

Balancing Mobility and Solidarity

Multilevel Governance Challenges of East-West EU Mobility in Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden

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Abstract

Each year, millions of Europeans exercise their right to move freely between EU member states – particularly so since the eastern enlargements in the 2000s. Mobility from eastern and central Europe (CEE) affects host member states in a number of ways; economically, legally, administratively and socially. Such effects are perhaps most clearly manifested in the frequent claims from popular destination member states that the east-west mobility excessively burdens national welfare systems and challenges existing labour market standards.

The efforts to manage the consequences of the east-west mobility are at the centre of attention in this thesis. Specifically, it compares the governance of EU mobility from the CEE region to Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden. The thesis brings attention to how problems are defined and addressed in multilevel contexts, analysing the role of national welfare and social partner institutions in governance.

The thesis applies data from the European, national and sub-national levels of governance. The main findings indicate that, in the absence of rigid structures imposed from the European level, problem definitions related to the welfare state or the labour market partly diverge across welfare regimes. Diverging problem definitions make coordination across contexts and levels unlikely. Nor do similar problem definitions related to welfare and labour market consequences necessarily result in similar governance processes. If possible, member states manage welfare and labour market related consequences of intra-EU mobility within existing governance structures. Consequences not directly linked to welfare or labour market institutions are sometimes problematised in similar ways across levels and contexts and addressed by voluntary, non-hierarchical governance across sectors and levels. The empirical results also indicate that governance structures may encourage the emergence of similar problem definitions by imposing common routines or encouraging coordination.

Key Words: EU mobility, policy, multilevel governance, national institutions, problem definitions.