

**TRANSEUROPE RESEARCH NETWORK:  
TRANSNATIONALISATION AND CHANGING LIFE  
COURSE INEQUALITY IN EUROPE (TransEurope)**  
Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)



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The European Science Foundation (ESF) was established in 1974 to create a common European platform for cross-border cooperation in all aspects of scientific research.

With its emphasis on a multidisciplinary and pan-European approach, the Foundation provides the leadership necessary to open new frontiers in European science.

Its activities include providing science policy advice (Science Strategy); stimulating co-operation between researchers and organisations to explore new directions (Science Synergy); and the administration of externally funded programmes (Science Management). These take place in the following areas: Physical and engineering sciences; Medical sciences; Life, earth and environmental sciences; Humanities; Social sciences; Polar; Marine; Space; Radio astronomy frequencies; Nuclear physics.

Headquartered in Strasbourg with offices in Brussels, the ESF's membership comprises 78 national funding agencies, research performing agencies and academies from 30 European nations.

The Foundation's independence allows the ESF to objectively represent the priorities of all these members.

# Introduction

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*Globalisation* and *Europeanisation* have become central reference points for media, politicians, academics, and policy-makers to explain social change and understand social inequality in European member countries. Globalisation and Europeanisation bring broader social regulations and tensions in national structures. They are two transnational processes experienced mutually by all nations, yet each nation appears to be impacted differently.

Although the phenomena of Europeanisation and globalisation are increasingly dominating public and political discourse, there remains a lack of research about how these processes affect and change family and employment lives of European citizens. So far, little empirical research connects these transnational changes to inequality at the individual level in Europe. Furthermore, it is not yet established whether individual life courses in European countries are experiencing more convergence or divergence.

The TransEurope Research Network closes this gap by bringing together leading European experts in Political Science, Demography, Economics, and Sociology from 7 countries to conceptualise, operationalise, test, and compare the impact of transnational shifts on life course inequality across Europe. This international and interdisciplinary design of the network allows the study of the supranational processes of globalisation and Europeanisation while at the same time paying attention to their repercussions in different national contexts.

Furthermore, TransEurope explicitly addresses the skills shortage in scholars able to perform international comparative research through a programme for young scientists to be trained in the analysis of comparative life course and panel data by the TransEurope network of senior scientists across Europe. The Programme seeks to create high levels of scholarship and productivity by bringing together international experts and junior researchers within Europe and creating the opportunity for them to collaborate on innovative and path-breaking comparative research.

The ESF TransEurope Research Programme runs for five years from June 2006 to June 2011.



# Contextual Background

## Globalisation, Transnationalisation and Increasing Uncertainty in European Countries

In the last two decades, European economies and societies have been undergoing rapid and substantial changes. Since the end of the 1980s and the breakdown of the Iron Curtain, the intensity and reach of various transnational interactions - in areas like the economy, information, culture, and politics - appear to have increased in most industrialised countries. The term *globalisation* describes these trends.

Globalisation is a broad and inherently complex conception, encompassing both the social and the economic sphere and based on the notion that the world is increasingly taking on a more *transnational* nature. Via transnational relations, domestic and international structures such as policies, politics, welfare regimes, and markets, become increasingly fused. Transnationalism fundamentally undermines the strict separation between national and international boundaries, which gives rise to potential policies, practices and relations that transcend domestic boundaries.

The phenomenon of transnationalisation can be characterised by four interrelated transnational shifts:

- First, transnationalisation refers to the *globalisation and Europeanisation of markets and domestic structures and subsequent decline in the meaning and efficacy at national borders*. It is connected with changes in laws, institutions, or practices, including the modification of trade regulations, political discourse and treaties, which make various transactions (in terms of commodities, labour, services and capital) easier or less expensive across national borders.
- Second, transnational shifts relate to the *intensification of competition*, i.e., the notion that capital and labour are increasingly mobile. This is particularly important in an integrated European market and forces not only firms but also national economies and welfare states to continuously adjust and become internationally competitive, often entailing a turn towards more deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation.
- A third feature is the *spread of transnational networks of people and firms linked by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)* such as microcomputers and the Internet. These ICTs, together with modern mass media, allow faster diffusion of information and knowledge over long distances. They increasingly allow people to share information, to connect and to create an instant worldwide standard of comparison and effectively render physical space and distance irrelevant.

- Fourth, transnationalisation is inherently related to the *rise in the importance of markets and their dependence on random shocks*. Actors are increasingly in the hands of anonymous global markets, yet changes are more dynamic and less predictable. In particular, global prices become exogenously more liable to fluctuations because world-wide supply, demand, or both are getting increasingly dependent on random shocks somewhere on the globe (e.g., major scientific discoveries, technical inventions, major political or economic upsets).

