



**Contemporary Southeastern Europe**

An Interdisciplinary Journal on Southeastern Europe

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Research Article

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*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2023, 10(1), 1-20

DOI 10.25364/02.10:2023.1.1



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# From Economic Remittances to Societal Transmittances Experiences from the European Union

Ludger Pries\*

**Abstract:** Analysis and debates on remittances concentrate on sending money from the Global North to the Global South. Here we deepen the aspects of social remittances and propose a broader view on transmittances as bi-directional and multi-dimensional flows in the context of migration taking Europe as a region less taken into account in these debates. The effects of remittances have to be analyzed in the overall context of historical conditions, economic and demographic cycles and transnational societal textures between the regions under consideration. We take the example of the accession of Poland and of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU and show the usefulness of an extended perspective on transmittances, that is, taking into account the multifaceted bidirectional impacts of migration. Some conclusions on desiderata for further research are drawn.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Remittances, EU, transmittances, development, transnational migration

## Introduction

In the 21st century social entanglements are transnational, mutual dependencies are global. Covid-19 demonstrated this extensively, as well as the far reaching consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In Central Europe and related debates on EU enlargement, challenges of economic as well as political, social and cultural development intertwine. Transnational interwovenness is also present in the dynamics of migration, as reflected in concepts like brain drain, brain gain, brain circulation, economic remittances, social remittances, migration and development. Since the millennium, debates about remittances boomed. In 2006 the United Nations focused their sixtieth general assembly session on international migration and development. “No longer do those who emigrate separate themselves as thoroughly as they once did from the families and communities they leave behind. No longer do the vast majority settle in just a small number of developed countries [...] those moving ‘South-to-South’ are about as numerous as those moving ‘South-to-North’.” Not

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<sup>1</sup> This article is related to my manuscript “From economic remittances to societal transmittances. Experiences from the European Union“, I confirm that there is no conflict of interest. I am the only and exclusive author of the text.

only migration corridors and patterns diversified between North and South, East and West, but also the composition of mobile persons according to contracts, skills and migration projects.

From being of marginal relevance, remittances moved into the center of international development theory and politics. But when it comes to remittances and their impacts, normally the countries of the Global South are addressed.<sup>2</sup> Europe is not considered as an important region of receiving remittances. Additionally, although admitting other forms of remittances,<sup>3</sup> debates concentrate on economic remittances. Here, we follow suggestions to broaden the concept of economic remittances to a view on social remittances and societal transmittances. For not only the volume and the quality of migration returns changed, but also their manifold spatial directions: “We can no longer divide ourselves so easily into ‘countries of origin’ and ‘countries of destination’ since, to one degree or another, many countries are now both.”<sup>4</sup> This holds especially for Europe where after the fall of the Iron Curtain complex migration dynamics emerged. More than a million Polish migrants went to Western European countries for work while Poland, simultaneously, began to receive labor migrants from Ukraine. Since the 1990s and due to extraordinary economic growth, Spain, a traditional country of emigration, turned to receive many immigrants from Latin America and Africa. However, the international financial crisis of 2008 stopped this boom, and many young Spanish academics migrated to Northern European countries for work. Although Germany was traditionally a country of immigration, in 2008 and 2009 it was a country of net emigration.

Despite these complex migration patterns, growth in international immigration concentrated in high income countries.<sup>5</sup> Economic remittances increased at a pace never experienced before. From 1990 to 2019 remittance inflows to Low-and-Middle-Income Countries grew worldwide from some 29 to more than 548 billion US-Dollars, that is, by some 1,900 percent. During the same period, the world population grew by only 45 percent (from 5.3 to 7.7 billion) and international migrant stock by 84 percent (from some 153 to 281 million). For many countries of the South, migrants’ remittance payments exceeded the amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI) and of official development aid. Therefore, many politicians as well as scientists turned to consider how migration dynamics could be better exploited for development purposes. Unsurprisingly, since the new century, international bodies and many national governments began to hype the issue of remittances and the link between migration and development. The debates on the impact of economic remittances

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<sup>2</sup> e.g. Eckstein, S. 2010. Remittances and Their Unintended Consequences in Cuba. *World Development* 38(7), 1047-55; Howell, A. 2017. Impacts of Migration and Remittances on Ethnic Income Inequality in Rural China. *World Development* 94, 200-11; Cuadros-Meñaca, A. 2020. Remittances, health insurance, and pension contributions: Evidence from Colombia. *World Development* 127, Article 104766.

<sup>3</sup> Carling, J. 2014. Scripting Remittances: Making Sense of Money Transfers in Transnational Relationships. *International Migration Review* 48(1), 218-62; Clemens, M. / Özden, C. and H. Rapoport. 2015. Reprint of: Migration and Development Research is Moving Far Beyond Remittances. *World Development* 65(1), 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> UN (United Nations). 2006. *International migration and development. Sixtieth session General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General*. New York: UN, 6.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. 2006. *Global Economic Prospects – Economic Implications of Remittances and Migration*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 27.

had ambiguous political effects. The EU developed strategies to integrate the issues of migration, development and securitization. The EU is a kind of ‘natural experiment’ with respect to migration and remittances, given that during the last twenty years it expanded from 15 to 28 countries, and from 331 million to 447 million people. What happened concerning migration and remittances when free mobility of labor was guaranteed for all persons of an EU member state?

Since the 1990s, scientific debates related migration to the brain-drain versus brain-gain issue, to the role of economic and also socio-cultural remittances as part of migration, and to the multifaceted aspects of sustainable development as defined e.g. in the Sustainable Development Goals. In what follows, based on literature review and own empirical studies in Northern America, we will first sketch out some basic findings of the international research on remittances and show that the concept has to be broadened to not only economic but social, cultural, political, in short: societal remittances. On the basis of own analysis of public mass data (mainly from World Bank), we then present some aspects of the migration and remittances dynamics in Europe, especially in the EU and argue that the effects of remittances can only be estimated and analyzed in the overall context of historical conditions, economic and demographic cycles and transnational societal textures between the regions under consideration. In a third step we shed light on the specific remittances impacts of the accession of Poland and of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU arguing that we should shift from a perspective on remittances to an approach of transmittances, that is, taking into account the multifaceted bidirectional impacts of migration. Some conclusions on desiderata for further research follow at the end.

