

**Title:** How the welfare state creates and reinforces social network deficits of migrants

**Aim:** This PhD project studies how welfare policies shape migrants' everyday support networks and the "downsides" that can come with them, such as social pressure, stigma, or misinformation (so-called social network deficits). In a cross-national comparison, it investigates whether restricted access to welfare programmes makes these social network deficits more likely, and whether welfare states reduce or worsen their impact on migrants' risk of economic vulnerability.

### **Theoretical background**

This project addresses a key limitation in research on welfare states and migrants' social networks: informal ties in social networks are typically treated as protective safety nets next to the welfare state, while there is little to no attention to potentially harmful effects of social networks. Classic debates contrast "crowding out" (strong welfare states reduce the relevance of informal support) with "crowding in" (welfare states enable informal support by freeing resources), yet empirical findings are mixed. The project departs from the hypothesis that these inconsistencies partly reflect a conceptual blind spot: networks may provide support and, yet, simultaneously generate social network deficits—pressures, dependencies, and misinformation that undermine migrants' economic prospects. The central premise is that limited welfare-state protection can increase reliance on networks in ways that also intensify social network deficits. In such situations, informal support may come with economically costly obligations and it may be compounded by misinformation about welfare rights and procedures spread through the network.

### **Research design**

The project combines comparative secondary analysis with an original cross-national data collection. It first links the European Social Survey (ESS) with MIPEX to examine whether cross-national variation in migrant welfare rights is associated with migrants' exposure to deficit-related economic outcomes. It then develops a new two-wave survey in a variety of countries to measure social network deficits across multiple migrant groups directly and enable systematic migrant-group comparisons that are not possible with ESS data.

### **Project**

This project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant 'The shadow of migrants' social networks: Towards a new theory of how social networks can increase migrants' economic vulnerability. In this project, you will work in a team together with 1 other PhD candidate and a postdoc, as well as other senior scholars in the field.

### **Literature:**

Offer, S. (2021). Negative social ties: Prevalence and consequences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47(1), 177-196.

Bilecen, B, and K Barglowski. 2015. "On the Assemblages of Informal and Formal Transnational Social Protection." *Population, Space and Place* 21(3): 203–14. doi:10.1002/PSP.1897.

Koning, E. 2021. "Accommodation and New Hurdles: The Increasing Importance of Politics for Immigrants' Access to Social Programmes in Western Democracies." *Social Policy & Administration* 55(5): 815–32. doi:10.1111/SPOL.12661.

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