PhD student: Ids Janssen, UU

Project title: The shadow of migrants' social networks: Towards a new theory of how social networks can increase migrants' economic vulnerability

Supervisors: Dr. Verena Seibel & Dr. Tobias H. Stark

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Migrants' social networks are generally understood as important sources of support, functioning as informal safety nets alongside formal welfare-state institutions. Research has highlighted how social networks provide access to resources, information, and opportunities that can help migrants overcome economic disadvantages.

This project takes a different perspective. It starts from the idea that social networks can be supportive and, at the same time, generate social deficits: pressures, stigma, and misinformation that may undermine migrants' economic prospects. For example, expectations to provide financial support to family members can strengthen social relationships but may also place pressure on migrants' own financial resources. Such obligations may become a source of economic vulnerability when individuals provide support at the expense of their own household's financial security.

The project further examines how welfare-state institutions shape these social deficits. Welfare states provide formal protection that may reduce individuals' dependence on informal support networks. However, this protection differs across countries, both in terms of the generosity of welfare provisions and migrants' access to them. Limited access to formal welfare may increase migrants' dependence on social networks, potentially strengthening the obligations and pressures that contribute to economic vulnerability. At the same time, more generous and accessible welfare provisions may reduce these pressures. Yet, little is known about how welfare-state institutions influence the emergence and consequences of social deficits.

The project therefore asks: Under what welfare-state conditions do migrants' social networks become sources of support or social deficits, and when do these deficits reinforce economic vulnerability?

The PhD project combines comparative secondary analysis with original cross-national data collection. First, existing survey data will be linked to country-level indicators of welfare-state generosity and migrants' access to welfare provisions. This analysis will examine how institutional differences are associated with migrants' economic vulnerability, with particular attention to financial obligations within family networks. Second, the project will contribute to the development of a new two-wave survey across several countries. This survey will directly measure social deficits among different migrant groups and enable systematic comparisons across migrant groups and welfare-state contexts.

Ultimately, the project aims to explain how social networks contribute to migrants' economic vulnerability and how welfare-state institutions may reinforce or reduce these effects.