### **Remittances debates in social sciences**

Since the beginning of the new century, economic remittances attracted much attention in science and politics. Even the COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to sharp decrease in remittances as initially predicted: “In 2020, officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries reached \$540 billion, only 1.6 percent below the \$548 billion seen in 2019”.<sup>6</sup> In the second half of the 2010s, the volume of economic remittances took over that of Foreign Direct Investment, and they seemed to be a key element of global development. Against overall euphoria, many scholars warned that the issue is more complex.<sup>7</sup> Individual economic remittances dissipate in households’ reproduction expenses. Collective economic remittances for public goods like water tubes, hospital ward or road surfacing were studied.<sup>8</sup> This type of remittance was addressed e.g. for

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<sup>6</sup> KNOMAD (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development). 2021. *Resilience. COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens. Migration and Development Brief 34*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, x.

<sup>7</sup> Bakewell, O. 2008. ‘Keeping Them in Their Place’: the ambivalent relationship between development and migration in Africa. *Third World Quarterly* 29(7), 1341-58; Castles, S. and R. Delgado Wise. (eds.). 2007. *Migration and Development. Perspectives from the South*. Geneva: IOM; De Haas, H. 2007. International migration, remittances and development: myths and facts. *Third World Quarterly* 26(8), 1269-84; De Haas, H. 2009. *Remittances and Social Development*, in *Financing Social Policy*, edited by Hujo, K. and S. McClanahan. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 293-318; Cazachevici, A. / Havraneka, T. and R. Horvath. 2020. Remittances and economic growth: A meta-analysis. *World Development* 134, Article 105016.

<sup>8</sup> Çaglar, A. 2006. Hometown associations, the rescaling of state spatiality and migrant grassroots transnationalism. *Global Networks* 6(1), 1-22.

the case of Mexican hometown associations in the USA and for the specific programs of the Mexican National and the Zacatecas State government to stimulate community oriented remittances by adding one state and one federal US-Dollar to any Dollar invested by Mexican hometown organization in basic social infrastructure. This program was so successful that it was extended to the “tres-por-uno” program, in which also the municipality in Mexico, where the collective remittances were invested, added its part.<sup>9</sup>

Already during the 1990s, Levitt focused on social remittances as the “cultural diffusion” of norms and habits.<sup>10</sup> This concept was extended to political, religious and other societal aspects. Goldring demonstrated shifting gender relations, citizenship and political engagement as result of return migration from the USA to Mexico.<sup>11</sup> Scholars also demonstrated the religious remittances of migration processes that show up e.g. as a pluralization of formerly more homogeneous religious beliefs and as the proliferation of evangelist religious groups.<sup>12</sup> Landolt/Goldring found that migrants in Canada are increasingly involved in transnational social, economic, political, religious and cultural practices.<sup>13</sup> They also stated that even when the transnational activities of migrants are not explicitly political, “they often have important political effects in their home countries, in Canada, and in transnational relationships”.<sup>14</sup> Levitt and Lamba-Nieves note that the effect of collective social remittances can range from local-level impacts to regional and national change and may affect various domains of action, such as religion and politics.<sup>15</sup> Fenoll/Kuehn found that the extend of social networks influences on amounts of remittances.<sup>16</sup>

Broadening the remittances perspective leads to transnationalization as a process that strengthens social, cultural, economic and political relations and interactions between locales across the borders of nation-states and national societies. Social groups and societies are not conceptualized as separated in distinct ‘container spaces’, but social spaces could be constituted by everyday life, communication and other interchanges of actors across different locales.

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<sup>9</sup> García Zamora, R. 2007. El programa Tres por Uno de remesas colectivas en México. Lecciones y desafíos. *Migraciones internacionales* 4(1).

<sup>10</sup> Levitt, P. 1998. Social remittances: migration-driven local-level forms of cul-tural diffusion. *International Migration Review* 32(4), 926-48.

<sup>11</sup> Goldring, L. 2001. *Dissagregating Transnational Social Spaces: Gender, Place and Citizenship in Mexico-U.S. Transnational Spaces*, in *New Transnational Social Spaces: International migration and transnational companies in the early twenty-first century*, edited by Pries, L. London/New York: Routledge, 59-76.

<sup>12</sup> Glick Schiller, N. / Nieswand, B. / Schlee, G. / Tsypylma, D. / Yalcin-Heckmann, L. and L. Fosztó. 2004. Pathways of Migrant Incorporation in Germany. *Transit* 1(1); Hüwelmeier, G. 2011. Socialist Cosmopolitanism Meets Global Pentecostalism: Charismatic Christianity Among Vietnamese Migrants after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. *Journal Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34(3), 436-53; Pries, L. and R. Bohlen. 2019. *Transnational Migration and the Travelling of Religious Beliefs*, in *Religion and Migration. Negotiating Hospitality, Agency and Vulnerability*, edited by Bieler, A. / Karle, I. / Kim-Cragg, H. and I. Nord. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 21-40.

<sup>13</sup> Landolt, P. and L. Goldring. 2009. Immigrant political socialization as bridging and boundary work: mapping the multi-layered incorporation of Latin American immigrants in Toronto. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32(7), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Landolt and Goldring. *Immigrant political socialization*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Levitt, P. nd D. Lamba-Nieves. 2011. Social Remittances Revisited. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, 1–22.

<sup>16</sup> Fenoll, A. and Z. Kuehn. 2018. Immigrant networks and remittances: Cheaper together? *World Development* 111, 225-45.

