



Deeper insights into trans-national migration

- ★ The European population today is highly mobile, with many countries welcoming migrants from both within the European Union and from further afield, raising important questions around their rights and obligations. We spoke to **Professor Hildegard Schneider** about the Transmic project's research into trans-national migration

The European population today is highly mobile, with citizens often moving between Member States to live and work, while many countries continue to welcome migrants from outside the continent. This high level of mobility brings questions around the fundamental rights and obligations of trans-national migrants into sharper focus, an issue which lies at the core of the Transmic project's research agenda. "The idea behind the project was to bring together several PhD students with our partners and post-docs to investigate issues around trans-national migration and citizenship. What happens when people move between states? What are their rights and responsibilities?" says Professor Hildegard Schneider, the project's coordinator. The concept of circular migration, where citizens migrate to a host state before eventually returning to their country of origin, is a central topic in this research. "One of the questions which inspired the European Commission was whether circular migration is a good idea or creates new problems," outlines Professor Schneider.

There are some lessons to be learned from history here, not least the guest

worker programmes which were established in some European states during the '50s and '60s to fill gaps in the labour market. Europe faces similar challenges again today, as we face up to the reality of an aging population. "In the light of demographic changes in the EU and other Western states, how do we fill our labour market shortages, especially in highly-skilled areas like

in our industries and in our economy, because we will just not have the right labour to fill the gaps," she warns.

Another question central to Transmic is how to cooperate with third countries on migration and borders. As we saw throughout the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, cooperation with Turkey and African countries has been high on the agenda. Several Transmic researchers are

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healthcare?" asks Professor Schneider. While the guest worker programmes were widely viewed as a failure, as in many cases migrants settled permanently rather than returning to their country of origin, Professor Schneider believes Europe again needs migrants to build a prosperous future. "Without migration we will have serious problems in terms of welfare provision,

looking at these external relations of migration policy. When policy makers seek to respond quickly to migratory events, such as migrant deaths in the Mediterranean or an increase in the numbers asylum seekers, the task of the Transmic research project is to take a step back and ask how we can understand these events and address them in line with international law.

Trans-national migration

The question in these terms is how to make Europe an attractive destination for migrants within the wider global market. A highly skilled engineer from India for example may have several job offers, in which case they're faced with a choice. "That engineer might be able to work in the US, gain citizenship relatively quickly and also maintain their Indian citizenship. That might be more attractive than going to Germany and waiting for a longer time. So the issue is how to make Europe more attractive," says Professor Schneider. The opportunity to move jobs and change location once they have arrived is another important issue. "When you gain a work permit in the US, you can move all over the country, you are not limited to one state, like California or New York. Whereas if a highly skilled engineer gets a permit to work in France, they are not allowed to move to Berlin just like that," continues Professor Schneider.

A European Blue Card does not automatically open up the wider European job market. Based herself in the Dutch city of Maastricht, close to the German and Belgian borders, Professor Schneider is keenly aware of this issue, which she believes makes Europe a less attractive destination for a skilled job-seeker than the US for example. "If an engineer comes and gets a work permit for the Netherlands, then goes shopping in Germany and discovers a better place to work, then it's not evident he would be able to accept the offer," she points out. Highly-skilled professionals often also travel regularly, maintaining houses in different countries,

yet Professor Schneider believes that existing governmental frameworks often do not take account of trans-national migration in this sense. "A migrant may have business interests in both their country of origin and their new state. That raises questions around how they maintain their rights concerning issues like pensions and social security," she says.

How to address the disconnect between the complexity of migration and the policy and legal framework governing it is one of the core questions being investigated within Transmic overall, which brings together 13 different projects at both PhD and post-doc level to look at different issues around trans-national migration. While Professor Schneider herself is a highly experienced lawyer, she says the project is very much multi-disciplinary in scope. "We work together with young researchers across various disciplines. Some are economists, some are anthropologists and some have a legal background, while others have a background in the social or political sciences," she explains. Each of these different disciplines have different methodologies, and Professor Schneider believes the young researchers benefit from exposure to new ideas and methods. "They have to learn from each other and to be open with these new methodologies. Some are trained in collecting data, statistics, and other forms of empirical evidence, while others are trained in analysing legislation," she outlines.

The data being gathered and analysed varies across the 13 different projects within Transmic, which

combine theory-based analysis and empirical research. Some migration-related data has been collected at the national level and Eurostat is a valuable resource, while researchers are also conducting interviews directly with migrants. "We are discussing migrants' experiences directly with them," says Professor Schneider. One of the Transmic projects at Maastricht University, where Professor Schneider is based, centres around the rights of migrant workers in Bulgaria and Poland, while researchers are also investigating migration to the EU from further afield. "We have a project looking at the external dimension of EU social security coordination, with case studies on India, Turkey and the US," outlines Professor Schneider. "We also have a project on tertiary-level student mobility between Asia and the EU, which is an emerging trans-national educational space."

