

# Institutionalising transnationalism: The national welfare system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives

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## Preface

I write this on a flight from Oslo to Warsaw, one of numerous journeys my PhD research has taken me on. This time, I am on my way to a conference. On past occasions, I have travelled for workshops, meetings, fieldwork or other conferences. In 2017, I went to Rotterdam as a visiting researcher. During the course of this trip, I became personally involved with the theme I have studied these last four years: the encounter between national welfare services and people who are transnationally mobile. While my dissertation examines state bureaucrats' perspectives on this encounter, I myself have experienced it from another perspective.

Together with my husband and our six-month old, I moved to the Netherlands for four months to work at Erasmus University Rotterdam. We were required to report our stay abroad to the Norwegian welfare administration, apply to maintain our membership in the Norwegian Insurance Scheme and export our parental and child benefits. Our applications were accepted, and we received our monthly social security benefits as usual. In the Netherlands, we did not need to register our stay. We avoided the administrative hassle by only staying three months and 30 days, thus circumventing the four-month registration requirement.

During the stay, both my child and I needed medical assistance. Due to our lack of an official residence permit, we could not register with any *huisarts*, the Dutch equivalent of a family doctor or general practitioner. We had to go to a private practitioner. Through our Norwegian Insurance Scheme we had European

Health Insurance, but since the private practitioner did not accept our European Health Insurance Card, we had to cover the expenses ourselves. The Norwegian Health Economics Administration informed us that the Dutch health insurance scheme was required to cover our expenses in line with EU coordination principles, but – if they did not – we could get our expenses reimbursed in Norway by filling out some forms and providing receipts and a doctor's notice in English. Towards the end of our stay, the doctor we had been to on several occasions did not agree to write any document in English. We were told we would receive one in Dutch by mail, but since they only sent such mail to Dutch postal addresses, we never received the relevant documentation. It probably landed in our Dutch mailbox long after our return to Norway.

In the middle of our stay, I became urgently ill. I needed to be examined and treated at a hospital, and since I did not know if this would result in lengthy hospitalisation, I decided to go to Norway for the treatment. I was scheduled for hospitalisation some weeks later on, and stayed in Rotterdam until then. In the meantime I got a doctor's note from my general practitioner in Norway through a phone call so I could receive sickness benefits while abroad. Once at the hospital in Oslo, I was told that I had to go through surgery within a week, and therefore my husband and baby travelled to Oslo to join me. Following further examinations over the subsequent days, I was told that my condition was less severe than initially suspected and that the surgery could be postponed. We therefore returned to Rotterdam and stayed there for the rest of the originally planned period.

Throughout our stay in the Netherlands, my family and I were heavily involved with national welfare services in both countries. We encountered bureaucrats over the phone, through the mail and face to face. We talked with Dutch and Norwegian national health and insurance offices. And when trying to get our travel expenses related to my hospital treatment reimbursed (I did not succeed), I had to engage with my private and workplace's insurance companies as well as the Norwegian national health office. Throughout these processes and encounters, some of our needs were smoothly accommodated, such as with our

social security benefits, while other issues were tricky and required us to use skills and creativity to get the services and rights we were entitled to. Some of the bureaucrats were highly helpful, while others did not provide the information we needed, and some argued sternly that the information we had received from other institutions was incorrect.

I have realised that my own transnational experiences exemplify what other people may – or may not – go through. Their transnational attachment to one or more states' welfare services may be more or less strong than mine, and they may live transnational lives for a longer period of time, over a larger geographical distance or in more than two countries. Approaching Warsaw Chopin Airport, I wonder how many of my fellow passengers have attachments in both Poland and Norway. I wonder what their relations to the different countries' welfare systems are, where they go to the dentist, which country pays their sickness benefits and whether they save up for their retirement pensions in one, both or neither of the countries.

In my research, I did not study transnational individuals and their encounter with state welfare services. Rather, I studied this encounter from another perspective – that of the bureaucrats who work with welfare delivery to people who lead transnational lives. My own experiences from being transnational are not included in my dissertation's data, but they have served as a constant reminder of the complexity in the encounter between national welfare systems and transnational living.

## **Part I - Foundation**

## 1. Introduction

This dissertation is inspired by the growing phenomenon of transnational living. Individuals increasingly lead lives that span across national borders. These ‘transnationals’ are simultaneously attached to several countries through residency, work, family or national welfare systems, and may call two, or more, places home. This very act of *living* transnationally rattles the ground on which the nation-state is built. Sedentary ideas – or ideals – of citizenship, place-specific embeddedness and the state-individual relationship are under pressure. The sustainability of national welfare systems in light of international migration has long been scrutinised in academic and public spheres. Yet, research on this state-citizen encounter has largely focused on immigrants who arrive in host states, the process of integration and the effects of policies concerning immigrants who settle.

Arguably, people – including immigrant populations – engage in transnational mobility, practices and living to an extent that surpasses historical trends. Far from everybody lives in line with the sedentary ideals of the nation-state system, and many people struggle to fit their transnational lives into national containers (Faist 2017). While the last three decades have seen an increase in research on migrants’ transnational practices (Brochmann and Grødem 2013; Crepaz and Dahinden 2019; Levitt 2001), few studies explicitly address the relationship between the state and its transnational population. How welfare policies develop, and how the state, in practice, encounters transnational or highly mobile populations has stayed waiting in the wings of the scholarly stage. This is the major gap my dissertation seeks to address. To do so, I draw on previous explorations of transnational-national frictions, but I invert the focus: I fix the

lens on the nation-state, examining a national welfare system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives.

This dissertation concentrates on the Norwegian social security system. I draw on empirical research collected in the Directorate of Labour and Welfare (hereafter the Directorate) and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (hereafter NAV). The latter is the institution that provides public social security benefits and services to the population, and the former is the body overseeing that process. Through interviews, observation and textual analysis, I have explored how street-level, administrative and policymaking bureaucrats approach, perceive and accommodate these transnational clients. In three separate research articles, each of which comprises a chapter in this dissertation, I offer theoretically rich, empirically fresh conclusions and thereby contribute to research-based knowledge on the Norwegian welfare system's dynamic reactions and responses to transnational living.

Throughout the dissertation, I pull from various scholarly discourses. Discovering early on some gaps in the theory stirred an ambition in me to bridge distinct, distant research fields. Ideally, my work would have been meaningfully contextualised through a range of theoretical frames. The absence of one obvious overarching framework and a general lack of cross-field conversations, however, pushed me to design a three-part theoretical framework consisting of a conceptual background, a theoretical approach and a methodology for data collection and analysis. In each part, the dissertation draws on and combines multiple bodies of research. Combined, these numerous conceptual, theoretical and methodological strands have guided the dissertation and influenced all stages of my research process.

In brief, the conceptual approach I draw on lies within the broad field of transnationalism in migration studies. The theoretical approach is positioned at the nexus between several schools of thought, broadly grouped as three fields: *welfare state studies*, *(transnational) social protection* and *(transnational) social policy and social work*. The dissertation's methodological approach is



based on two institutional theoretical strands: *neo-institutional theory* and *institutional ethnography*. My methodology has influenced the process of data collection and choice of methods, but its theoretical nature has also influenced the overall research questions and the analytical process.