These mechanisms generate an unprecedented level of *structural uncertainty in European nations* about economic and social developments. For individuals on European labour markets, uncertainty may take the form of *economic uncertainty* (e.g. economic precariousness of labour market position), *temporal uncertainty* (no permanent contracts) or *employment relation uncertainty* (e.g. public vs. private sector, dependent workers vs. self-employment). This uncertainty makes rational decision making increasingly difficult as behavioural alternatives (e.g. inability to compare and rank options for employment careers), the possible consequences of a decision (e.g. inability to assess outcomes of future actions due to reliance on uncertain labour market positions and employers) as well as the amount of information to be collected for a particular decision are becoming blurred. Individuals are therefore increasingly reluctant to make long-term binding life course commitments such as partnerships or family formation.

KOF Globalisation Index,  
1970-2003,  
selected countries



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## Transnationalisation and the Importance of National Institutions

It is not only increasing uncertainty that is important when analysing the consequences of transnational shifts in Europe; rather it is how rising uncertainty is 'institutionally filtered' and channelled towards specific social groups in various members of the European Economic Area (EEA). Increasing uncertainty does not impact all regions, states, organisations or individuals in the same way. There are *institutional settings* and social structures in Europe, historically grown and country-specific, that determine the degree to which people are affected by rising uncertainty with the net result of rising levels of inequality.

These institutions include

- **employment relations:** This includes the types of work councils, collective bargaining systems, strength of unions versus employer organisations, and labour legislation or administrative regulations.
- **educational systems:** There are great differences among European nations in the way they: (1) differentiate the maximum number of school years attended by all and implement tracking (stratification) or standardise the quality of education (standardisation), (2) value certificates or ability-based learning, and (3) link education with entry into the labour market.
- **national welfare state regimes:** Modern European nations have created different welfare regimes that reflect diverse national ideologies about social solidarity as well as gender and social equality.
- **the family:** There is a close interdependence between family dynamics (i.e., partnership and fertility decisions) on the one hand and educational and employment careers on the other.

European and national institutions have a certain tendency to persist by their very nature and design and act as a sort of intervening variable between global macro forces and the responses at the micro level. Thus, it cannot be expected that increasing uncertainty leads to a rapid convergence of life courses in all European countries, but that there are path-dependent developments within European nations, depending on the design of nation-specific institutions.

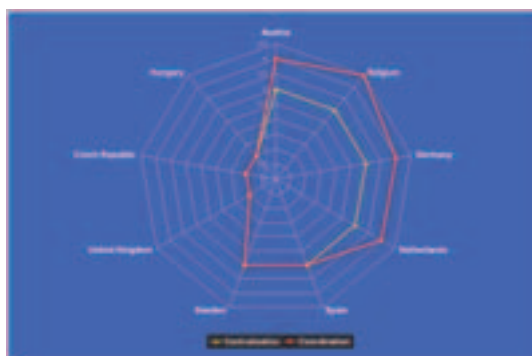
## TransEurope: An integrated Research Approach towards Transnationalisation and Life Course Impacts

The TransEurope research network will provide an in-depth analysis of the development of transnationalisation and its effects on life courses in contemporary Europe. It will create concrete measures of transnational shifts that can be used in comparative analyses and will focus on the effects of national policies on managing the consequences of a new transnational Europe. It comprehensively examines:

- the reach of globalising and Europeanising transformations within European nations,
- the policy responses of various European nations and cultures to these transformations,
- the effectiveness of these responses toward furthering national interests or slowing the effects of transnational shifts,
- the consequences of transnational shifts on social inequality at the individual level throughout European member nations, and
- the impact of transnational labour market changes on family dynamics (partnership and fertility trends) in various European nations.

It is likely that, as a result of transnationalisation, some European regions or nations will emerge as new economic leaders while others will lose their privileged positions. A goal of the network is to evaluate such changes.

Level of centralisation and coordination of wage setting institutions, 1995-2000, selected countries



# Aims and Objectives

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## Scientific Objectives

The Programme's main scientific objectives are:

- 1) to isolate and specify the mechanisms through which transnational developments of globalisation and Europeanisation change the relations of social inequality across the life course in various European nations;
- 2) to develop and test measures of the transnational shifts, which can be used in comparative longitudinal life course studies;
- 3) to understand and identify the role of institutions and social policies in Europe that filter divergent responses to the transnational shifts brought about by Europeanisation and globalisation that subsequently impact life course inequality; and
- 4) to study individual-level responses to transnational shifts at pivotal life course transitions (entry into the labour market, job mobility, re-entry after a period of non-employment, retirement, and family dynamics) in Europe.