Many European universities have a long history of welcoming students from across the world, either for the duration of a full programme or a shorter period of study, helping strengthen research links and encourage cultural exchange. This can lay the roots of long-term research collaborations, with new perspectives leading to new ideas. "If you bring together bright, open-minded people from different cultures in research institutions, they might come up with solutions, new findings and research ideas," says Professor Schneider. Beyond the academic sphere, Professor Schneider believes student exchanges can also help strengthen diplomatic and commercial

Members of the TRANSMIC project research team at the Mid-Term Review Meeting held on 25th May 2016 in Brussels.



At a glance

Full Project Title

Transnational Migration, Citizenship and the Circulation of Rights and Responsibilities (TRANSMIC)

Project Objectives

The aim of the project is to contribute to the understanding of transnational migration, in particular by looking at the conditions for and effects of transnational migration, possibilities for the mobility of migrants' rights to be enhanced, and the links between migration, citizenship, and migration and development. TRANSMIC will run from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2018.

Project Funding

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Project Partners

• Maastricht University (Netherlands) • University of Liège (Belgium) • University of Minho (Portugal) • University of Oxford (UK) • University of Aix-Marseille (France) • University of Tampere (Finland) • University of Warsaw (Poland) • Centre for European Policy Studies- CEPS (Brussels/Belgium)

Contact Details

Professor Hildegard Schneider
Maastricht University, Faculty of Law,
METRO P.O. Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht,
The Netherlands

T: +31 (43) 388 3256

E: h.schneider@maastrichtuniversity.nl

W: <https://law.maastrichtuniversity.nl/transmic/>

Professor
Hildegard Schneider



Hildegard Schneider is Professor of European Union Law at the Law Faculty of Maastricht University. She studied Law, Political Science and Art History in Freiburg (Breisgau), London, Paris and Münster. She completed her legal education in Germany with the '1. Staatsexamen' in 1980 and the '2. Staatsexamen' in 1986 with distinction. She obtained her Ph.D. defending a thesis entitled 'Die Anerkennung von Diplomen in der Europäischen Gemeinschaft' at Maastricht University. Since 1986, she has worked at Maastricht University, teaching mainly various courses in the area of European Union law as well as Art and Cultural Property law. Her research covers the same areas. She has been a Jean Monnet chair holder in European Migration Law. Since September 2011 she serves as Dean of the Law Faculty and is a member of the Management Team of Maastricht University.

ties. "From a long-term economic perspective, it's important to have an open educational policy. Many European countries are keen to build and maintain good relations with fast-growing Asian countries, so from that point of view it's positive if students have studied in the EU and were happy there," she says.

There are also well-established migrant communities in and around many European cities, who have integrated in the local area and make a valued contribution to cultural and economic life. Despite Europe's long history of accepting migrants, debate continues on what 'good' integration actually means; Professor Schneider and her colleagues plan to investigate this in a new project outside the scope of Transmic. "We'll look at how to map and gather evidence about what good integration is," she says. This could mean economic independence or cultural integration, such as participation in a highly visible activity, like the sporting life of the city. "For example, there are some communities who do very well economically, but don't speak the local language," continues Professor Schneider. "You can also have a look at what happens with successive generations. Are they going to secondary schools? Are they integrated into the academic life of the country?"

Evidence base

Part of the wider agenda in this research is to build an evidence base to inform the continued development of public policy on migration, an emotive issue which arouses intense debate. The Transmic project will make an important contribution in terms of providing clear data. "We hold workshops to share our findings with policy-makers and other interested parties. The projects in Transmic are still ongoing, but we have already held these types of meetings," says Professor Schneider. For example, a PhD and postdoc

from Transmic recently held a meeting in Brussels with policy-makers, civil society and international organisations to share and discuss their findings. This is how the project aims to make a direct contribution to evidence based policy-making. The recent referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union demonstrates the depth of feeling on the issue, and in many cases it was difficult for the electorate to establish the facts around the issue, particularly the numbers of migrants and the wider economic and cultural impact; continued research is essential to objective debate, believes Professor Schneider. "I think our work is very important, because we can analyse the data and make the facts available," she says.

This is further enhanced by wider international collaboration, reflecting the fact that migration is a global issue, and certainly not one that only affects Europe. While Transmic is funded under the Initial Training Networks scheme, Professor Schneider and her colleagues are looking to establish links with other research networks. "For example, there is a very big one in Switzerland, and there are also some in the US. Connecting research networks is one of the follow-ups of this type of research," she outlines. This will enable researchers to compare their findings, refine methodologies, and build a bigger picture on the impact of transnational migration. "We can be challenged about research that contradicts ours. It might be an interesting challenge to look at the reason why certain research findings might possibly contradict each other for example, and that could be important also in terms of building a clearer picture," continues Professor Schneider.

Images to right: Ten Ph.D. and three post-doctoral researchers are carrying out research projects within the framework of the TRANSMIC project.

Image Below: The TRANSMIC project team.