## Research questions

The driving question of this dissertation is multivalent, and its breadth is scalar. The encounter between nation-state systems and transnational populations refers, at a normative level, to the exclusivity and territoriality of social membership in the welfare state. Yet, this state-citizen crossover has practical and inter-human dynamics: it concerns relationships and lived experiences of the individuals who perform state actions and those on their receiving side. The questions guiding this work can therefore play out differently, depending on whose perspective they are answered from. The questions in focus are investigated from a bureaucratic point of departure, from within and across the institutional scales of a specific Norwegian welfare system: the Norwegian social security system. The main research question asks:

In light of the inherent contradiction between *national* state structures and *transnational* living practices, how does the Norwegian social security system encounter people who lead transnational lives?

To sharpen the scope of this monumental query, I pose three specific sub-questions. These questions, the theoretical framework and the empirical discoveries mutually influenced and shaped one another throughout the research stages. In the dissertation, the sub-questions are tackled separately in three articles, asking the following:

<b>1</b>	How do the social security system and bureaucrats <i>approach</i> the dynamic and diverse group of people whose lives span national borders?
<b>2</b>	How do social security bureaucrats <i>perceive</i> individuals' agency as they reconcile the conflicting acts of claiming national benefits and living transnationally?
<b>3</b>	Given the sedentary and national anchoring of the Norwegian welfare system, how do bureaucrats and institutional structures <i>adapt</i> to accommodate an increasingly transnational population?

I address these questions based on theoretical examination, ethnographic fieldwork and data analysis. While each article deals with one specific feature of the encounter in question, the three together shed light, from complementary angles, on overall patterns of this national welfare system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives. The articles are as follows:

- 1.** Who are the transnationals? Institutional categories beyond 'migrants'
- 2.** Reconciling transnational mobility and national social security: what say the welfare state bureaucrats?
- 3.** Accommodating transnational living in the Norwegian welfare system

### **Structure of the dissertation**

The following section begins by presenting the conceptual backdrop of the study. Here, I engage with the conceptual-theoretical notion that underpinned my

research: ‘transnationalism in migration studies’. I also clarify what the term ‘transnational living’ means. In Chapter 3, I outline my theoretical approach, which is made up of three broadly defined research strands: ‘welfare states and migration’; ‘(transnational) social protection’; and ‘(transnational) social policy and social work’. In Chapter 4, I contextualise the dissertation by situating it within the research discourses on the Nordic model and the Norwegian welfare system; elaborating on diversity and transnational living in Norway; and finally describing how I landed on the social security system as my field of focus. Chapter 5 introduces the methodology of the dissertation, which draws on ‘institutional ethnography’ and ‘neo-institutional theory’. In Chapter 6, I detail the process of data collection and discuss my ethical concerns. Chapter 7 introduces the analysis, illustrating how my methodological approach influenced the analytical process in practice. In Chapter 8, I provide an overview of the articles in the dissertation. Finally, I conclude with Chapter 9, highlighting the main contributions and findings of the dissertation. This is followed by full-text versions of the three articles.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

Existing theoretical discussions and understandings of the concept of transnationalism have underpinned the dissertation’s research idea, questions, analysis and, ultimately, findings. This chapter therefore elaborates on research, theories about and conceptualisations of transnationalism in migration studies and my understanding of ‘transnational living’.

### **Transnationalism in migration studies**

Within migration studies, ‘transnationalism’ is a well-established concept. In the early 1990s, transnationalism was pointed to as a neglected phenomenon. Research had found that migrants were not necessarily ‘uprooted’; rather, they could be closely attached to both their countries of settlement *and* their countries

of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1992a). Transnationalism was described early on as ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (Basch et al. 1994: 7). From then onwards, transnational studies gained prominence in migration studies, and a variety of transnational perspectives have been applied to understand current patterns of migration (Faist et al. 2013; Vertovec 2009). The growing focus on transnationalism in migration studies underscores the conceptual difference between transnational and international. Though the term was criticised early on for simply supplanting ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ (De Jong and Dannecker 2018), transnationalism evolved to become a specific segment of research focusing on ties that stretch ‘across borders’ (Pries 2007: 16). Where *international* signifies relation *between* nations, *transnational* indicates an extending *beyond* national boundaries (OED 2019a, 2019b). This was indeed the core idea when transnationalism was introduced. Rather than merely describing nation-centred and international migration dynamics, it underscores the ‘multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that *span* borders’ (Glick Schiller et al. 1992b: ix; emphasis mine).

Early scholars in the transnational field focused on a specific segment of practices, including to this day empirical investigations into remittance-sending, communication with relatives and campaigning in countries of origin (Al-Ali et al. 2001). Yet, studies that peer through the transnational lens have revealed the multifaceted nature of transnationalism. The focus of research has expanded to include transnational networks, mobilities, activities and feelings. Conclusions have also been drawn about the variety of forms and extents of transnationalism: while some people carry out transnational practices occasionally, others truly lead lives that span borders (Itzigsohn et al. 1999). I will return to this idea at the end of this chapter.

Along with its growing popularity, the transnational perspective has come under close scrutiny. A major criticism is the modest theoretical foundation of the transnational lens, and researchers’ tendency to focus on descriptive, qualitative

and context-dependent analyses of transnational phenomena (Crepaz and Dahinden 2019; Portes et al. 1999; Waldinger 2015). Despite the original aim to move beyond national framings of migration, research on transnationalism has continued to reinforce the nation-state logic through its tendency to treat ethnically or nationally defined groups as the natural entities of focus (Brubaker 2004). This, critics maintain, reveals a trait of an underlying methodological nationalism (Chavel 2014; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and an ethno-centred epistemology – even in the study of transnationalism (Dahinden 2016).

Another critical perspective gained appeal as transnational activities among migrants were proven to be less frequent than originally assumed (Boccagni 2012). Many voices have underscored the fact that ‘not all immigrants [are] transnationals’ (Portes et al. 2017: 1487; see also Guarnizo et al. 2003; Portes et al. 2002). Because not all migrants are actively engaged in transnational practices, activities or networks, newer conceptual developments focus not only on forms, but also degrees of transnationalism. It is now widely acknowledged that transnational experiences can take place anywhere on a continuum of experiences. Scope and intensity of transnational practices can vary considerably. Guarnizo (2000 in Levitt 2001) theorises that transnational activities can be differentiated as ‘core’ versus ‘expanded’, where the former is more regular and habitual and the latter is more occasional. In the same spirit, Itzigsohn et al. (1999) differentiate between ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ transnationalism, and Portes (2003) between ‘strict’ and ‘broad’ transnationalism. Levitt (2001) illustrates the varying degrees of complexity by arguing that transnational practices can be both comprehensive or selective in scope (i.e. more or less regular), *and* stretch from core to expanded (i.e. through being more or less institutionalised). These discussions are highly relevant in my dissertation, as they influence how I conceptualise transnational living and the bureaucrats’ transnational work practices (the latter is discussed in Article 3).

