance, as well as the care of relatives. At the same time, they contribute to

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the reproduction of labour in the households in which they are employed, for example, through childcare or the care of older relatives, by relieving the burdens on their employers and enabling those family members, usually the women, who are capable of working to join the labour market (Kofman, 2012). The second example comes from a strongly male-dominated sector, namely, the construction sector, in which services are provided by contract labourers or self-employed workers from European Union (EU) member states or third countries. Here, the matter of social protection for the self-employed arises if an accident occurs in the workplace and, in the case of contract workers, with respect to how payment and working conditions compare to those of local workers; in both cases, the question at hand is whether their relatives back home have any form of social protection. Some people work in both the countries of destination and their countries of origin; accordingly, the demand for and provision of social protection benefits is not confined to the territory of a single welfare state. Employment in the care and construction sectors is often irregular, and sometimes, the care of family members such as children or seniors, for example, in the regions of origin, is not ensured. Such cases can highlight inequalities in the respective households in both the regions of origin and of destination, for example, in terms of access to social rights, the use of financial transfers or child rearing and power relations between generations in the respective households.

The following analysis identifies social mechanisms pertaining to inequality in a cross-border context, which in Europe means in a transnational context, involving both the EU and neighbouring states. 'Transnational' is understood here as an umbrella term to describe cross-border interactions comprising three possible levels: interstate relations (at an international level), relations within an association of nation states (at a supranational level) and worldwide relations (at the global level). The term 'transnationality' always refers to non-state actors as well and relates to processes of communitization and socialization within a transnational framework, which I call 'transnationalization'. The dense cross-border social spaces that arise through transnationalization processes are called 'transnational social

spaces'. Transnationality is understood to be a quantifiable measure of cross-border transactions between persons and groups on a scale from low to high (Faist et al., 2013).

Setting out from the initial assumption that there is a correlation between transnationality and both the mitigation of existing inequalities as well as the generation of new ones, this contribution focuses on assessing how cross-border social protection relates to cross-border social inequalities, in other words, the distribution of valuable resources, status and power that are decisive for life chances. This requires a closer look at national and European politics as well as the practices of families and networks in transnational social spaces. That the lifeworlds of migrants and mobile employees are organized across state borders is confirmed by statistics. An analysis of data from the German Social Economic Panel (SOEP) for the year 2010, for example, shows that 80 percent of all migrants residing in Germany conduct various types of cross-border transactions such as remittances, journeys and maintaining contact with friends and relatives abroad. By comparison, only around 30 percent of non-migrants, that is, German citizens with no migrant background, carry out such transactions.¹

My fundamental proposition is that labour migration and certain forms of cross-border social protection constitute an adaptive response to social risks and related inequalities of opportunity, but at the same time perpetuate old inequalities and create new ones. It should also be borne in mind that cross-border migration, inasmuch as it is not politically intended or forced, is the outcome of socio-economic, cultural and political transformation and related inequalities, which are in some cases even on the increase; migration thus does not – at least not directly – contribute to reducing inequalities. This does not contradict the fact that at the individual or family household level, geographical mobility and transnationality may indeed be a successful strategy for gaining employment and social protection (Goldin et al., 2012). Nonetheless, as we shall see, at this level, too, it gives rise to the (re)production of inequalities.

The transnational social question is thus concerned with processes relating to the perception and

politicization of social inequalities between states against the background of demands for more social equality from a cross-border perspective, both regionally and worldwide (Faist, 2009). In a certain sense, the transnational social question in Europe is a regional manifestation of the global social question, the difference being that Europe defines itself as a union of civilized welfare states (although this characteristic can by no means be applied to all member states in the same way). This difference, however, forms the basis upon which it is argued in public debates in Europe that on the grounds of social human rights – as codified, for example, in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe (1961) and the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (1989) social inequalities must be addressed by public policies. For this reason, the term transnational social question is apposite. Anti-globalization movements, for instance, call for an intensified effort to reduce poverty and provide healthcare and education for all (Cabrera, 2011). Such demands are founded on the assumption of an unstoppable, even desirable, growing interdependence between different regions within Europe and on the normative conviction of the illegitimacy of severe social inequalities (Heidenreich and Wunder, 2008).

The first part of this contribution outlines the transnational social question in Europe as a problem of inequality against the background of existing or desired equality norms in the context of national social citizenship and within the EU. The national and supranational contexts are, however, inadequate to explain the consequences and the potentials of social protection strategies. For this reason, the second part takes a transnational perspective in order to illustrate the relevance of cross-border social relations between migrants and non-migrants in transnational social spaces for their opportunities and inequalities. The third section examines social mechanisms that not only do not help reduce social inequalities, but, to the contrary, enhance and even generate new inequalities. Examples of household and care work employment as well as the construction sector are drawn on to illustrate this. The contribution concludes by identifying

research questions that arise out of the empirical analysis.