Transnational social spaces span places in different countries and consist of everyday practices, organizations and social institutions.<sup>17</sup> In a broader study we could trace the complex circuits of Mexican migrants between their home country and the USA.<sup>18</sup> Based on analysis of mass data and own interviews we could underline the relevance of transnational social ties between Mexico and the USA even under conditions of restricted border control and economic crisis.<sup>19</sup> Integrating the transnationalization debates on remittances and grounded on own empirical studies, we propose to extend the study of remittances to that of transmittances. The focus on remittances concentrates on economic aspects, specifically money sending, and on one-way flows and impacts from countries of migrants' arrival to those of their origin, mainly flows from wealthier countries of the North to poorer countries of the South as countries of origin. For at least four reasons such an approach is increasingly limited. First, most countries of the world become mixed countries of origin, transit and of arrival. This holds for Mexico, Poland, Turkey, India, Egypt or Russia.

Second, due to communication and transportation facilities migration movements get increasingly complex, go back and forth, relate to more than two places and include sequences of locales. Therefore, it is ever more difficult to consider remittances as unidirectional and to identify and isolate exactly their starting and end points. Third, the effects of migration should be analyzed not just by those things (like money, values, habits) sent 'back' to a certain place, but have to include the impact all along the complex migration routes, countries of arrival, passage or temporal stay. Many of those primarily considered as guest-workers (e.g. from Mediterranean countries) not only sent money back home, but stayed and changed substantially receiving countries like Germany or France. Although migrants in New York City sent money, knowledge etc. to other countries, they also infused substantially to the wellbeing of the place of arrival: "The energies of immigrants from around the world also spurred New York's turnaround in the last decades of the 20th century".<sup>20</sup> A fourth argument for transmittances is that the impacts of migration could be beneficiary for migrant households and families, for countries of origin and/or for countries of arrival. But the effects of migration could also be detrimental for one or all of these individual, collective and corporate actors involved. Brain drain would be one example, another are increasing social conflicts at community level due to new religious tensions and divisions as an outcome of return or transnational migration (see Table 1).

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<sup>17</sup> Pries, L. (ed.). 2008. *Rethinking Transnationalism. The Meso-link of organizations*. London: Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> Pries, L., 2004. Determining the Causes and Durability of Transnational Labor Migration Between Mexico and the United States: Some Empirical Findings *International Migration* 42(2), 3-39.

<sup>19</sup> Pries, L. (2019). The momentum of transnational social spaces in Mexico-US-migration. *Comparative Migration Studies* 7, 7-34.

<sup>20</sup> MCNY (Museum of the City of New York). 2019. *New York at Its Core. 400 Years of New York City History*. New York: MCNY, 164.

Table 1: Dimensions of transmittances

Dimension	Definition	Examples
Economic	Flow of money, material goods/values, properties	Money sent regularly, cars, tools, construction material, technology
Political	Impact on political culture and power relations	Civic participation, claims making, social movements, organizing
Cultural	Impact on collective belongings and knowledge	Religious orientation, arts, public discourse, language, artefact use
Social	Change of beliefs, norms, values, habitus, networks	Gender roles, life projects, relevance-structures in life

Source: own elaboration

In sum, societal transmittances could improve the self-determination of persons and families, but also persuade nation states to privatize public responsibilities of social welfare e.g. by arguing that the best developmental aid is that one relying on private initiatives of families. Societal transmittances could support the sustainable development of societies and countries, but they also could lead to accentuate existing inequalities in wealth and power between countries. Europe and especially the European Union (EU) are good examples for these complex interrelations.

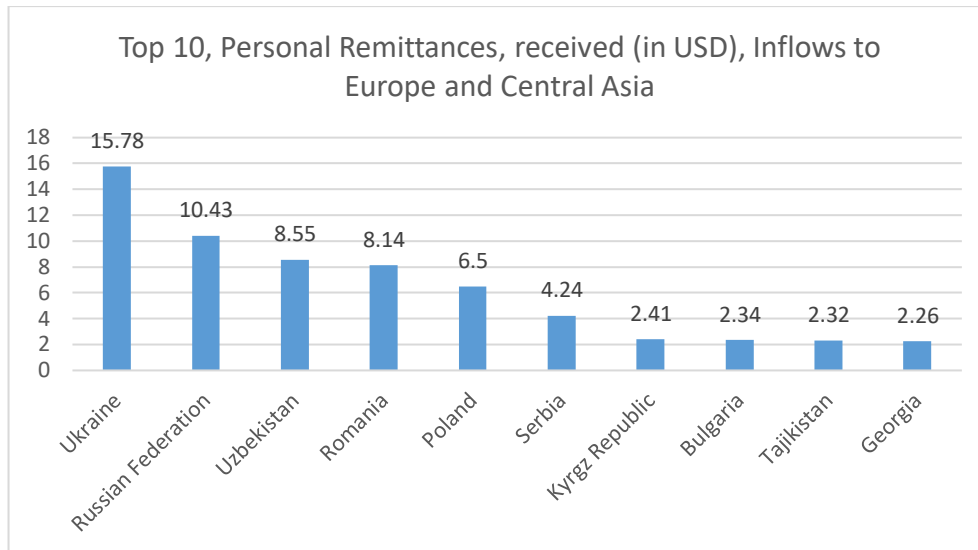
### Migration and remittances dynamics in Europe

Due to its history, Europe is a worldwide special case. Despite some opposing trends like Brexit, there is a continuing process of deepening and extending the EU as a joint place of free mobility of goods, capital, services and persons. At the same time, after the fall of the iron curtain, there was a renaissance of many new nation states that had been part of the Soviet Empire before. Therefore, dealing with migration and remittances in Europe, we have to differentiate between countries inside the EU and third countries outside the EU like Ukraine, Russia or Kyrgyz Republic. “Remittances to Europe and Central Asia remained strong in 2019, growing by about 6 percent to \$65 billion in 2019”.<sup>21</sup> Until the Russian invasion, in Ukraine more than ten percent of the total population (of 44 million) were labor migrants. In 2018, in Poland as its most important destiny alone there worked some 1.2 million Ukrainians. Figure 1 reflects the remittance inflows to Europe and Central Asia and reflects the significance of remittances for that country in volume and share of GDP.