The transnational turn in migration studies resembles the broader ‘mobilities’ perspective in the social sciences (Urry 2007). The mobility turn reconsidered spatial mobility and ‘its patterns and manifestations’ (Faist 2013: 1638). This

reconsideration is to some extent reflected in the transnational approach, as migrants are not only seen as settled immigrants, but increasingly also as part of a process or continuum of short-term, circular or continuous migration (Faist 2013). Both the mobilities and the transnationalism paradigms influence this dissertation. The application of both inspires the theoretical discussions in Article 1, and perspectives on transnational mobility are particularly significant in Article 2. While the dissertation generally places emphasis on people who lead transnational *lives*, Article 2 consistently refers to individuals who are engaged in transnational *mobility*, while maintaining ties to the countries between which they are mobile. The differential perspectives are due to differences in empirical data, as the data of relevance to Article 2 focused more on these individuals' mobility rather than their living practices. Yet, parallel use of the terms 'mobility' and 'living' in this dissertation reflects the challenges of clearly measuring degrees as well as forms of transnationalism. Indeed, it may reflect potential lack of sound theoretical foundation in the discourses of transnationalism. Moreover, in relation to this dissertation in particular, it underscores the difficulty of conceptualising transnationalism when the 'transnationals' themselves are only indirect objects of study. Their subjective stance on whether they live transnationally or are transnationally mobile, and to which degrees, is not part of this dissertation's empirical material.

One feature of transnationals becomes apparent through the bureaucratic lens of this dissertation: that people who lead transnational lives are not necessarily migrants. As clarified in the dissertation's contextualisation (Chapter 4), people who lead transnational lives in Norway include people of different nationalities and with different mobility and living practices. This may not have become as apparent through the study of transnationals themselves because the selection of research participants would have been informed by the academic literature. In the traditional and still widespread academic discourse, those who carry out transnational practices are, will be or have been migrants.

Because Article 1 elaborates a conceptual discussion and criticism of this framing, I only summarise it in this section. In brief, despite the aim of moving beyond

narrow categories, the transnational paradigm in migration studies remains focused on migrant exceptionalism (Hui 2016). Sedentarism, before or after migration, is seen as the norm (for discussions about ‘migranticization’ in migration studies in general, see also Dahinden 2016). Most research on transnational practices remains tied to specific migrant categories and often *immigrants*. When continuous (transnational) mobility is in focus, it often appears outside the discourse on ‘transnationalism’, and research is limited to focus on a typology of highly skilled mobile persons (Faist 2013). Individuals carrying out these ‘middling forms of transnationalism’ (Conradson and Latham 2005) include mobile academics, students, expats, retirees and privileged or lifestyle migrants (see e.g. Bilecen and Van Mol 2017; Croucher 2012; Gustafson 2008; Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014). Often, but not always, such practices are framed as a different transnationalism than that of ‘ordinary’ migrants (Castles 2010; Cranston 2017; Faist 2013; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). Thus, despite studies on other sorts of mobile individuals, theoretical conceptualisations of transnationalism remain tied to a specific and narrow understanding of migrants (Hui 2016).

### *Transnational living*

These reflections on the evolution of transnationalism in migration studies are highly significant in Article 1. Moreover, the general conceptual discussions on transnationalism also influence the premise of my dissertation. As Leonard (2010) highlights *vis-à-vis* the expatriate experience, researchers must acknowledge the diversity and fluidity of the transnational experience. This dissertation does so through its conceptualisation of transnational living. In my research, I move beyond migrant exceptionalism and view people who lead transnational lives as people, not as migrants, even though many of them have migrated, currently migrate or plan to.

Herein, the concept *transnational living* denotes profound simultaneous attachment in two or more countries. Transnational living is understood as a

transnational practice which leans more towards being core rather than extended and coherent rather than selective. Any person, regardless of nationality or migration experiences, can lead a transnational life. Yet, it is difficult to pinpoint what is meant by *living* in this context. Among its multiple meanings, the verb 'live' can mean 'to make one's home' (OED 2019c). As the spatial imaginary 'home' is closely tied to individual identity (Blunt and Dowling 2006), conceptualisations of where people belong or are at home are inherently subjective (for further discussions on this, see e.g. Erdal 2014).

Further, the information made available to me about the individuals that the welfare system encounters was limited. I know that they all receive or establish contact due to the desire to receive some benefit or service from the Norwegian welfare system. I know that they reside, have resided or plan to reside abroad, though this does not mean that they currently live in two places. In order to receive welfare benefits from Norway, they are required to reside or work in Norway. As such, most cases – notably, if the primary 'home' is abroad while an individual works in Norway – have a degree of cross-border mobility.

Transnational mobility is a more physically observable, less subjectively experienced transnational practice than that of transnational living. I could have easily focused on people who are transnationally mobile rather than people who live transnationally. But then again, the bureaucrats I spoke with largely perceived the transnationals in question as *living* across borders. Many referred to mobility practices rather than living practices in their narratives about this population, even though their clients did indeed split their lives across two or more countries. Based on the bureaucrats' criteria, I found it reasonable to focus the dissertation on people who are transnationally mobile and people who live transnationally. The segment of those who lead transnational lives referred to herein is thus defined as people who lead lives or are mobile between two or more countries while they remain attached to Norway, at a minimum through claiming Norwegian social security. Throughout the dissertation, 'people who lead transnational lives', 'transnational people' and 'transnationals' are all shorthand variations of this wordier definition.



### **3. Theoretical approaches**

To address welfare state perspectives on the encounter with transnational people, three broadly conceived strands of welfare-related studies are particularly relevant: welfare states and migration; (transnational) social protection; and (transnational) social policy and social work. The first of these includes a range of empirical and theoretical research on the evolution and sustainability of welfare systems in light of changing global migration dynamics. The second focuses on migrants' social protection and transnational social protection assemblage across borders. The third comprises studies on social policy, social work and service delivery to migrants, including those with transnational anchoring. These three different research strands all intersect with the topic of this dissertation and with the different sub-questions guiding my work. I have referred to and bridged all of them – though to varying degrees – in the sections below and in the dissertation's articles.