Equality norms and social citizenship

Inequalities in present-day Europe are reminiscent of the ‘social question’ that was the key issue in political conflicts between the ruling classes and the working-class social movements in industrial countries in the 19th century (De Swaan, 1988). In light of the imbalances in the various European states with regard to opportunities in general and incomes in particular (European Commission (EC), 2010), one might wonder whether we are now on the verge of a new social conflict, this time on a transnational level and along various boundaries – not only in terms of class boundaries, that is, between capital and labour, but also increasingly in terms of difference, or features of heterogeneity such as gender, race, ethnicity, legal status, sexual orientation, religion and, last but not least, transnationality. Political groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active across national borders in various campaigns on issues such as the environment, human rights or gender politics attest to such conflicts (Carver and Bartelson, 2011). The forums in which perceived social inequalities and the demand for social equality across state borders are articulated are as diverse as the actors involved. They include public voices in individual nation states, but also voices within supranational institutions like the EU, international organizations like the ILO and, not least, social movement organizations and networks active in the (regionally organized) World Social Forum (Della Porte, 2005).

It cannot simply be assumed, however, that the people affected, the political and economic decision-makers and the activists have a common perception of how to overcome such inequalities. Nor can it simply be taken for granted that there exists some kind of natural evolution of global social norms that might be enforced through supranational social rights and cross-border social citizenship. Transnational policy measures for dealing with severe inequalities and thereby addressing aspects of social protection are not anchored in social rights beyond the nation state and are often not actionable

at the European level. At the supranational, European level, there is little codification of social rights, with the exception of provisions on gender equality (Article 141 of the Treaty of Rome), health and safety at work and the migration of member-state citizens within the EU (Faist, 2001). It is more often the case that cross-border social rights comprise unenforceable norms, or soft law, such as voluntary social standards on working conditions in multinational companies, or policies that indirectly generate income and provide social protection, for example, through the EU common agricultural policy.

This 'new' social question can thereby be understood as a formation process of discourses and policy measures at the national level (e.g. in social movements, welfare organizations and in state institutions), the supranational level (e.g. in the European Parliament and the EU Commission) and also in global contexts (e.g. the United Nations (UN), World Social Forum) concerning the perception and reduction of cross-border inequalities against the background of equality norms, as articulated most prominently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in various UN conventions.² In short, a transnational social question concerns cross-border inequalities in the light of demands for equality, and calls for cross-border public awareness of the interdependencies that extend across national borders. Social movements protesting at the World Social Forum, and, at the European level, activities of NGOs within the EU (e.g. Inequality Watch) are instances that generate transnational publicity.

One fundamental insight of sociological inequality research is that inequalities are only perceived as such against the background of equality norms (Hondrich, 1984). Equality norms are encapsulated in a national context in state constitutions, and beyond that in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has global scope. There are, however, no generally accepted equality norms – in the sense of being codified and legally actionable – that refer to equal social protection for cross-border employment. A meaningful starting point for considering the transnational social question, besides human rights standards, is the classic debate on social citizenship. T.H. Marshall (1964 [1950])

viewed nationally institutionalized social citizenship as a possible means of reducing the risks ensuing from market participation and market exclusion, and as an egalitarian status concomitant with full membership in a national society.

This national welfare state constellation, which guarantees social rights and thus also creates a horizon for the perception and politicization of inequalities, is challenged in two respects by the cross-border mobility of people, as well as by the diffusion of ideas and the provision of services. First, there is a rights issue. Problems arise with respect to the social protection of non-citizens, large numbers of whom are residents but often do not have full social rights (Morris, 2002). Within the EU, most resident non-citizens from third countries (denizens) do not have the same social rights as migrant citizens from other member states. Second, there is an analytical issue. The transnational social spaces that extend across nation states and supranational structures, and, hence, the transnationality of practices, must be taken into consideration in order to comprehend the actual repercussions of social protection for inequalities.

Supranational developments within the EU provide, first, an insight into the growing complexities of the social rights of migrants and cross-border mobile workers at several regulatory levels. The linking up of different national systems at the European level harbours diverse opportunities for citizens from member states and from third states, even if the latter have permanent residential and employment status. With the low-degree institutionalization of social rights at the EU level, it comes as no surprise that there are also considerable differences between cross-border mobile EU citizens (e.g. French citizens working in Italy) and non-EU citizens (e.g. Ukrainian citizens in Germany). While EU citizens are from the outset entitled as employees to largely the same social rights in other member states, this is not the case for citizens of third countries, who can claim entitlement only if they have secured residential and employment status and have thus attained what can be termed denizen status. It already becomes clear at this point that with respect to social rights at the EU level, a coordination of national legal entitlements for EU citizens can be observed

(e.g. in the form of the portability of social entitlements across state borders), while for extra-communitarians, the status depends on the respective bi-national agreement.³

At present, there is no prospect of harmonization of status between third-country citizens and EU citizens, because national welfare states are not prepared to relinquish control over their employment markets and social protection systems to supranational institutions. From the point of view of the EU, competition between member states and consequently fewer social rights and higher international competitiveness are desirable. This is easily illustrated by the example of freedom of movement for workers. Argentineans of Italian descent may adopt the citizenship of their ancestors; they then have the option to settle not only in Italy, but in any other EU member state. People from Moldova who adopt Romanian citizenship (as they are entitled to do) are also ensured freedom of movement in the EU. In these and other cases of a similar nature, other member states have no control over the mobility of workers according to citizenship. They do have the ability to exercise control over members of third states, however. In this way, member states use migration control and sometimes also naturalization policies vis-a-vis third-country nationals to regulate their respective labour markets (and, hence, wage costs) and social citizenship – which it is their sovereign right to do. What constitutes an ‘employee’, however, is increasingly defined and determined by the EU Commission. Access to national citizenship thus becomes an indirect instrument for controlling labour markets and access to social rights.

