

Caught Between the National and the Transnational: EU Claimants at the Frontline of Welfare Policy

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My doctoral project opens the black box of social service provision in Germany. The research draws attention to the politics of belonging: onto why and for whom formal rights might not map onto substantive benefit take-up, and thus on who remains (un)intentionally excluded from European social citizenship.

The analysis draws on a wealth of 118 qualitative interviews with jobcentre employees, migrant claimants, welfare support and advisory organisations, as well as participant observation data in three Berlin-based jobcentres. The novelty of the research lies in the analysis of the interplay between frontline bureaucrats as gate-keepers of access to benefits and services, who interpret and potentially subvert eligibility criteria, and potential EU migrant applicants who engage or not in claims-making. It explores the inequalities embedded

within the daily practice of administering EU migrants' legal entitlements to basic social security in German jobcentres. The project also offers an account of the coping strategies vulnerable EU citizens deploy in light of the insecurities they face, such as the involvement of cultural brokers.

Research on social security access to date has neglected this dimension of informal inequality of treatment between (non) belonging claimant groups. Belonging here acts as proxy for the often complex and intersecting linkages of class, nationality and citizenship, and other critical factors such as gender. The nexus between deservingness judgement and belonging in local implementation has remained undertheorised. My analysis thus provides a valuable addition to the existing street-level bureaucracy literature.