## Key Research Questions

Key research questions include:

- How do European countries resolve the tension between the established insider-outsider labour markets and the simultaneous pressure from globalisation and Europeanisation forces to 'flexibly adjust' their labour?
- To which extent are young people able to establish their labour market and family ties under conditions of increasing labour market flexibility and uncertainty?
- What are the consequences of rapidly changing, period-specific work-entry and family dynamics on intergenerational relationships?  
Have transnational shifts contributed to changes in family dynamics, such as partnership formation rates and types, functioning, and dissolution probabilities via its effects on the labour market?
- To which extent does the increasingly transnational nature of Europe alter upward, downward, and lateral mobility patterns and, as a consequence, change social inequality in society?
- To what extent are men and women's life courses converging or diverging under transnational shifts, and how do nation-specific traditions and policies affect this movement?
- Have globalisation and Europeanisation fundamentally undermined the impact of nation-specific institutions on the life course by blurring the boundaries between national and international processes and practices via transnationalisation?

- How do different nations respond to transnational shifts such as supranational European policies? Conversely, how do governing bodies at the European level react to nation-specific life course and inequality structures that are based on the existing configurations of the labour market, family, and organisation of social support in different nations?
- Does transnationalisation contribute to more geographical mobility across national borders and regions?
- Which of the historically dominant life course patterns in different European societies persist in the face of transnationalisation, which new ones emerge, and what are the consequences for social inequality in Europe?
- To what extent can recommodification processes in the family system and welfare regimes be observed in various European nations and for different life cycle stages? To what extent do such processes expand social inequality?

## Added Value

In addition to the thematic focus, TransEurope also aims at the **development of new comparative methodologies**. The network is innovative in that it uses longitudinal data such as panels and retrospective life histories and in terms of a more systematic international comparison without neglecting important differences among nations. The main methods will be discrete event history and panel methods, which allow for 'causal-type' analysis of events that represent changes from one discrete life course state to another. At the same time, macro-level transnationalisation indicators can be simultaneously included in these or other types of multi-level statistical models. As one of very few studies in the Social Sciences, TransEurope therefore aims at establishing a direct micro-macro-link by uncovering empirical consequences of the macro-process of transnationalisation at the individual level.

Finally, the Programme will link not only persons, but also institutions, by including both junior and senior researchers. A clear aim of the Programme is to **train and qualify a new generation of quantitative social scientists** via workshops and a summer school and to provide them with the opportunity to visit institutes in other nations in order to undertake international comparative research.

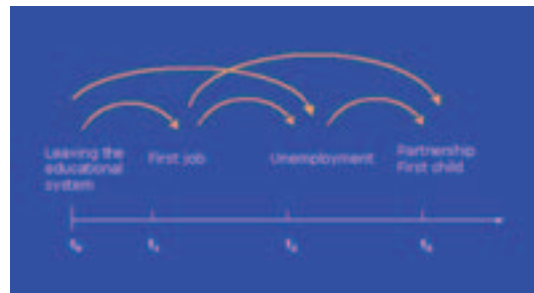
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## Dissemination of Results

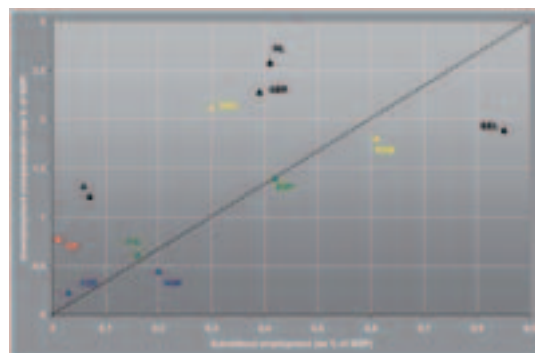
The output of up-to-date and widely disseminated results to the broadest relevant audience is another key target of this Programme. To this end, we expect each network member/group to contribute one or more *articles per year to international peer-reviewed journals*. Ongoing work will be available to the widest possible community through a *working paper series*, which will be posted on the Programme's website. *Workshops and generous scientific exchange grants* will furthermore encourage transnational comparative papers and networking of scholars.

Network members will be free to organise *additional research initiatives* according to the particular problems and circumstances of the European nation they represent and to use the network to arrange meaningful international collaborations that bring forward the scholarship on the effects of transnational shifts on European social inequality.