The EU is a unique regime in this respect. The cross-border mobility of populations/employees can be considered international or interstate migration, though the European legal framework meanwhile considers it domestic migration. This is underlined by the fact that EU institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament define the cross-border movements of EU citizens as ‘mobility’, while ‘migration’ is as a rule used to refer to the movements of third-country nationals (Faist and Ulbricht, *in press*). ‘Mobility’ can thus be viewed as a form of ‘first-class’ migration, without the time-consuming controls, visas or residence restrictions characteristic

of international mobility or migration, between the EU and third countries.

A transnational perspective on social protection

All the above observations on national welfare states, the institutional architecture of the EU and international conventions are without a doubt necessary for an understanding of the legal and political aspects of social citizenship and entitlement to social rights. Nonetheless, they are not sufficient to comprehend social inequalities as cross-border phenomena. Restriction to a national and supranational perspective takes only the immigration side into account, obscuring the lateral links across state borders. In order to bring these back into the picture a transnational perspective is needed that looks beyond instruments such as bilateral treaties and includes the level of (informal, private) social protection mechanisms between migrants and their dependents in transnational social spaces (Sabates-Wheeler and Feldman, 2011). This also implies that for an understanding of social protection within the context of cross-border transactions, one must focus on how social protection is actually provided and what impact this has on social inequalities.

A transnational approach takes a critical view of methodological nationalism, that is, the frequently implicit assumption in the social sciences that national societies or nation states are the natural unit of reference for analysis and data collection. In order to move beyond this somewhat hackneyed observation, however, the points of reference for transnational analyses must be specified (Faist, 2012). The starting point for a transnational approach is, on the one hand, the degree, or density, of cross-border transactions – in other words, transnationality. On the other hand, a transnational approach must use different levels of analysis, namely, the local, the national, the European and the global level, and, as far as possible, the interplay between these levels must also be analysed, as connecting points for transnational transactions can be found at each level.

The spatial mobility of workers across borders should not be isolated as the only aspect of cross-border interactions. The role of relatively immobile

members of the household or other relatives who stay at home and often make cross-border mobility and migration possible in the first place should also be taken sufficiently into account if the phenomenon is to be understood. Not all individuals or groups who carry out cross-border practices actually cross the borders between two or more nation states on a regular basis. Thus, not only relocated and settled migrants, but also their at times immobile family members, as well as members of migrant groups who have been settled in one place for a long time, are active across borders.⁴ Only then do the merits of the concept of transnationality become apparent. Transnationality denotes the social activities of people and groups across national borders. The term encompasses a whole spectrum of cross-border transactions in various spheres of social life – familial, sociocultural, economic and political – ranging from travel to remittances and the multiple ties involved in these practices, to the exchange of thoughts and ideas. Seen thus, transnationality is a marker of difference akin to heterogeneities such as age, gender, citizenship, sexual orientation, cultural preferences, language and linguistic usage. Transnationality can thus take on different forms and be understood in terms of a scale of participation from low to high, that is, from very few, transient ties to multiple, dense, long-term ties. For our purposes, this also means that population groups who are employed across borders, that is, the non-migrants and their families, cannot simply be categorized as transnational or non-transnational, but rather in terms of differing degrees of transnationality. For example, migrants transfer different amounts of money or no money at all to their families back home. In general, flows of remittances play an important role for household incomes in eastern Europe (Chukanska and Comini, 2012). Unfortunately, officially recorded flows of remittances usually underestimate the actual flows which are often at least double the official amount. Also, they do not measure so-called reverse remittances which flow from regions of origin to destination.

The social protection structures comprise formal and informal, state and non-state dimensions. On a smaller scale, there are non-formal private networks of friends as well as highly institutionalized kinship

and family groups. The decision to migrate can be seen as a way of insuring the family on a reciprocal basis against impoverishment (i.e. mutual assistance with respect to various social risks) should unexpected expenses arise through illness, for instance. Informal forms of social protection are particularly important where formal social security does not exist, or fails. These often include financial transfers among relatives, for example, to help buy property or pay for pension plans or for a relative to study. The provision of childcare by community day-care centres is by no means guaranteed in the countries of immigration, but sometimes has to be taken over by relatives who arrive from abroad to look after the children so that their parents can go out to work. Sometimes, older relatives are brought over because they cannot be provided for or cared for in their home country.

The transnational perspective (which is the preferred approach here) is concerned with inequalities in the context of cross-border transactions between individuals and groups. The units of observation and analysis depend on the respective research question, because transactions take place at different levels, for example, within households, or in local or religious communities or organizations.