#### **Welfare states and migration**

In the last decades, research on welfare states and migration has skyrocketed. Abundant studies have chiefly assessed immigrants' sociocultural integration (see e.g. Carmel and Cerami 2011; Friberg 2015; Kevins and Van Kersbergen 2019; Koopmans 2010) and the economic consequences of immigration (see e.g. Battisti et al. 2019; Edo 2015; Martinsen et al. 2017). A third body of welfare state research is more in line with this dissertation, concerning how migration, still largely confined to immigration, challenges the stable relationship between the state and the population. Consideration is given to the legitimacy and the sustainability of welfare systems (Brochmann et al. 2011; Cappelen and Midtbø 2016). A vast literature concentrates on attitudes towards welfare and migration in Western countries (see e.g. Eger and Breznau 2017; Garand et al. 2017; Graham 2019; Huber and Oberdabernig 2016), and has more recently addressed how such attitudes, not least welfare chauvinism, threaten the legitimacy and

thus the sustainability of welfare states (see e.g. Cappelen and Peters 2018; Heizmaann et al. 2018; Schmidt et al. 2018). Another discourse concentrates on how states' welfare policies impact migration choices (see e.g. Brekke and Brochmann 2015; Di Feliciano and Gadelha 2016). This debate has focused on the correlation between the generosity of states' welfare provision and the volume of immigration flows, for example, discussions covering the 'welfare magnet hypotheses' (which lacks considerable support in recent studies) (see e.g. Borjas 1999; Giulletti 2014; De Jong 2019; Martinsen and Werner 2019; Razin and Wahba 2015); the phenomenon of 'benefit tourism' (see e.g. Bettwy 1997; Hunt and Wallace 2004; Verschuere 2014); and the extent of 'benefit portability' (D'Addio et al. 2015; Geis et al. 2013; Holzmann and Werding 2015). A growing bulk of studies also addresses welfare systems in the context of intra-European mobility (see e.g. Kramer et al. 2018; Ruhs 2017), and thus partly overlaps with the focus on (intra-European) circular mobility in migration studies more broadly (see e.g. Grabowska and Garapich 2016; Torre and De Lange 2018; Van Mol 2019) and in the social protection literature (as discussed below).

Until recently, limited research has examined how welfare states respond to transnational practices among mobile people. While states' encounters with and management of different forms of migration-related diversity have to some extent been covered in migration governance research, this literature has not centred on welfare system adaptations nor transnational practices in particular (see e.g. Geddes and Scholten 2016; Holzinger 2019; Scholten 2019). The general neglect of focus on transnationalism from a welfare state perspective is palpable throughout my dissertation. One of its major academic contributions lies in approaching the aforementioned theoretical strands within a transnational conceptual frame. This is achieved partly by bridging the welfare state discourse with the transnational strands of social protection and social policy research as well as partly through the topic of research itself.

## **Transnational social protection**

Social protection studies and migration studies have recently begun merging. Levitt et al. (2015: 2) argued for such bridge-building to take place, stating that these ‘ongoing, isolated conversations must be brought into a more integrated, expanded dialogue’. This declaration was already part of a surge in social protection studies within international migration (Boccagni 2017; Dankyi et al. 2017), and the rise of – what can be called the sub-branch – transnational social protection (Boccagni 2014; Faist 2013; Levitt et al. 2017). The discourse’s emergence can be traced to research showing the significance of social risks in migration studies (see e.g. Amelina et al. 2012; Baldassar et al. 2007). As a result, researchers called for studies of social protection against those social risks to move beyond the nation-state realm (Bilecen and Barglowski 2015; Faist et al. 2015).

Over the last ten years, the body of research on transnational social protection has grown, and – until very recently – has largely been concentrated in two camps. The first of these focuses on transnational care provision. It highlights informal social protection and explores how migrants and their families are social protection providers. This branch overlaps with research on so-called migration care circulation (see e.g. Lutz 2018). Studies have examined how migrants are responsible for the wellbeing of family members and households in their origin countries (see e.g. Douglass 2013; Mingot and Mazzucato 2018) as well as the role of transnational social networks, addressing how remaining family members are left with caregiving responsibilities (see e.g. Bilecen and Cardona 2018). Here, findings have pointed to how complex and dynamic systems of solidarity and support between migrants and non-migrants evolve over time and place (see e.g. Bastia 2015). A specific segment within this strand has focused on the gendered experience of transnational caregiving from mostly female migrants’ perspectives (Fielkowska 2019; Mingot 2019).

The second and arguably more relevant discourse for this dissertation looks at the phenomenon of transnational social protection assemblages (Bilecen and

Barglowski 2015; Sassen 2006). Research has found that those with stronger transnational ties can seek social protection from different sources (Levitt et al. 2017), including formal and informal arrangements (Faist 2017). For example, people can receive formal state-provided child support in the country they work, while also getting informal caregiving support from family in the country where their children live. This research, however, has also revealed how transnationality may complicate people's access to and use of various systems of social protection and consequently produce inequalities (Lafleur and Romearo 2018). The discourse highlights how individual agency and social protection assemblages may be affected by attachments and relationships across borders, as well as structural and institutional factors in several places (Carling 2008; Drinkwater and Garapich 2015; Faist 2013; Vertovec 2001). A key divergence between research on welfare states and social protection discourse lies in perspectives. While the first addresses the nation-state infrastructure's encounter with migrants, the transnational social protection literature highlights migrants' experiences and practices. Agency of migrants is often underscored, as they are found to use their transnational or mobility 'capital' to tackle social inequalities outside the nation-state container (More 2017). These research insights are little heralded in broader welfare state research.

Very recently, the state, or macro, perspective has emerged from the transnational social protection discourse. Here, research on specific migrant groups' use and experiences of formal social protection provision, such as social security, partly overlaps with research on migration and social work (see e.g. Calzada 2018; Scheibelhofer and Holzinger 2018). Studies on states' social security provision to the transnational population remains limited, but may be rising on the research agenda (see notable examples in Caldarini 2020; Mingot and Mazzucato 2018). The latter discourse partly intersects with welfare state research, but it addresses the state-migrant encounter with a different, and transnational, angling – along similar lines as the articles in my dissertation. This may signal that while transnational perspectives on social policy sought to move beyond the national-container and methodological nationalism (Barglowski et al.

2015), transnationalism may bite its own tail: nation-state-provided social security remains a core part of social security provision structures, and should thus also be addressed – not neglected – within the transnational social protection paradigm.

## **Transnational social policy and social work**

The study of social policy and social work is a distinct strand of research, which some scholars conceptualise as a sub-segment of welfare state research. Social work research has long given migration attention (Leighninger 1975). Yet, as a profession and an academic discipline, social work tends to view migration as a nation-state arbitrary since regular ‘social problems’ addressed by social workers are imagined as existing within nationally contained societies (Raitelhuber et al. 2018). In response, transnational perspectives have steadily been given priority and developed into the ‘social work-migration nexus’ (Righard and Boccagni 2015). This has, to some extent, broadened perspectives in social work research. Originating in the academic branch of *international* social work, this strand has transformed into transnational social work research (Boccagni et al. 2015; Chambon et al. 2013; Olivier-Mensah et al. 2017). Along the same lines, its sister discourse, the transnational social policy research agenda, emerged within the strand of *global* social policy, and now more attention is devoted to transnational social policy (see e.g. Lightman 2013; De Swaan 1992).

A fast-expanding, yet still limited, literature on transnational social policy and transnational social work (see e.g. An et al. 2016; Lyons 2015; Negi and Furman 2010) scrutinises the ‘transnational challenge’ brought by clients’ cross-border attachments. As social work programmes and organisations were not originally oriented towards transnational interrelationships, their encounters with transnational clients have become a prioritised topic of investigation (Olivier-Mensah et al. 2017: 124). Similar to social protection research, these strands also largely focus on the transnationality of *immigrants*, not the broader groups of migrants or mobile individuals more generally (Raitelhuber et al. 2018). In the

social policy discourse, attention is directed at macro-scale dynamics, such as social policy development (see e.g. Lightman 2013). This macro-scale approach has been influential in my dissertation work. So too has the scale of focus in transnational social work research: namely, the individual or micro-scale. In the latter, contributions have – in what may seem to be a general tendency – largely emphasised explicit migrant groups, such as ‘Latino populations’, or specific branches of social work, such as child protection (see e.g. Furman et al. 2009; Modderman et al. 2019).