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<sup>21</sup> KNOMAD (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development). (2020). *COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens. Migration and Development Brief 32*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 19.

Figure 1: Personal Remittances Inflows to Europe and Central Asia 2019, Top 10 (in billion USD)



Source: Own elaboration based on: World Bank Data. (2021). *Personal remittances, received (current US\$)*.

As can be seen (Figure 1), Russia is the second important receiver of remittances in volume, followed by two EU member states. All countries with high shares of remittances as part of GDP (Figure 2) had belonged to the Soviet Union and its Allies until the 1980s. We can assume that economic, social and political ties still are quite strong. In terms of the total volume of remittances (Figure 1), besides Poland there are two EU member states (Romania and Bulgaria) and an advanced EU accession candidate (Serbia). Whereas in the case of Russia and the former members and allies of the Soviet Union migration corridors between these countries continue to be strong, in the case of the United Kingdom (UK) there is an opposite trend. Since the financial crisis of 2007 emigration to the UK, especially from Poland has declined. And since 2016 many migrants seem to anticipate Brexit as the “net migration from the European Union to the United Kingdom slumped to just 57,000 in the 12 months through September 2018, the lowest level since 2009 and half the number recorded a year earlier”.<sup>22</sup> In 2019, this number declined again and stood at 49,000 by the end of the year.<sup>23</sup> “EU net migration to Britain has fallen by 70 percent since Britain voted to leave the European Union in the June 2016 referendum.”<sup>24</sup> At the same time, immigration to UK from outside the EU, mainly from former colonies, increased considerably. History matters.

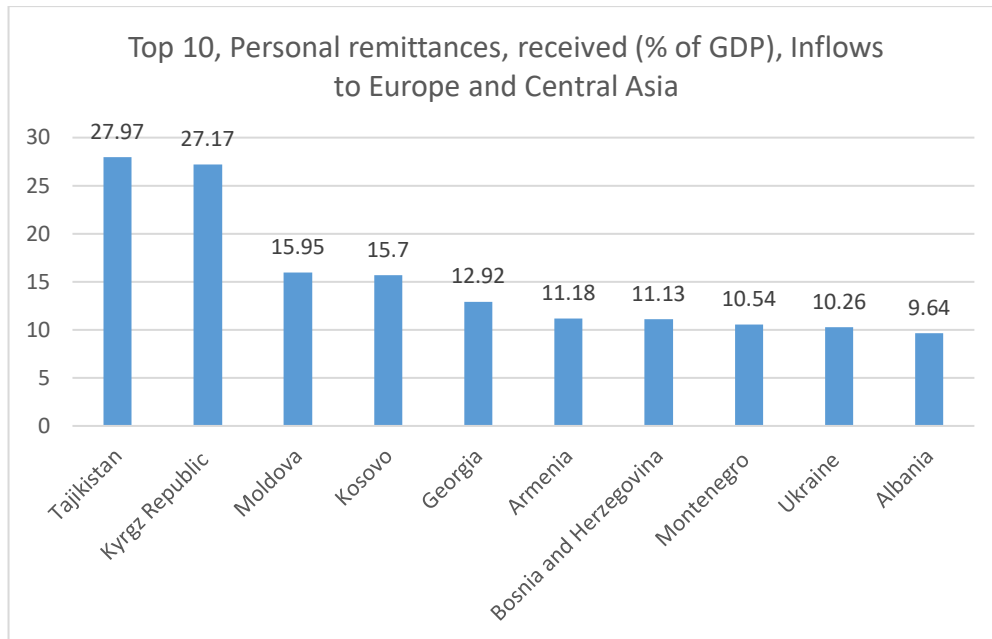
<sup>22</sup> KNOMAD (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development). 2019. *Migration and Remittances. Recent Developments and Outlook. Migration and Development Brief 31*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Sumption, M. and C. Vargas-Silva. 2020. Net migration to the UK. *Migration Observatory briefing COMPAS*, University of Oxford.

<sup>24</sup> KNOMAD, *Migration and Remittances*, 17.



Figure 2: Personal Remittances Inflows to Europe and Central Asia 2019, Top 10 (% of GDP)



Source: Own elaboration based on: World Bank Data. (2021). *Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)*.

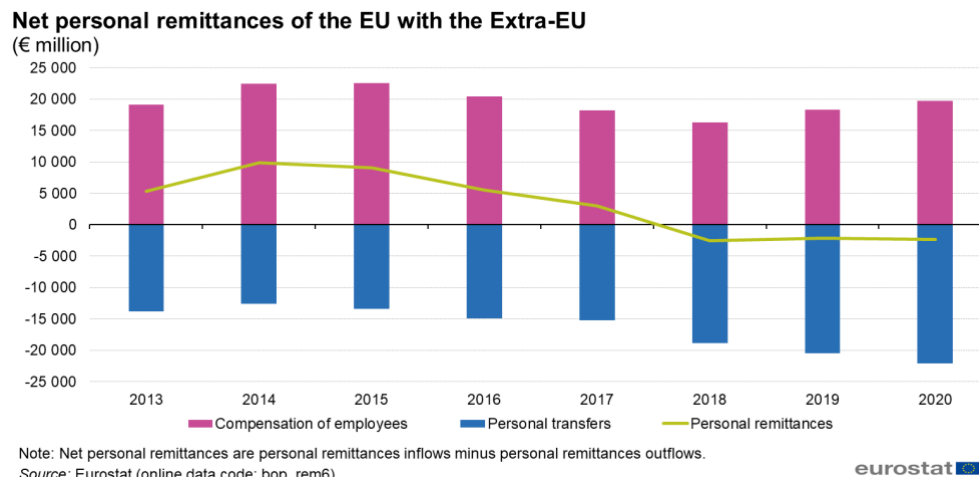
This also holds for the EU and its migration and remittance dynamics. Already in 1968, the free mobility for labor migrants was introduced in the then ‘Common European Market’. 25 years later the four principles of free mobility of persons, goods, services and capital were accomplished. According to transition clauses, the free mobility of persons was restricted during the extension of the EU by 8 Middle European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) plus two Mediterranean countries (Malta and Cyprus) in 2004 and by Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. In both cases, EU member states could opt for restricting free labor market access from the corresponding accession states for a maximum of seven years. Meanwhile the UK, due to a lack of labor, opened its labor market e.g. for Polish migrants since 2005, Germany did so until 2011. Due to historic legacies Polish migration had been strong since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Until the EU accession of Poland in 2004, the majority of all temporary Polish migrants (385,000 out of all EU 750,000) resided in Germany. Since 2005 then the majority of Polish migrants oriented towards the UK, reaching a maximum of 690,000 in 2007, the year of the financial crisis. Lack of labor opportunities and increasing hostility led to a reduction of Polish migrants in the UK.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to the effect of legal labor market access to the UK since 2004, Polish migration to Germany did not increase substantially after lifting the restrictions since 2011, but general labor migrants’ dynamics in the EU increased substantially: “The EU enlargement has resulted in a significant increase in labour mobility. More than 99% of migration flows between the newer and older member states have been East-West flows