Mechanisms of inequality

How inequalities across national borders arise in practice can be seen in the example of the commodification of labour power. In this process, the family division of labour is brought to market and monetized. In some EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, various spheres of work, for instance, the long-term care of the elderly and domestic work, are increasingly subject to commodification. Care and domestic work comprises a whole complex of activities that fulfil the day-to-day living requirements for sustaining health and welfare. At present, care and domestic work – both within the traditional, family context and the commercialized form – is primarily a field in which female cross-border workers are employed. This partly derives from the fact that in OECD countries, the proportion of women in formal employment is on the increase, with the consequence that women

in the core countries are no longer available to carry out care and domestic work to the same degree as before (Pfau-Effinger, 2000). For this reason, care work has meanwhile become an expanding employment sector – according to the ILO, around 100 million migrants worldwide are in paid employment in this field – and the number of elderly people in need of care increases, as more and more women decide to enter the employment market for industrial, commercial or clerical work.

The construction sector is another example of commodification, in this case intensified commodification. The share of (dependent) self-employed workers in the building industry in west European states has increased dramatically in recent years, particularly since the accession of central and east European countries to the EU and the consequent free movement of workers from these countries. A large percentage of these (pseudo) self-employed workers are not, or not sufficiently, covered by social insurance. Specifically, conditions of dependent self-employment are such that the employer can evade rules on issues such as protection against dismissal or making fixed-term contracts permanent. Often, labour law is not applicable because private law contracts were concluded, which means that in contractual terms, workers who are effectively subject to directives from employers are treated as non-tariff, self-employed workers (European Parliament, 2013).⁵ One of the long-term consequences of this state of affairs is that these workers do not have adequate retirement provision.

Strategies for cross-border mobility create social protection links between the country of origin and the country of destination. The relevant regulations in the social and migration policies of these countries do not, however, constitute a coherent cross-border scheme for social integration, because accessibility and entitlement to social benefits in welfare states are still determined by border controls and policies directed at migrants. For instance, there are different degrees of accessibility depending on the type of residence and work permit (e.g. Sainsbury, 2010). It is the demand for workers that dictates the issuance of work permits and, hence, the migration or mobility of people from central and east European states to southern and western Europe. In countries

where the demand for care workers was high, and where the employment market for domestic and care work is comparatively deregulated, for example, in Great Britain and southern European member states, migration controls were less severe. This was also true after 2004 when some member states such as Great Britain removed obstacles to worker mobility from new member states, whereas others such as Germany maintained tight controls until recently. The situation is similar in male-dominated sectors such as the construction industry.

To get a handle on the (re)production of inequalities, we shall start out from the basic assumption that identifying the key social mechanisms is an important step to reconstructing the causal processes that are relevant to inequalities. The term ‘social mechanism’ refers to recurring processes and developments, and links identifiable initial conditions with specific results (McAdam et al., 2001: 24). To demonstrate how inequalities are generated and reproduced, one can differentiate between types of social mechanisms and analytical levels (Figure 1). The different types of social mechanisms are, for instance, hierarchization, exclusion, opportunity hoarding and exploitation and the specific practices with which they are linked (on further mechanisms see Diwald and Faist, 2011). On an analytical level, we roughly differentiate between mechanisms that function at an intermediate level – that is, among small groups and networks of individuals – and at the level of society as a whole, that is, through societal institutions. Institutional mechanisms at the intermediate level determine connections between individuals, groups and interpersonal networks, that is, relations between individual and collective actors. At the societal level, institutional mechanisms refer to the significance of structures and their (newly emerging) features for the emergence of social inequalities. Specifically, from the perspective of the intermediate level, the focus is on the effects of cross-border mobility for those ‘left behind’ in the home regions. Ethnographic studies in various parts of the world – eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and southeast Asia – suggest that women who migrate to seek employment in another country usually leave their children in the care of substitute mothers or grandmothers and other relatives, but

Social formation	Intermediate level	Societal level	
General social mechanisms	Small groups and networks	Societal institutions	
	Exclusion	<i>Affiliation</i> (for example, access to networks and jobs)	<i>Immigration Policy and Citizenship</i> (for example, irregular status, circulatory migration, visa requirements)
	Hierarchization	<i>Job Grading</i> as qualified or unqualified	<i>Scandalmongering</i> through the mass media
	Opportunity Hoarding	<i>Support networks</i>	<i>Opportunity structures</i> in employment markets
	Exploitation	<i>Power Asymmetries</i> (for example, domestic work)	<i>Negative Redistribution:</i> Emigration of care workers and other skilled workers (brain drain); <i>reverse remittances</i> from the regions of origin to the target regions

Figure 1. Social mechanisms and the genesis of social inequalities (examples).

seldom in the care of the fathers (e.g. Parreñas, 2005). There is insufficient evidence, however, to identify what mechanisms in care and nursing work generate and reproduce inequalities in the countries of emigration and immigration. In the construction sector, it is primarily businesses or agents, who act as ‘transmission belts’. Increasingly since the mid-1990s, the workers in this sector are not classic workers (Faist, 1997), but workers who are self-employed in legal terms.⁶ In particular, pseudo self-employed workers who are subject to directives work under precarious conditions and are barely able to make regular social protection contributions for their families in their country of origin.