One strand of transnational social work studies focuses on how social workers apply ‘transnational knowledge’ or engage in transnational practices themselves (see e.g. Hunter et al. 2010; Lietaert 2017). This perspective has been particularly influential in this dissertation, providing me a theoretical approach to understand the practitioners’ experiences of their work with transnationals. Cross-border work practices are hailed as optimal in several studies: just as the transnational clients’ social lives are entangled in different geographical spaces, so should the practitioners’ work be (see e.g. Collins-Dogrul 2012; Crettaz 2017; Furman et al. 2008; Righard 2019). Based on this, social work researchers underline the need for a transnational epistemology, and social policy and social work practitioners are advised to orient their work away from sedentary ideals (Righard and Boccagni 2015). In social work and welfare service delivery research, workers are encouraged to ‘think globally and locally, and act globally and locally’ (Furman et al. 2010: 4). Similar to understanding transnational practices as falling on a continuum, it has been suggested that the degree of transnational practices in social work can – and should – vary; they should not be ‘either transnationally or locally bound’ (Righard and Boccagni 2015: 238).

Research on transnational social work with migrants has recently started to overlap with research on service provision to superdiverse populations (see e.g. Boccagni 2015; Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018; Schrooten et al. 2015). These theoretical lenses share traits, as both highlight that lacking ‘specialist services, appropriate language support, or information’ leaves many migrants behind (Phillimore 2011: 19). Both have an activist stance, calling for ‘changes

that enable services to be designed and delivered differently' (Phillimore 2011: 24; see also Phillimore et al. 2016). Indeed, transnational practices in general could be viewed from the theoretical angle of superdiversity. The notion of superdiversity describes the increasingly diverse and changing features of migrant populations and migrant identities (Vertovec 2007), and originally was proposed as a 'summary term' for a range of the variables surrounding migration patterns (Meissner and Vertovec 2015). The term thus includes transnational practices. Despite this, perhaps because superdiversity has often been used to refer to 'more ethnicities rather than to the term's fuller, original intention' (Meissner and Vertovec 2015: 541), transnationalism has not been foregrounded in the superdiversity discourse. However, the new coupling of transnationalism and the superdiversity/service-provision discourses may strengthen this link. Indeed, the drawing of these links mirrors developments in the other welfare discourses presented above, which may signal a slow rise of the transnational paradigm on the welfare state research agenda more generally.

As illustrated by this synopsis of existing literature, there is no clearly defined or coherent academic theoretical approach to the study of the encounter between welfare systems and transnationals. Little attention has been given to transnational social security provision in particular, and thus no discourse scrutinises the various scales and experiences of this encounter from a welfare state perspective. Yet, the three scholarly strands presented in this chapter provide different lenses through which to view this state-citizen encounter. As building blocks in this theoretical structure, they inform the gaze within my dissertation. Moreover, this theoretical construct reinforces the research strands as overlaps and gaps are revealed in my attempt to build bridges between them.

## **4. Context**

The dissertation's case-specific, multifaceted backdrop merits attention. Just as the research fields on transnationalism, welfare and migration intersect in this work, so do the various features and knowledge fields addressing the Norwegian

welfare state and international migration. Since the journal article format provided limited space to elaborate on case-specific features, I use this chapter to contextualise the analysis. Below I provide key theories and empirical facts regarding the Nordic welfare model, the Norwegian welfare state, the welfare system's encounter with migration-related diversity and transnational living in Norway. The chapter ends with a reflection on my process of narrowing the dissertation's focus to the Norwegian social security system.

## **The Nordic model**

Since the early 2000s, the Nordic model has received international acknowledgement as a welfare 'supermodel'. This has been particularly tied to its success at combining the objectives of economic growth and societal equality (Bungum et al. 2015; *The Economist* 2013). This labour and welfare system, framed as the Scandinavian or the Nordic model, has been heatedly debated since it reached adolescence, and questions have been asked concerning its sustainability when faced with social changes, most recently economic turmoil and increased globalisation. While all the Nordic welfare systems differ to small or large extents, they share a common set of values, principles and overarching aims (Bungum et al. 2015; Dølvik et al. 2015). The Nordic model's ability to secure both equality and efficiency has been argued to emerge from the interaction of three foundational pillars: macroeconomic governance, organised working life and public welfare services (Dølvik 2013).

While differences exist across the Nordic states' welfare systems, one may argue that the internal variations are smaller than the differences between the Nordic welfare model and others. Academic discourses categorise welfare models differently – as one, two three or several typologies – but researchers focusing on the Nordic welfare system often categorise it as one of three models. Esping-Andersen (1990) pinned these down early on as the conservative, the liberal and the social-democratic regimes. Interchangeably, these are referred to as the continental, the Anglo-Saxon and the Nordic models. Examples within the



conservative model include Austria, France, Germany and Italy. Archetypal examples of the liberal model are the United States, Canada and Australia. The social-democratic cluster consists of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway (Esping-Andersen 1990).

A core difference between the three models lies in each system's structures for welfare allocation. That is, the way entitlements are distributed among the population. In liberal welfare states, social benefits are distributed to the poorest layer of the population; entitlement depends on demonstrated capital and income levels below a set minimum (Bungum et al. 2015). The conservative model, a middle ground between the liberal and the social democratic models, bases its welfare allocation on work and contribution records; amount of benefits is calculated as a proportion of past earnings (Palier 2010). In comparison to the liberal model with its preference for private welfare provision (Castles 2010), the conservative system is run by collective compulsory social insurance funds (Palier 2010). The social democratic model differentiates from both in that welfare management is public. In contrast to the liberal model, benefits are allocated universally and not to specific segments of the population; unlike the continental model, the distribution is not primarily related to occupational status (Arts and Gelissen 2010). That said, the insurance schemes of the Nordic countries do, to different extents, have earnings-related components (Kautto 2010).

According to Kautto (2010), the most striking similarities *within* the Nordic welfare systems are the broad public responsibility, the funding by tax revenues, the attention to equality for all through the principle of universalism and the respect of employment interests. In brief, the Nordic model is public, universal and aims for full employment (Kildal 2006). The Nordic countries' long record of stable economic and social development has been praised, but the Nordic model has also, as already mentioned, been criticised. As highlighted by Kautto (2010), welfare state developments in the 1990s and 2000s triggered debates concerning the model's coherence and continuity. During the early 1990s' macroeconomic downturn, the Nordic countries experienced record-high unemployment levels and the robustness of the model was brought into question (Dølvik et al. 2013).

While voices favouring the model argue it has tackled the winds of change (see e.g. Kautto 2010; Valkonen and Vihriälä 2014), a continuous doubt – or assumption – questions whether the generous welfare model is able to cater for global changes and increased interconnectedness (for further discussions, see e.g. Fangen and Vaage 2018; Taylor-Gooby et al. 2018).

