

PhD Partnership in Global Social Protection
Transnational Studies Initiative - Harvard University
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The world is on the move. One out of every thirty-three persons is a migrant. There are an estimated 214 million international migrants worldwide, up from 150 million in 2000. On the one hand, migrants provide a low-cost and flexible workforce for receiving countries that helps counteract declines in the labor force due to an aging native-born population. On the other hand, migrant remittances may make important contributions to sending country development that, in some cases, far exceed international aid and are often used to compensate for state retraction from public services and social benefits. Yet migration also has costs. Some of them—including the impact of “brain drain” and an overreliance on migration and remittances in sending countries, or the effects of migration on employment and wages in receiving nations—are well researched. Other costs, especially those associated with social reproduction and social protection, have not been sufficiently studied. Where and how will people on the move be protected and provided for? What new institutional arrangements, or forms of global social protection (GSP), are emerging? How might these developments affect the ability and willingness of nation-states to provide social welfare to citizens and non-citizens?

The Transnational Studies Initiative (TSI) at Harvard University will begin to work on these topics during the upcoming academic year. We will host a monthly seminar series and a small conference where participants will take stock of the current state-of-the-art of GSP and chart an agenda for the future. Our goal is to develop collaborative research that will help move pieces of this agenda forward.

The following are some ideas about the questions we might explore:

- How can migrants claim eligibility and access rights and protections outside the traditional framework of the nation-state as provider and regulator of services? How do individuals claim rights from their home countries when they live outside them? How do individuals get rights in receiving countries when they are long-term non-citizens? How might eligibility claims vary across migrants, depending on whether migration was forced or voluntary; migrant’s anticipated length of stay; and migrants’ legal status, gender, skill-level and education, class, and social networks?
- As structural adjustment continues to eviscerate many state social welfare regimes, what transnational organizations, institutions, or social arrangements are filling the void? How are these new institutional arrangements produced? What are the power and interests behind them? How do they vary across national contexts (U.S./Mexico versus Germany/Morocco), and across sectors (i.e., legal rights versus the right to health and education)? Who benefits and who gets left out?

- What examples of new transnational social welfare institutions can we find and how might we study them? Examples may include transnational bank accounts that allow immigrants to deposit money in the receiving country and their family members in the sending nation to withdraw it for health and educational expenses; college degree or professional training programs that are recognized in the home and host country; or immigrant women's rights NGOs that appeal to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- Is the situation broadly similar in the case of both international and internal labor migration, especially in countries undergoing rapid urbanization in the context of significant regional inequality, such as China and India?
- What are the hidden costs of migration for states, including, for example, providing pre-migration education, the costs of health care during and after migration, and arrangements for pensions or other retirement benefits for individuals who spent most of their working years abroad?

Starting in January 2014, TSI will host one or two PhD or post-doctoral students working on related topics who would like to partner with us on this intellectual journey. These individuals will work with Professors Levitt and Viterna on developing these ideas, participate in all TSI activities, and be welcome to take part in all open University seminars and public conferences. Most of the time they will be free to pursue their own research interests and interact with members of the general Harvard community. TSI can offer shared office space, library privileges, visiting scholar status for J-1 visa applications, and intellectual engagement, but no funding. We hope that successful candidates will stay for a minimum of six months but we are open to considering shorter stays as well.

All interested candidates should send their resume and statement of research interests to Peggy Levitt (plevitt@wellesley.edu) and Jocelyn Viterna (jviterna@wjh.harvard.edu) by October 15, 2013. Selected candidates will be interviewed by skype.