With respect to inclusion and *exclusion*, membership in groups and participation in networks is important because among other things these provide and facilitate *access to jobs*, *accommodation* and *childcare*. For migrants working in the service

sector, clique and group membership is crucial not only in the search for work, but also for making childcare arrangements, to ensure care of their children while they are abroad, or care of older relatives who have been left at home (Piperno, 2007). At the national societal level, *immigration policy measures* and *citizenship* are decisive with respect to membership. At the EU level, legal affiliation to a state and, hence, full membership in the sense of equal rights for state citizens (e.g. social rights) and Union citizens (e.g. freedom to travel and right of establishment in EU member states) are important because they facilitate cross-border travel and thus ensure a higher degree of transnationality in terms of cross-border mobility. When Romania – one of the major suppliers of care workers in southern Europe but also for countries such as Germany – became a member state of the EU in 2002, short-stay visa requirements for Romanians were lifted and other

obstacles also removed. By contrast, Ukraine – another important source of care workers – remains a third country, with all the consequences that entail for transnationality. Citizenship of an EU member country, and consequently, freedom to travel, thus changed the situation considerably for the mobility of hired care workers. Romanian minors are able to visit their mothers working as carers in Italy more frequently than their Ukrainian peers, which, as one might expect, has affected trust relationships between mothers and their children. Moreover, as EU citizens, the employment status of female Romanian workers has greater legal security compared to that of Ukrainian women workers. In terms of inequality, this means that migrants from Romania and Ukraine to Italy have different options relating to freedom of travel or access to social services. The unequal treatment of EU and non-EU citizens is frequently discussed in political debates across Europe (Bauböck et al., 2006). In sum, legal status based on national membership has an effect on inequalities with respect to transnationality, but also in terms of resources such as time that could be spent looking after one's own family members instead of standing in long queues outside consulates.

At the same time, this also reveals the limitations of legal status as a heterogeneity feature in explaining and understanding inequalities. Despite the lifting of access restrictions to labour markets in the EU, the employment situation for mobile citizens from Romania, Bulgaria or Poland in southern European member states has still not improved significantly in terms of working conditions or income (as is often the case in the informal sector). *Hierarchizations* thus do exist among workers from EU countries. In Italy or Spain, for instance, job opportunities for east European citizens are mainly restricted to so-called low-skilled, low-pay jobs. This constitutes a *downgrading* from 'mobile', that is, cross-border, workers to 'migrants', that is, a social status akin to extracomunitarians, and applies equally to employees in care and domestic work, the construction industry and many other services and sectors (Recchi and Triandafyllidou, 2010: 141). These workers function – just like many other extra-communitarians – as a kind of flexible reserve army of labour.

The hub and pivot of hierarchization is the valuation and grading of care and domestic work as 'unqualified'. As a rule, domestic and care work is associated with unqualified, gender-specific work, not least because in the regions where many of these female workers come from such work is not yet commercialized on such a wide scale. In fact, many of the women from eastern Europe or the Philippines, for instance, who do this kind of work in Europe are qualified, skilled workers who completed their vocational training in their home country. For example, many women from Ukraine employed in care work in western and southern European countries are qualified nurses (Lutz, 2010). In a modified form, this pattern can also be identified in the construction sector. In particular on large construction sites, where the production methods are organization-oriented and the prime contractors shun employing their own teams of skilled workers, subcontractors (from other countries) are in demand who can provide trained, skilled workers. In general, therefore, it is not unskilled or unqualified workers who subject themselves to a cross-border way of life, and this grading proves to be a means of sustaining hierarchies.

At the societal level, it is not only legal differentiation that accounts for the hierarchization described here, but also the semantic mechanisms of *scandal-mongering* in the mass media. In recent years, the departure of mothers who take up work as migrants in western and southern European countries has been the subject of debate in particular. Newspapers and journals report on 'Euro-orphans' or 'social orphans' whose alleged 'bad' mothers decide to go west to seek personal fulfilment through paid employment, without taking into account the negative effects that this apparently has on their defenceless children (Pustułka, 2012, drawing on Sylwia Urbańska). A consequence of such categorizations is the creation of semantic classifications in terms of social status, in this case 'good' or 'bad' parenthood. Empirical research allows more differentiated evaluations, and shows that diverse strategies are used in the context of 'transnational motherhood' or 'transnational fatherhood' to alleviate the distress of physical separation, ranging from occasional phone calls and

visits home to bringing the children and other dependents to join them in the country of immigration (see also Dreby and Adkins, 2010). The practices of many female carers and male construction workers employed in western and southern Europe also display a high degree of transnationality in terms of high levels of communication to stay in touch with their families, and in particular with their children. Most of the research in this field indicates, however, that the new care-givers, for instance, grandmothers, in the countries of origin are themselves often overburdened with work. The care situation for those members of transnationally dispersed families in the target countries is often equally precarious. While migrants provide care and assistance in their employers' households, the care of their own children falls by the wayside, because their employment does not allow them to also take care of them (Pérez Orozco, 2009).