<sup>25</sup> Okólski, M. and J. Salt. 2014. Polish Emigration to the UK after 2004, Why Did So Many Come? *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 3(2), 14.

from EU 8+2 to EU15. Despite the fact that many countries from EU15 imposed several restrictions to their labour markets, the stock of emigrants from EU 8+2 to EU15 tripled in the period 2003-2009.”<sup>26</sup>

The accession of Poland to the EU could be considered a ‘natural experiment’ related to the impacts of legal barriers on labor migration. Opening the UK labor market in 2004 already led to a growth of temporary Polish workers. Germany restricted Polish migrants’ mobility to the maximum of seven years until 2011 fearing massive ‘waves’ of cheap labor. But when Germany opened its border in 2011, no significant influx was registered. The other way round, some 16 percent of all Polish migrant workers left the UK in only three years, between 2007 and 2010. Obviously, historically grown social ties explain the momentum of temporary migration between Germany and Poland, legal regulations and later labor market conditions explain the high responsiveness of temporary migration between the UK and Poland.

Figure 3: Balance of personal transfers and compensation of employees EU-27 (2013-2019)



When analyzing the more recent situation of the EU as a whole, interestingly the overall remittance balance between EU-27 and the rest of the world was positive for a long period. As demonstrated in Figure 3, this was the case until 2017, it turned negative since 2018. So until 2017 the balance of compensation of employees with residence in one of the EU-27 member states, who worked outside the EU-27 for limited periods (as Expatriats or temporal workers) and sent money back into the EU, was some 20 billion Euros higher than the compensation of employees, who or whose employers were residing outside the EU-27. Compared to this, the balance of personal transfers of non-EU-27 residents from the EU-27 to household members outside the EU-27 (being mainly workers’ remittances) historically has been negative, and it increased since 2018 faster than the positive balance of employees’ compensation. This reflects the relatively high compensation of normally high-skilled personnel from the EU working

<sup>26</sup> Ionescu, L. 2014. *Emigration from Eastern Europe with a focus on Brain Drain*. Aarhus: Aarhus University, 23.

temporarily outside the EU as managers or specialists. “The major powerhouse for employment of EU citizens outside the EU-27 is Switzerland, generating considerable inflows in compensation of employees to the EU. France (EUR 12.2 billion), Italy (EUR 4.6 billion), Germany (EUR 4.1 billion), Portugal (EUR 1.0 billion) and Austria (EUR 0.6 billion) benefit significantly from their residents working in Switzerland.”<sup>27</sup>

Whereas Figure 3 only reflects the net sum of personal remittances, it is interesting to note that in 2019 the total inflow and outflow of personal remittances (workers’ remittances and compensation of employees) between countries of EU-27 and the rest of the world amounted to more than 236 billion Euros.<sup>28</sup> Similarly to previous years, more than half of all flows in personal remittances in 2019 took place between EU-27 member states.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, EU member states show quite different patterns. Countries like Belgium and Germany concentrate outflows and inflows of personal remittances with other EU countries, meanwhile France and Italy show inflows and outflows being concentrated with countries outside the EU. Poland is an interesting case because of its significantly high outflow of personal remittances to third countries, while corresponding inflows concentrate on EU countries.<sup>30</sup> Inside the EU-27 the disparity of countries concerning immigration is very high. In Luxembourg almost every second inhabitant has a foreign citizenship, in Austria the ratio is about 17 percent, in Germany some 13 percent. But in many Eastern European countries (like Poland and Romania) that acceded the EU since the 21st century, the share of foreigners living there is one percent or even lower.<sup>31</sup>

The extension of the EU during the last two decades leads to some general conclusions. The bugbear of massive ‘waves’ of low skilled immigrants eroding the wage structures and of hundreds of thousands of persons ‘migrating into the public welfare systems’ do not correspond with empirical evidence. In the Polish-German case e.g. there was a quite relaxed migration dynamic after the free labor mobility since 2011. The Polish-UK migration adapted to the economic and societal conditions in both countries. The Ukrainian-Poland case reveal the momentum of historically and societally grown textures of social spaces that are even gradually resistant to political tensions: “In Poland there took place a silent revolution, that only few people in the West took notice of. We turned to be a country that receives massively economic migrants from Ukraine and other countries. Concerning short-term migration Poland took over the USA and is worldwide on place one.”<sup>32</sup> It has to be stressed that economic or labor migrants not only send economic remittances, but also transport social and societal remittances. The Polish case is an example.

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<sup>27</sup> EUROSTAT, *Personal Remittances*, 10 and 11.

<sup>28</sup> EUROSTAT, *Personal Remittances*, 5 and 6.

<sup>29</sup> EUROSTAT, *Personal Remittances*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> EUROSTAT, *Personal Remittances*, Table 1 and 2.