Modelling the transition to adulthood



Public expenditure (subsidised employment and unemployment compensation) as percentage of GDP, selected countries, 1997-98



## Programme Approach

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Key milestones within this network are organised within five phases, aimed at the development of general transnationalisation measures as well as a consecutive analysis of four pivotal life course transitions:

- Year 1 - 2006: Developing measures of transnationalisation for comparative work, organising collaboration structures and potential expansion of network.
- Year 2 - 2007: Transition to Adulthood/Employment Entrance Transitions + *Summer school*.
- Year 3 - 2008: Job mobility transitions.
- Year 4 - 2009: Fertility decisions, employment re-entry from caregiving.
- Year 5 - 2010: Employment exit decisions.
- Early 2011: Final conference, culmination of all project phases.

*Grants* for research visits will enable junior and senior researchers to establish and expand scientific collaboration in the field. A *yearly workshop* will provide researchers with the opportunity to present and discuss work in more detail. A *summer school* will allow talented young researchers at graduate level to enlarge their knowledge and acquire skills for advanced cross-national research from leading experienced researchers in the field. The final year will consist of a *large conference* where all project phases and the accumulated milestones of the project will be presented and discussed to a larger audience.

## Grants

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A concrete means in which the network will bring together researchers is to offer grants for research visits to enable senior and junior scientists to actively cooperate in research. Grants will be available on a competitive basis to participating researchers in the programme using two general categories of: 1) 5 day research visits, and 2) 15 day exchange grants. Grants will be offered on a competitive basis of six 5-day and two 15-day grants offered each year. Calls for grants will be issued early each year from 2007 onwards. Applicants should have experience or be working in a relevant field of study.

## Workshops

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From 2007-2010, a series of annual 2-day workshops will be held in order to bring together approximately 20 researchers from all seven member countries. The workshops will consist of presentations of papers by all participating countries, active in-depth discussion of problems and solutions, presentation of data and methodological developments and exchange of information. Each workshop will focus on a pre-specified theme dealing with a specific life course transition.

The workshops will take place in late August and early September of each year in different locations, as outlined below:

- 2007: Transition to Adulthood/Employment Entrance Transitions (Groningen, the Netherlands)
- 2008: Job mobility transitions (Stockholm, Sweden)
- 2009: Fertility decisions, employment re-entry from caregiving (Tallinn, Estonia)
- 2010: Employment exit decisions (Bamberg, Germany)



## Research School

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In the second year (2007), the annual TransEurope workshop will be combined with a 5-day TransEurope Research School for approximately 25 students in Groningen, the Netherlands. The Research School is directed towards graduate students, and a call for participation will be issued in late 2006.

Senior researchers with high international standing in the field of transnational comparative research and longitudinal statistical analysis will provide the training. The School will focus on a theoretical introduction to the study of transnationalisation and applied methodological training using the materials developed within this project with a focus on data preparation, collecting and constructing transnational indicators, comparison of data sets, and creating comparative variables and indices. Students will actively learn how transnational forces have affected European nations in disparate ways and how to apply indicators to central life course transitions and more specifically early labor market transitions and the transition to adulthood.

At the end of the Research School, students will attend and actively take part in the research network 2-day annual workshop, which will be a leading-edge seminar on the impact of transnationalisation on the transition to adulthood and early labor market experiences.



## Conference

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The project will culminate in early 2011 with a major conference that highlights the central findings of this programme and their broader impact. All project phases and the accumulated milestones of the project will be presented to and discussed within a larger audience.

Key researchers and members of the non-academic community (e.g., union members, policy-makers) will be brought together for 4 days and 3 nights. The conference will consist of lectures, exchange of information, data demonstrations and active panel and informal discussions.



## Funding

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ESF Research Networking Programmes are principally funded by the Foundation's Member Organisations on an à la carte basis. TransEurope is supported by:

- Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung in Österreich (FWF)  
*Austrian Science Fund, Austria*
- Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek-Vlaanderen (FWO)  
*Fund for Scientific Research - Flanders, Belgium*
- Akademie věd České republiky (AVČR)  
*Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Czech Republic*
- Grantová agentura České republiky (GAČR)  
*Czech Science Foundation, Czech Republic*
- Eesti Teadusfond (ETF)  
*Estonian Science Foundation, Estonia*
- Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)  
*German Research Foundation, Germany*
- Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO)  
*Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Netherlands*
- Forskningsrådet för arbetsliv och socialvetenskap (FAS)  
*Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, Sweden*

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