Social closure in the sense of privilege as a means to increase one's own opportunities is occasionally used by certain (ethnic, religious, kinship) groups to occupy particular niches, for example, gastronomy sectors of town districts (Tilly, 2005: 153–70). Another example is the occupation of a spatial and occupational niche by Romanian nurses in geriatric nursing in a district or even an entire town in Italy. New migrants from their home region are recruited for other employers or to replace those who return to eastern Europe. Here, the preferential inclusion of their own people – an *opportunity hoarding* mechanism – ensures that the members of a group (for instance, from the same home town) or of a support network benefit from recommendations. This gives rise to inequality through categorizations relating to access to jobs and, hence, income for members of other groups. At the same time, this is a form of protection – as Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) described it: in light of the commodification of work, workers are able to fight for better opportunities and better tariffs only if they combine and cohere; the safest way of doing this is with colleagues from back home. This can be seen in exemplary ways by strikes among undocumented workers ('sans-papiers', Barron et al., 2011). Both opportunity hoarding and exploitation (see below) are social mechanisms that lead to monopolization. Monopolies are defended with

ascriptions such as stereotyping, by categorizing others as 'lazy' or 'uneducated', for instance. Opportunity hoarding is often accompanied by exploitation, for example, when relatives are held under forced labour conditions in the context of sponsored immigration and forced to work to pay off the immigration costs.

In the Italian social protection system, informal recruitment opens up new opportunities for women from central and east European countries. Unlike the German system, for instance, the Italian social protection system offers no formally regulated care provision through institutions such as care insurance, and this gives rise to informal care arrangements without a legal framework or collective tariff agreements (cf. Bettio et al., 2006). As a consequence, the emergence of new informal protection structures for geriatric care can be observed that are not as highly differentiated as formal national social welfare systems.

With regard to cross-border social protection strategies, the degree of transnationality is therefore relevant.⁷ If a high degree of transnationality obtains – that is, if there is a high density of cross-border contacts, regular consignments of goods and money and visits abroad and even multiple nationalities – there is a high probability that informal social protection within families and friendship cliques is organized across borders. When there is a low degree of transnationality, local networks in the country of destination play a stronger role. This assumption is corroborated by the detailed analysis of social protection strategies in different categories of cross-border workers in the Turkish–German (e.g. labour migrants and refugees), Polish–German (e.g. EU migrants and seasonal workers) and Kazakh–German (e.g. ethnic Germans) transnational spaces in the areas of old-age provision, healthcare, education and childcare. Transnationally oriented forms of social protection express themselves in specific social mechanisms such as the temporary assignment of care, for example, when parents send their children who were born in the country in which they are employed to the country of their origin and place them in the care of relatives for long periods, so that they can go to school there, thus exercising social control. Such practices perpetuate inequality

inasmuch as they restrict their children's autonomy and, hence, their potential for development. Of the aforementioned transnational social spaces, this can especially be observed in the German–Turkish social space, which is on the whole characterized by a relatively high degree of transnationality in comparison to the other two transnational social spaces. In the case of the German–Polish space – which displays a moderate degree of transnationality – practices for maintaining family cohesion more often take the form of summer holidays in one of the two countries, while in the German–Kazakh case – with a low degree of transnationality – such practices barely exist. The latter case ultimately implies the emigration of whole families and kinship groups, so that only few links to the country of origin remain.

From the point of view of employees, the mechanism of *exploitation* can be observed when employers use power asymmetries to violate standards of fair and legitimate practice. In relational terms, workers in irregular domestic employment, sometimes even without official residence permits, forgo the opportunity to legally enforce their claims because they are in the dilemma of being exploited in the informal sector or facing expulsion because of their illegal residence status, even if the court were to penalize the employer. This results in a reinforcement of the *power asymmetries* between contractors and employees in terms of legal and social relations. The violation of equality norms such as equal tariffs, as set out in numerous conventions of the ILO, has given rise to the discussion of such employment relations in public forums like the International Labour Conference (ILO, 2010). Moreover, there are sectoral distinctions in terms of inequality. For instance, it is far more difficult to carry out inspections under labour law regulations in households or on construction sites than in fixed business premises. There are also differences among European countries. In states with highly deregulated markets, such as in Spain, the care sector and construction industries actually serve as important means of access to the formal employment market, which is enhanced by the so-called regularization campaigns for migrants with irregular legal status (Leon, 2010). As a result, the exploitation mechanism has gained relevance.

A closer analysis of the exploitation mechanism suggests that social inequalities as a rule do not relate to one dimension of heterogeneity alone. In the employers' households, for example, inequality increases with respect to resources, status and power when migrants enter the households as domestic employees. The employment of labour migrants does not reduce gender inequalities in households, because while the division of labour between men and women is altered by the presence of exploited, mainly female migrants – thanks to whom middle-class women are now in a position to pursue their careers more consistently and in this way help break down the gender-specific patterns of participation in the formal employment markets (Nakano Glen, 1992) – at the same time the employment of migrant domestic servants creates new inequality patterns. Both the production of inequalities in households in the immigration countries and the improvement of the status of women in the formal employment markets in Germany or Italy are interrelated through transnational processes.