<sup>31</sup> EC-KCMD (European Commission-Knowledge Centre on Migration and De-mography). 2020. *Atlas of Migration KCMD. Migration in EU Member States*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>32</sup> Arak, P. 2020. Polen – vom Auswanderungsland zum Einwanderungsland. *Polen-Analysen* Edition 250, 2-7.

A comprehensive ethnographic study analyzed all aspects of social remittances comparing three contrasting communities in Poland. The authors underline that the impact of the different types of remittances has to be analyzed in the broader socio-historical context of the places. Two towns, situated in Western Poland, had belonged to Germany until World War II, Pszczyna was integrated in Poland in 1922, Trzebnica until 1945, when the total population settled newly after the German residents had left the city. The third city, Sokolka, is located in the Eastern part of Poland and differs from the others by its religiously diverse population (of Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims). Understandably, visa policy and changing requirements to travel to the West (EU) or to the East (e.g. Belarus) had different impacts on migration and social remittances in the three places. Based on these different local settings, the biographies, life projects and characteristics of migrants trigger their potential role as “agents of change” in the sense of bringing societal remittances. Such agents of change, besides “opportunities and spaces for contacts and diffusion” need to be “socially recognised in the communities of origin and to have »an audience« for their social remittances” and “needed to have a specific set of personal characteristics connected to both personalities and earlier processes of socialization”.<sup>33</sup>

The study concludes with a distinction of visible and latent social remittances; visible remittances “are predominantly connected to the workplace such as: openness to communicate at work and after work in a pub; teamwork and time management; social innovations addressed to the clients and patients [...]; and their translation and implementation into the local conditions and methods of motivation to perform.”<sup>34</sup> Latent social remittances were found mainly in “attitudes to social diversity (both positive and negative) and civic participation through for example small charity actions, female emancipation and methods of raising children”<sup>35</sup> In sum, this study presents an innovative way of identifying typical social remittances, their individual and societal preconditions as well as their possible effects.

For the Polish city of Wrocław, White argues that migration subcultures are crucial for understanding the impacts of social remittances.<sup>36</sup> Based on 47 biographical interviews Tissot demonstrates how transnational migrants develop a contextual self-understanding that is not tied to either the country of origin or to the country of arrival but developed in transnational social spaces.<sup>37</sup> Not only bodies are moving in the migration process, the definition of one’s own origin also travels. In this perspective, the concept of remittances itself has to be challenged because everything that transnational migrants do is located and ‘transmitted’ in multiple and transnational spaces. Elrick already compared two rural Polish communities (Wilkow and Nowy Korczyn) and found quite distinct migration patterns before and after the EU accession of Poland; the impact of this migration, especially economic and socio-cultural remittances vary also

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<sup>33</sup> Arak, *Polen*, 210.

<sup>34</sup> Arak, *Polen*, 211.

<sup>35</sup> Arak, *Polen*, 211.

<sup>36</sup> White, A. 2016. Social Remittances and Migration (Sub-)Cultures in Contemporary Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* 5(2), 63–80.

<sup>37</sup> Tissot, A. X. 2019. Travelling origins: Migrant belonging in times of post-migration mobilities. *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 10(2), 293-313.

according to visible and 'hidden mi-gration'.<sup>38</sup> Complex conditions of the impacts of social remittances were also reported for Romanian migrants by Sandu, who distinguished different effects at personal or family level and at community level.<sup>39</sup>

### **A natural experiment: EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria**

Similar to the Polish case, when Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, there was a lot of skepticism in many member states. Political parties, unions and other collective actors were afraid of a new kind of remittances, respectively, transmittances: poor and low skilled people from the new accession countries would migrate to the old Western member states, ask for social security provisions and send money back to Bulgaria and Romania that was not earned by work but taken from the welfare states. In Germany the terms "Armutszuwanderung" (immigration of poverty) and "Zuwanderung in Sozialhilfesysteme" (immigration into the systems of social welfare) came up.<sup>40</sup> In a utilitarian concept of migration the main focus is on benefit and advantage. As migration always is embedded in power relations – between states, social groups and individuals – the more powerful define the criteria of evaluation: which profit for whom? The first binational treaties for labor migration in Europe, e.g. between Italy and France or Germany and Poland after World War I, were very frank in this respect.<sup>41</sup> In Germany, the Nazi-regime had planned to forcefully relocate some 45 million people, some 20 million forced laborers were employed during World War II.<sup>42</sup> Nobody discussed remittances or what benefits for whom – it was simply a question of power and interests declared in the name of nations.

In the 21st century, debates are more decent, but underlying arguments span from simple economic or national interests over win-win-situations for all up to the benefit of saving the planet and human rights. In EU member states the leading questions in public discourse are: What is the benefit for us, for our labor market, economy and society? Will migrants go back if they are no longer needed? In countries of migrants' origin politicians and the state will mainly ask: Will labor emigration mitigate the pressures on our labor market? Will economic remittances bring in foreign currency and perhaps alleviate economic needs of the poor? Could social, cultural or political remittances eventually challenge the social stability? At the micro level of individual actors and their *lifeworlds*, the calculation of remittances is limited in time and dimensions. This is due to the

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<sup>38</sup> Elrick, T. 2008. The Influence of Migration on Origin Communities: Insights from Polish Migrations to the West. *Europe-Asia Studies* 60(9), 1503–17.

<sup>39</sup> Sandu, D. 2010. *Modernising Romanian society through temporary work abroad*, in *A Continent Moving West? EU Enlargement and Labour Migration from Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Black, R. / Engbersen, G. / Okólski, M., and C. Panțiru. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 271-87.

<sup>40</sup> Brücker, H. 2013. *Zuwanderung aus Bulgarien und Rumänien vor der Arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit. Aktuelle Berichte*. Nürnberg: IAB; Losse, B. 2013. Sinn: Keine Sozialhilfe mehr für arbeitslose EU-Zuwanderer. *Wirtschaftswoche*, 2 March 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Rass, C. 2012. *Staatsverträge und >Gastarbeiter< im Migrationsregime des >Dritten Reiches<. Motive, Intentionen und Kontinuitäten*, in *Nationalsozialistisches Migrationsregime und >Volksgemeinschaft<*, edited by Oltmer, J. Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 159-84.