### ***The Norwegian welfare system***

According to Hagen and Hippe (1993: 3), the history of the Norwegian welfare state can be seen as a development through four distinct periods: ‘The establishment of selective, public welfare policies in the last decades of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century; the ideological breakthrough of modern state interventionism in the wake of the great depression in the [1930s]; the post-war expansion and...; a period of stagnation’. After the 1990s, a fifth period came of remodelling (Hippe and Berge 2013). Post-war developments in the Norwegian welfare system are key to this dissertation, as this period saw the emergence of today’s social security system.

At the outset of the First World War, Norway had one of Europe’s most developed social insurance systems. Following the war and during the 1920s’ economic recession, however, Norway did not have the financial means to develop its social policies as planned. In 1935, when the Labour Party entered government, social policy reappeared on the agenda. Changes in the political climate during the 1930s created more political consensus, and the idea that the state should be responsible for all its citizens gained increased popularity. During the German occupation of Norway in the Second World War, the exiled Norwegian government worked on the idea of a comprehensive welfare system, inspired by the Keynesian paradigm. This was to be implemented upon peace (Hagen and Hippe 1993). Following the war, all political parties agreed on a joint programme (*Partienes fellesprogram*) to secure political consensus during the post-war reconstruction (Berg and Christensen 2014). Aiming for full employment, the

programme pursued an active economic policy in combination with a public system of health services and social protection (Hagen and Hippe 1993).

A key aim during the post-war welfare expansion was for social insurance to no longer depend entirely on class affinity or income levels (Kuhnle 1994). Supported by international economic growth, Norway went through a phase of intensive industrial expansion, particularly in the oil sector. This ensured that the educational, organisational and welfare systems continually advanced (Dølvik 2013). Several social benefits were included in the original social insurance system, such as child benefits (1946), sickness benefits (1956), universal old age benefits (1957), unemployment benefits (1959), disability benefits (1961) and widow and mother benefits (1965). In 1966, all of these and other social rights were compiled in the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme (*Folketrygden*). By the early 1970s, the Norwegian welfare system's development was to a large extent complete.

The 1970s was marked by a major oil crisis and ensuing economic downturn. The attractiveness of social policy reforms thus diminished while support of right-wing politics boomed. The social-democratic government was replaced by a conservative government in 1981, and liberal ideals gained foothold on the Norwegian political scene (Dølvik 2013). The welfare state ideal was criticised, but while other social-democratic regulations in areas such as housing markets, broadcast media and financial transactions were liberalised, the generous welfare benefits were not severely affected by the political turnaround (Berg and Christensen 2014; Heiret 2012). The extent of services and levels of benefits has steadily evolved, but the National Insurance Act of 1966 remained at the core of the welfare system and was only updated in 1997 (Kuhnle 1994; Mæland and Hatland 2015). Since its early years, the Norwegian welfare system has been challenged by both internal and external changes. As they did with the Nordic model, academics and politicians have questioned the sustainability of the system when faced with demographic and global changes. In 1993, welfare researchers Hage and Hippe (1993: 3) noted that 'the post-war Keynesian formula' had 'come to an end' and was 'no longer working'. The era following 1990, however, was less

characterised by dismantling than by remodelling, and the past two decades have been marked by active political reform. As argued by Hippe and Berge (2013), the refashioning of the welfare system has produced contradictory tensions: on the one hand, efforts to modernise welfare institutions seek to preserve the sustainability of the model; on the other hand, traditional values and strategies have held strong. In the case of some social benefits, the characteristics of the post-war welfare expansion have been maintained, while other benefits have been adapted to internal and external conditions, such as longer life expectancy, technological changes and increased immigration.

In this encounter with changing global and national dynamics, the welfare system's foundational principles of universalism and egalitarianism face new challenges (Bendixen et al. 2018). Häikiö and Hvinden (2012) expose a latent tension between diversity and universalism. Here, the concept of universalism is taken to mean that 'all people have access to welfare services such as education, health care and social care, and economic security – for instance in old age, maternity and unemployment' (Anttonen et al. 2012:3). The remaining ideal of universal coverage for all, considering the broad scope and generosity of the Norwegian welfare system, provokes reflections on who should be included in the container of 'all'. With an increasingly diverse population, where and when should the line of inclusion be drawn?

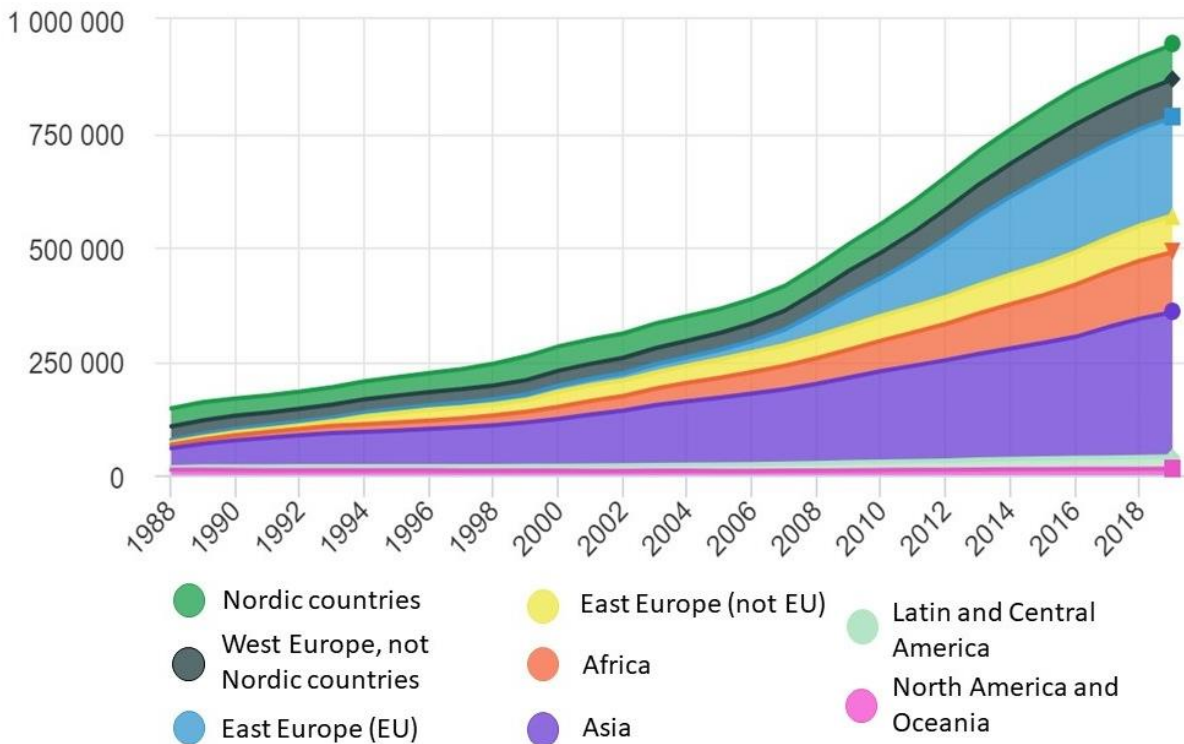
Since the Second World War, class-based, gendered and mobility-related types of diversity have challenged the principle and practice of universalism. An alternative perspective sees the variants of diversity as important drivers of change, revealing the welfare system's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. In current writings on the sustainability of the Norwegian welfare system, however, migration-related diversity is largely foregrounded as a welfare state challenge, not as an advantage (Anttonen et al. 2012; Brochmann and Grødem 2013).