Exploitation manifests itself in a two-way *redistribution* between regions. First, the emigration of care workers from eastern Europe to western and southern Europe means that in the countries of destination numerous employees working in private households are nurses who received training in their countries of origin. Instances of the 'brain and brawn drain' are also observable in other sectors such as the construction industry. As a consequence, investments in occupational training are lost, and there are even labour shortages in the respective fields in the regions of origin. To complete the picture, one must also take into account the incentives of young people who enrol for training, inspired by the successfully employed skilled workers abroad (Stark, 2004), as well as the consequences of return migration and the transfer of money to the countries of origin. It is self-evident that this trend can lead to losses for the emigration regions when the emigration of skilled workers cannot be offset by the increased training of suitable persons or the recruitment of labour from abroad – a phenomenon which one might call a 'cascade of loss'. To a certain extent, this is the case in countries to which workers do not immigrate, but from which workers only emigrate, as is the case in

central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan. Ultimately, there arises a deficit that cannot be filled by either domestic or foreign workers.

Second, at a regional level, remittances from the destination country to the country of origin, which are a manifestation of transnationality, do not offset the losses described above. There is no clear evidence of a reduction of inequalities among households, at least not in the short term, particularly in the regions of origin, although there is evidence that remittances do have poverty-reducing effects at the household level (Skeldon, 1997). After all, not all households in the regions of emigration participate in international migration. Social class and networking through migration networks exert a considerable influence on the type of mobility of those who migrate. One may deduce from this stratification, in which those migrants must also be taken into account who make up the intermediate categories between highly skilled migrants and marginalized labour migrants (see also Verwiebe, 2008), that in the emigration regions not everyone benefits to the same degree from the return remittances. It is extremely difficult to provide evidence of the trickle-down and multiplier effects of money transfers beyond the participating households. Certainly, the governments of the countries of origin benefit from remittances. Worldwide, almost half of all bank remittances in the currency of the countries of employment are transferred to the central bank of the country of origin, which in turn pays the money in the currency of the country of emigration to the bank of the receiving family.⁸

These observations bring us to the question of whether social inequalities arise in the opposite direction. In fact, other resources are also redistributed from the emigration to the immigration regions. In addition to the emigration of skilled workers, there is also evidence of *reverse remittances*, that is, monetary transfers from the regions of origin to the target regions. Migrants often have to spend considerable sums of money to be able to settle in the target regions, for instance, to study or file an application for a work or residence permit. It comes as no surprise that, in particular, political and academic representatives in the emigration regions put such inequalities forward as evidence of an unfair trade-off in the broadest sense (Khadria, 2009).

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that produce inequalities, one must consider the interaction of different levels of analysis, the intermediate and the societal level. The consequences of legal status pertaining to inequalities must therefore always be seen in the context of the conditions of (re)production in both the emigration and immigration regions. For instance, on German construction sites, in the mid-1990s, there were contract workers who had come from central and east European countries as well as from EU member states, notably from Portugal and Ireland; almost a quarter of Portugal's construction workers were working abroad at that time. Cross-border work contracts were, and still are, common practice in some sectors of the construction industry. The production processes on construction sites are often closely coordinated (Perrow, 1986), and in view of the necessity for cooperation among the numerous actors involved this implies that, particularly on large construction sites, hierarchies are flat and personnel must be deployed on site as flexibly as possible. To increase profitability, meet deadlines and avoid contract penalties, for example, there is a high incentive for building contractors – or in this case subcontractors – to benefit from irregular or at least grey employment contracts. Reducing wage costs is a proven means of cost reduction, as other cost factors such as machines or building materials offer little scope for economizing.

Conclusion and open questions

An analysis of the transnational social question begins with the charting of the linkages between individuals, groups, places and different states, and the identification of the social mechanisms of inequality that take effect in cross-border transactions. Our preliminary conclusion on work and social protection in transnational social spaces in Europe is that the exertions of migrants and their dependents frequently reinforce old inequalities and generate new ones. As a rule, while cross-border social protection strategies can substantially improve the livelihoods of individuals or families, for example, through remittances for education, healthcare or consumer goods, fundamental inequalities between

the regions of origin and the target regions tend to persist. Institutionally embedded forms of public social protection in the regions of origin are often exposed to additional pressures, for instance, through the migration of skilled workers. New inequalities arise in the course of cross-border migration, for example, between households in the regions of origin that receive remittances and those that do not, or in the aforementioned gender-specific division of labour in the immigration regions, where the emancipation of women in the immigration countries results in women from peripheral countries taking over the vacant positions for care work in the household.

Further social-science research on this issue is urgently needed, for the fact is that over the past four decades, the opening of national borders for the common market in the EU in the sense of 'negative integration' has not been rectified by 'positive integration' measures and the creation of more uniform social standards (Streeck, 1996). At the same time, convergences, for instance, in the care and household sector, are impossible to overlook. For example, over the past decade, the commodification and partial informalization of care work has progressed inexorably not only in highly deregulated states such as Great Britain and Spain, but also in (hitherto) highly regulated welfare states such as Denmark and Sweden (Williams, 2012). This is manifest in certain segments of a sector that have few attractive jobs to offer and demand severe physical exertion, and in which, in general, low-skilled workers with little market power are therefore recruited. Within the liberal market paradigm of the EU, the opening of the market gives rise to an expansion of cross-border employment; this is additionally driven by the widespread negative visions of demographic development in European societies. An expansion of public care institutions – which would have been a primary option in the era of the Keynesian welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s – has hitherto not been observed. Under the prevailing fiscal and financial policy of the EU, the advent of elements of a supranational social policy is hardly possible. This also means that in all probability the effects of the social mechanisms pertaining to inequality described here will not be

alleviated but, on the contrary, will intensify. A number of further questions for future research arise from our empirical analysis, two of which are crucial with respect to the transnational social question.