<sup>42</sup> Pries, L. 2014. *Migration und Nationalsozialismus—Ein immer noch blinder Fleck der Soziologie?*, in *Soziologie und Nationalsozialismus*, edited by Christ, M. and M. Suderland. M. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 417.

fact that migration is rarely a singular ‘one-point-in-time-event’ and an individual rational choice decision, but it is normally an iterative-sequential, long-lasting, reversible dynamic of processing and negotiating many criteria and aspects with oneself, the narrow family and the broader social groups.

So what happened with migration and remittances, when Bulgaria and Romania entered the EU in 2007 and gained full labor mobility with Germany only since 2014? Studies reveal a complex picture where the selective access to work before 2014 did not lead to a general ‘immigration into the social welfare systems’. In 2012 and 2013, the share of employed persons of all Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants aged 15 to 65 in Germany was almost as high as of German citizenship holders, and it was higher than for the overall foreign working age population. The unemployment rate of Romanians was similar or even lower than for German citizenship holders, and it was much lower (almost the half) than for the group of all labor migrants. For Bulgarian immigrants, the labor market performance was substantially lower, employment rates were lower (only half) than for Romanian or German workers, unemployment rate was as high as for all foreign workers and almost double of that of German citizenship holders.<sup>43</sup> The main explanation for these differences between migrants from Romania and Bulgaria is the lack of educational and occupational qualification. Nevertheless, not only in Germany, but also in France (e.g. offering return bonuses for Sinti and Roma people) and especially in the UK skepticism against Romanian and Bulgarian migration remained strong in public discourse and politic parties (and fueled the Brexiteers).<sup>44</sup>

On the other side, in sending countries like Bulgaria or Romania there actually arose some severe challenges of brain drain. Since the EU enlargement process, the emigration rate of tertiary educated persons increased substantially in all accession countries. In 2010, Romania had the highest rate of 20 percent, while Bulgaria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland ranged between 12 and 15 percent.<sup>45</sup> Considering emigration rates of college graduates during the period 1990 to 2000, Romania was among the world top ten

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<sup>43</sup> Brücker, *Zuwanderung*, 7; “At this moment, data of employment and social welfare receivers do not justify to qualify the immigration in general as ‘immigration of poverty’” (Brücker, *Zuwanderung*, 2); this does not mean that there were not hotspots of immigration of poor and low skilled or even illiterate persons especially from Bulgaria, see e.g. KALKschmiede. 2012. *Zuwanderung aus Rumänien und Bulgarien. Hintergrund, Herausforderungen und Handlungsansätze. Erfahrungen aus nordrhein-westfälischen Städten*. Köln: KALKschmiede; Kurtenbach, S. 2013. Neuzuwanderer in städtischen Ankunftsgebieten. Ru-mänische und bulgarische Zuwanderer in der Dortmunder Nordstadt. *ZEFIR-Forschungsbericht* Band 3. Bochum: RUB-ZEFIR; SVR (Sachverständigenrat für Migration und Integration). 2019. *Bewegte Zeiten: Rückblick auf die Integrations- und Migrationspolitik der letzten Jahre. Jahresgutachten 2019*. Berlin: SVR, 17-19.

<sup>44</sup> Independently of such differentiated findings of social science research in Germany, the All Party Parliamentary Group for European Reform (APPG) discussed controversially (see the statements of Romanian and Bulgarian governments) the lifting of transitional controls for Bulgaria and Romania in 2013, see ICF GHK. 2013. *A fact finding analysis on the impact on the Member States’ social security systems of the entitlements of non-active intra-EU migrants to special non-contributory cash benefits and healthcare granted on the basis of residence. DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion via DG Justice Framework Contract*; APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group for European Reform). 2013. *Inquiry into EU free movement and immigration: The lifting of transitional controls for Bulgaria and Romania*. London: Open Europe.

<sup>45</sup> Ionescu, L. 2015. Emigration from Eastern Europe with a Focus on Brain Drain. *Journal of Social and Economic Statistics* 4(2), 64 and 65.

countries.<sup>46</sup> In 2005/2006 almost a third of all Romanian emigrants resided in Germany, almost a quarter in Spain and some 14 percent in Italy.<sup>47</sup> “Most of the skilled labor has a university education degree either in medicine or IT. About half of the 5000 graduates of Romanian universities in computer science emigrate each year”.<sup>48</sup>

The situation for doctors in Romania and Bulgaria is especially severe. In countries like Germany, they could earn almost ten times what the salary for a physician is in their countries of training. “Since Romania joined the European Union in 2007, about 14.000 doctors left Romania. Over the past 2 years, 30% of resident doctors emigrated, reducing the number of physicians from 20.000 in 2011 to 14.000 in 2013” (ibid). A newspaper report cites a Romanian thoracic surgeon working in the UK: “We are the ones getting screwed, not the Brits [...] The Brits complain that we will steal their benefits? They are scared that we will abuse the NHS? That’s ironic given that the NHS runs thanks to the thousands of Romanian doctors working for the NHS.” (Fontanella-Khan 2014, NHS is the National Health Service in UK). Although the overall brain drain out of Bulgaria is lower than for Romania, a report stated “Bulgaria’s medical field suffers from brain drain. Each year between 500 and 600 doctors choose to continue their careers abroad, while around 600 new doctors are graduating each year in the whole country” (Ionescu 2014).