## **The welfare system's encounter with migration-related diversity**

The welfare system was developed at a time when the population appeared more homogenous and sedentary. This is no longer the case. The contemporary relationship between the state and its residents is changing (Brochmann and Grødem 2013). A vast amount of the discourse on welfare state sustainability focuses on migration, even though a larger and more pressing welfare state challenge may be the aging population (Regjeringen 2019a). While several of the migration-related frictions are addressed in relation to immigration and ethnic diversity, another set of challenges is related to the very acts of migrating and living lives spanning national borders. In the Norwegian context, issues relating to migration have been viewed as issues relating to immigration and ethnically different segments of the population. Moreover, migrants have been perceived as people entering the country with the aim of staying; policies have centred on economic, cultural and social integration, either with the idea of assimilation or the aim of multiculturalism. In contrast to the conception of both the sedentary Norwegian and the settled (and subsequently sedentary) immigrant, people in Norway have become more mobile. While the relative size of international migration has not accelerated, globalisation has brought about new types of mobility and multifaceted ways of living lives that transcend national borders (Czaika and De Haas 2014) – including in Norway.

Norway is a relatively young immigration nation. It generally receives a small number of migrants; in 2018, only 18,103 persons immigrated to Norway. In the same year, 765,000 immigrants resided in Norway, which amounts to 14.4% of the total population. Since 1990, approximately 36% of all immigrants have arrived through family reunification; 36% have immigrated for labour purposes; and 19% have come as refugees or asylum seekers (Statistics Norway 2019a). In recent years, most of the immigrants have migrated from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Syria and Somalia, though main countries of origin have recurrently shifted over the last half-century. Figure 1 illustrates the variation and

development in country backgrounds among immigrants and Norwegian-born children with immigrant parents since 1990.



**Figure 1.** Regions of origin among immigrants and children of immigrants in Norway, 1990-2018

Source: Statistics Norway 2019b

According to newspaper *Aftenposten*, the Norwegian government has adopted more than 20 action plans and more than 670 actions concerning integration and inclusion since the mid-1990s (Stokke and Gedde-Dahl 2012). Since the turn of the century, the focus on integration and accommodation of ethnic diversity in the welfare state has reached new heights. A public consciousness of ethnic diversity in Norwegian society has deep roots in Norway and the government has aimed to suppress ethnic discrimination since the 1970 and 1980s (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008). Challenges related to immigration, and in particular what

has been called ‘the foreign worker problem’, had long been on the agenda when the government introduced an ‘immigration stop’ in 1975. Since then, the public justification of Norwegian immigration policies has revealed fundamental ambiguities concerning the impact and accommodation of immigrants. As reported by Brochmann and Kjeldstadli (2008: 202): ‘On one hand, the government since the war had built a welfare state based on an ethos of equality, humanism and international solidarity; on the other hand, the national household economy had to be taken care of: the *realpolitik*, as it were.’

Over the last 40 years, this uncertainty has been present in governmental and public discussions on immigration and welfare. The ideals of universal welfare, equality and solidarity have been challenged with increased immigration to Norway, a steadily more multicultural and ethnically diverse society and public resentment towards immigrants. To combat and prevent discrimination, the government recurrently reforms its policies and measures to influence institutional and private practices regarding ethnic inclusion. As highlighted by Bore et al. (2013), typical measures have included financial incentives, awareness campaigns and, increasingly during the last decade, legal requirements. Besides anti-discrimination measures, general as well as specific welfare rights and services to the immigrant population have been brought to the fore. As described in the government action plan to promote equality and prevent ethnic discrimination in the period 2009-2012, it is an explicit objective for public welfare services to cover the needs of all, while ensuring that ethnic minorities do not become worse-off than the general population (Bore et al. 2013).

Despite these normative ideals, research has shown that public measures to secure equal benefits and welfare for an ethnically diverse society should not be viewed as entirely successful (see e.g. Bore et al. 2013; Bråten and Elgvin 2014; Djuve and Tronstad 2011). Writing on equal treatment of immigrants in the Norwegian welfare context, Djuve and Tronstad (2011) call the three public goals of universalism in welfare services – universality in access, quality and outcome – ambitious. They exemplify how some local public welfare providers have understood the goal of equal welfare in less ambitious terms, defining equality in

public services as ‘when the immigrant population, to the same extent as ethnic Norwegians, can use and take advantage of public services’ (Djuve and Tronstad 2011: 49; my translation). In brief, they argue that the aim of equality in welfare and service provision can be problematic due to the inherent vagueness of the term ‘equality’. Inherent difficulties in measuring equality aside, clear indications show that ‘welfare clients with a non-Western background have access to a narrower range of services and receive poorer quality of courses, internships and monitoring than ethnic Norwegians’ (Djuve and Tronstad 2011: 55; my translation).

### **Transnational living in Norway**

Migration in the Norwegian context is not restricted to ethnically confined and unidirectional labour, family and humanitarian immigration. Migration is increasingly diverse and multidirectional. The migrants are Norwegians, Swedes, Europeans, Americans, Africans and Asians who recurrently migrate to and from Norway and other countries. A segment of the migratory population lives transnationally. This group includes pensioners travelling between Norway, Spain, Thailand and Pakistan; civil engineers travelling between India and Norway; diplomats living in Brussels and Oslo; industrial labourers who work in Norway with family in Poland; researchers who bring their spouses for periodic work in the USA; or students spending some years in Australia and some years at home, while ending up with a partner in a third country. This part of the population makes up those I label as ‘transnationals’ in this dissertation. To varying extents, they live their lives abroad while maintaining physical, emotional and/or material ties to Norway.

Figures on transnational living in Norway are scarce. While Statistics Norway provides data on immigration and emigration, it does not trace individuals along their journeys. If an individual registers as emigrated, the statistics do not reveal if the individual has re-migrated or returned. Also, the numbers only cover individuals who *register* as moved, which they are only required to do if they