First, apart from widening the empirical analysis beyond domestic and care work and the construction sector to other fields, the subjective significance and attribution of social inequalities should be examined in more detail. The reason for this is that the transnational social question is only conceivable against the background of social inequalities that are deemed to be normatively unjustifiable. From an empirical point of view, the criteria for the assessment of inequalities is usually oriented to norms that are relative or relational and allow comparisons with categories of people who are, in social terms, not too far removed from each other (Panning, 1983). A transnational approach is confronted, of course, with problems of measurability and political communication regarding inequalities, as data collecting and political discourse are primarily confined within the territorial borders of nation states. For social scientists, the interesting question is what categories of people and which norms are considered relevant by the participating actors in the respective labour and social protection organizations and political arenas. The perception of inequalities in terms of resources, status and power can relate to the emigration side, the immigration side, to onward destinations or to all three. In a transnational perspective, inequalities must be regarded as 'debordered': while state borders, and especially the boundaries of membership and affiliation are constitutive of a person's opportunities in life, the social, cultural and economic boundaries are not necessarily congruent with the daily realities of cross-border workers. The EU is a particularly interesting case, because it is not only the poorer nation states that can serve as a point of reference for the subjective assessment of inequalities, but also the richer welfare states – both for people from the relatively poorer regions of the EU and for those from regions outside the EU. The social lifeworlds of individuals and, where applicable, their respective criteria for comparison extend beyond state borders. There is evidence, for example, that people from

Poland, Lithuania and Romania who live and work in western Europe experience upward social mobility in terms of income and career chances compared to their situation in their region of origin, but when measured against the standards of the destination countries, they rank much further down the social scale, for example, because their educational and occupational qualifications from home are not recognized (Favell and Recchi, 2011: 74).

A second promising area of research concerns whether and in what way the transnational social question plays a role in public forums, debates and political conflicts in Europe. While social protection in the context of cross-border mobility can easily be used as a theme for scandalmongering – one only has to think of the aforementioned reports on ‘care orphans’ or the mobility of Romany people in west European countries – it is international migration itself that deters the EU member states from implementing further supranational immigration regulations on the protection of cross-border workers, as long as a considerable part of state social protection provides a way of regulating and partially sealing off nationally regulated employment markets. Even if the transfer of authority to a supranational level meant shifting the exclusionary and inclusionary processes in the (re)production of inequalities from nation states to the EU, it would at least achieve a slight improvement within the EU. National citizenship and European citizenship are instruments of social closure against outsiders and internal social integration at the same time. The relevant sociological question is how, in conflictual processes, the borders, understood not only in a territorial sense but also in terms of membership and affiliation, are shifted.

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Notes

1. See the findings of the project ‘Transnationality and Inequalities: Pilot Project for the Panel Study’ in the Collaborative Research Centre ‘From Heterogeneities to Inequalities’ (CRC 882) (www.sfb882.uni-bielefeld.de/de/projects/c1).
2. Examples of such conventions are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). The most important social rights specified (Art. 22-27) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights include a fundamental right to education, the right to work and the right to join a trade union and the right to a minimum income, food, clothing, housing, medical care and social security. For migrants, these rights are stipulated, for example, in the Migration for Employment Convention, adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1949, or in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, ratified in 1990, which also includes the rights of the families of migrant workers. For an overview on social security and migration from an institutional perspective, see for example, Crevits and Van Buggenhout (2005: 33–41).
3. Association agreements with individual neighbouring states, especially Turkey, refer to a slightly more privileged status for citizens from these states.
4. In fact, people who are not associated with cross-border migration are also observed to have transnational practices. See Mau (2010).
5. Dependent self-employment is a form of work relationship in which the worker is formally self-employed, but under comparable conditions to those of dependent employees. As well as the construction industry, such legal constructions can be found primarily in the transport sector, in the insurance sector, throughout the service sector and in the advertising industry.
6. Contract workers are the employees of subcontractors, who carry out a contract for a prime contractor under the freedom to provide services in the European Union (EU) or in the context of bilateral agreements with third countries.
7. See the findings of the subproject ‘Transnationality and the Uneven Distribution of Informal Social Protection’ in the Collaborative Research Centre ‘From Heterogeneities to Inequalities’ (CRC 882) (www.sfb882.uni-bielefeld.de/de/projects/c3).
8. The initiative of the World Bank in the early 2000s to put the issue of remittances on the international agenda must be understood against this background.

The World Bank was concerned with the control of transfers through international organizations and national governments in light of the fact that more than 50 percent of financial transfers from migrants are not made through banks.

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