In a recent study and based on extended personal interviews with Romanian physicians working abroad, Dumitru analyzed types of *professional remittances* that the interviewees sent to organizations in their country of origin.<sup>49</sup> She defines professional remittances as “the transfer of technical and industry or sector specific knowledge, skills, ideas and professional training”.<sup>50</sup> Such professional remittances could include (1) changing normative values, ideas and beliefs related to the professional sphere, (2) new social practices in relevant working areas, (3) extended social capital, especially as networks of professionals as experts, and (4) innovating social identities as physicians and citizens. The study extends the perspective of “brain drain” (in the sense of emigrating experts) and of “economic remittances” (as money transfers towards the country of origin) and shows the transnational professional ties and their potentials. Ciumasu already had shown that only some four out of ten Romanian scientists working abroad actually collaborated at an individual level with scientists living in Romania, but an overwhelming ninety five percent were interested in such collaborations, especially in the interchange of knowledge and ideas.<sup>51</sup> Dumitru found: “Out of the fifteen participants, eight remitted professionally in Romania, out of which five remitted only in the professional normative structure category – discussion and opinions with Romanian peers and friends and casual

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<sup>46</sup> Docquier, F. / Özden, Ç. and G. Peri. 2011. The Labor Market Effects of Immigration and Emigration in OECD Countries. *IZA DP* No. 6258. Bonn: IZA, 43.

<sup>47</sup> Widmaier, S. and J. Dumont. 2011. *Are recent immigrants different? A new profile of immigrants in the OECD based on DIOC 2005/06*. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 126, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Ionescu, *Emigration*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Dumitru, O. 2022. *Professional Remittances of the Romanian Physicians Abroad: A Transnational Approach*. PhD-thesis. Ruhr-Universität Bochum-Fakultät für Sozialwissenschaft.

<sup>50</sup> Dumitru, *Professional Remittances*, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Ciumasu, I.M. 2010. Turning brain drain into brain networking. *Science and Public Policy* 37(2), 135-146.

interviews in the Romanian media.<sup>52</sup> The other three of the physicians that remitted professionally, did so in a combination of all four categories of professional remittances.”

The example of the accession of new member states to the EU reveals complex interactions between countries and factors like demography, history, educational systems and labor market conditions. The case of the EU also demonstrates that the issue of labor migration cannot be reduced to economic remittances, but has to include the transfer of knowledge, cultural norms, political ideas etc. A differentiated study on brain drain and brain gain concluded: “sending countries might further benefit from highly qualified emigration through remittances, transnational networks or knowledge transfer. The main social implication of large highly qualified emigration flows concerns the emergence or aggravation of demographic imbalances, such as reinforcement of a population’s ageing or shrinkage. In addition, large highly qualified emigration flows might lead to the emergence of a brain drain chain”.<sup>53</sup> The experience of the EU underlines the need to take into account power imbalances between richer member states like Germany or France and poorer countries like Bulgaria or Romania. It also reveals that only focusing on economic remittances favors the positive perspective on the benefits for countries of origin but does not take into account the (brain gain) benefits for countries of arrival and the manifold challenges or damages for countries of origin. Therefore, a perspective on the complex, multidimensional and multidirectional impacts of transmittances seems more adequate. For Rumania, a study of physicians’ migration “highlighted the poor efficiency of specific, one-off policy measures and the need for an articulated vision to reform the health sector, supported by public policies, based on a mix of measures to meet the multidimensional requirements of service quality in health”.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, the EU stands for a complex history of unequal power and dependency relations. Societal remittances have to take into account these historical experiences that are still present in current narratives and symbolic interchanges. End of the 18th and during the 19th century Poland was divided by its neighboring states three times, leading to a mosaic of historically grown minorities of Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Germans and Kashubian. In Bulgaria and Romania still live minorities of Turks, Roma, Hungarians or Germans. Some six million Jews, who represented great part of intellectual life in many countries, especially in Poland, but also in Bulgaria and Romania, were killed during the Nazi-regime. All this is in play until today as historical transmittances, e.g. when Roma people claim for recognition and restitution or are still discriminated in EU labor markets.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dumitru, *Professional Remittances*, 190.

<sup>53</sup> Teney, C. 2017. *Conclusion*, in *Brain Drain – Brain Gain: European Labour Markets in Times of Crisis*, edited by Schellinger, A. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Apostu, S. / Vasile, V. / Marin, E. and E. Bunduchi. 2022. Factors Influencing Physicians Migration—A Case Study from Romania. *Mathematics* 10, 505, 22.

<sup>55</sup> FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights). 2019. *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 111-113.



### **Conclusions: From remittances to transmittances**

Migration has multifaceted preconditions, forms and consequences. The view on remittances should be broadened from economic to overall societal impacts and from unidirectional to multi-directional effects. The accession of 13 European countries to the EU in just a decade is a kind of 'natural experiment' to observe the impact of free mobility of persons between many different countries. First the Iron Curtain fell down at the beginning of the 1990s, then from the new century onwards the EU extended substantially as a space granting free mobility of goods, services, capital and people. There were many worries; some feared a mass influx of poor and low skilled migrants looking for social welfare benefits; other groups rejected open borders being afraid of wage dumping because migrants from poorer countries would accept lower than the established wages. Even where there was no harmonization in economic and/or political cooperation, like between Russia and the EU or between Russia and its former allies, the historically grown social networks, imaginaries, and lived experiences proved to have its own momentum.

The review of the European migration and remittances dynamics offers four basic lessons. First, in spite of speaking of remittances, the term transmittances better reflects the multi-directionality of migration impacts as studied in the transnationalization context. When money transfers go e.g. from Germany to Romania, the other side of the coin is the mobility of labor force and knowledge from Romania to Germany. Second, transmittances do have a strong economic dimension, but also include social, cultural and political effects. Therefore we should speak of societal transmittances when dealing with the complex social intertwining between different places and countries. Third, the question of societal transmittances has to be embedded in its historical context. As the example of Poland reveals, what in a short-term view might appear as a brain drain of knowledge could result in brain gain or in strengthening transnational social spaces at medium term. On this background, remittances could enhance the autonomy and life prospects of the mobile persons themselves. And this could be in favor of the country of origin or of arrival – or of both. Fourth, the conditions, forms and effects of societal transmittances have to be related to power relations and governance structures at a global and regional level, between sending and receiving countries and the resources of migrant groups and their organizations. Europe is one of the most intriguing regions and a laboratory to study these topics scientifically. The pressure for further enlargements is high.

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