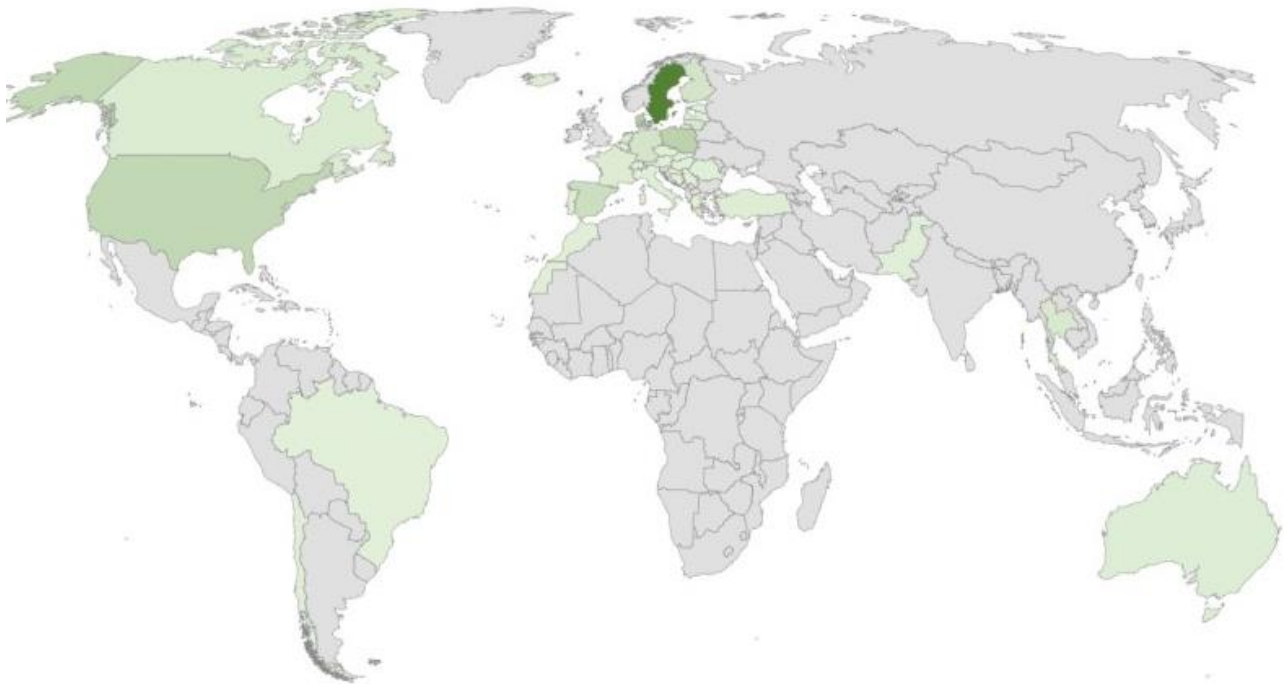
move abroad for a minimum of six months. Therefore, whether and how people live transnationally is difficult to map. Yet, through statistical accounts of Norwegian social security provision, we can discover some patterns in when and how people have lived abroad while being attached to Norway through their social insurance membership. Likewise, other countries may provide statistics on people who live in Norway while they receive benefits from the respective countries, but neither Statistics Norway nor NAV provide such figures. The numbers presented in the following paragraphs thus only cover people who lead transnational lives outside of Norway while receiving Norwegian social security benefits.

In 1960, 50,000 individuals received Norwegian benefits abroad. Along with a diversification in characteristics – from largely consisting of Norwegian sailors to also including foreign nationals and students – the size of the group grew, especially from 1980 onwards. Up until the 2000s, there is no complete or regular data on the overall population of social security clients abroad. Yet, data is available on the number of ‘pensioners’ – those receiving disability or retirement pensions. These figures show a stable but accelerating growth in transnational living since the 1970s (see Figure 2). The number went from 1,000 transnational pensioners in 1978 to 11,000 in 1990; it reached 28,000 in 2000; 44,000 in 2010; and, finally, nearly 60,000 in 2018 (for details, see Auestad 1997; Skarpaas 2014; NAV 2019).



**Figure 2.** *The increase in number of individuals receiving Norwegian pensions abroad*  
 Sources: Auestad 1997; Skarpaas 2014; NAV 2019

The total number of benefit recipients abroad in 2018, including pensioners and others, was 75,500 (NAV 2019). These individuals, who together received 1.65% of the total amount of benefits, lived across all the world's regions. The large majority of 62,300 lived in Europe, while 7,000 and 3,400 lived in North America and Asia, respectively. Figure 3 maps the size and the geographical dispersion of all registered as staying abroad while they received social security in 2018 (the figure does not include the 1,200 individuals whose location was unknown). In the figure, the darker colours signal higher numbers of benefit recipients.



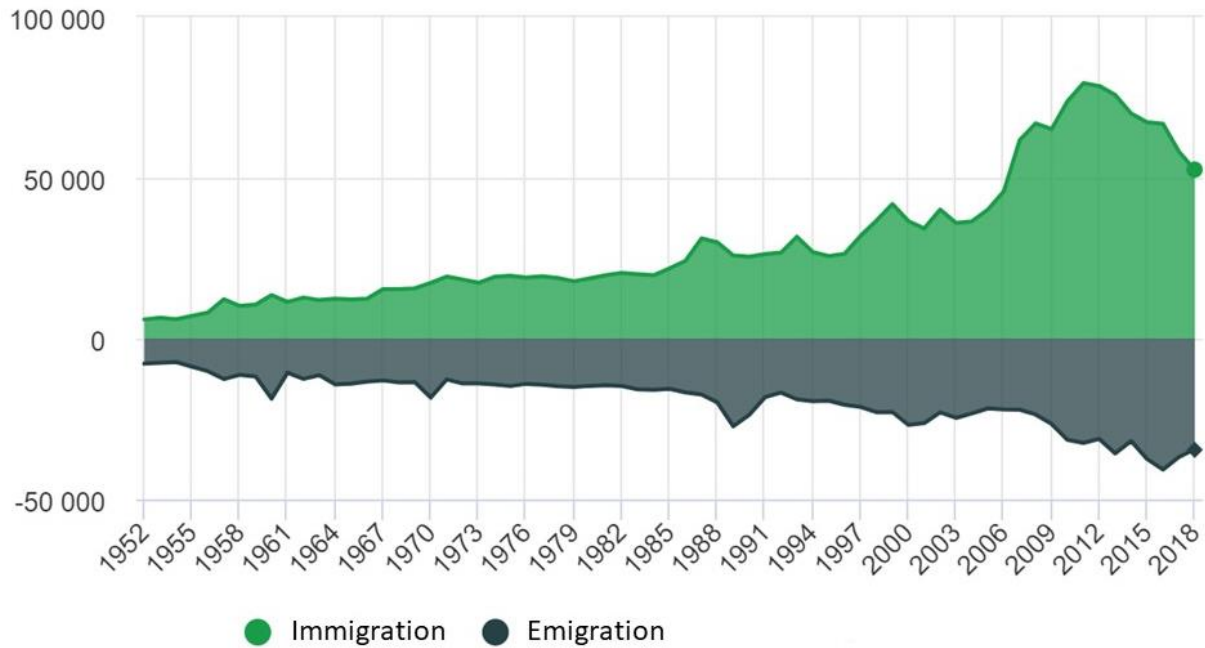
**Figure 3.** Relative size and geographical spread of Norwegian social security recipients in 2018

Source: NAV 2019

This illustration says little about the – likely much larger and more geographically spread – group who in different ways lead transnational lives while being attached to or based in Norway. For the topic of this dissertation, which focuses on social security, the data is useful. Yet in terms of discussing the overall welfare system’s encounter with people who lead transnational lives, the data does not provide a sufficient overview of the size of the population and thus not the potential political, cultural or economic implications of transnational living.

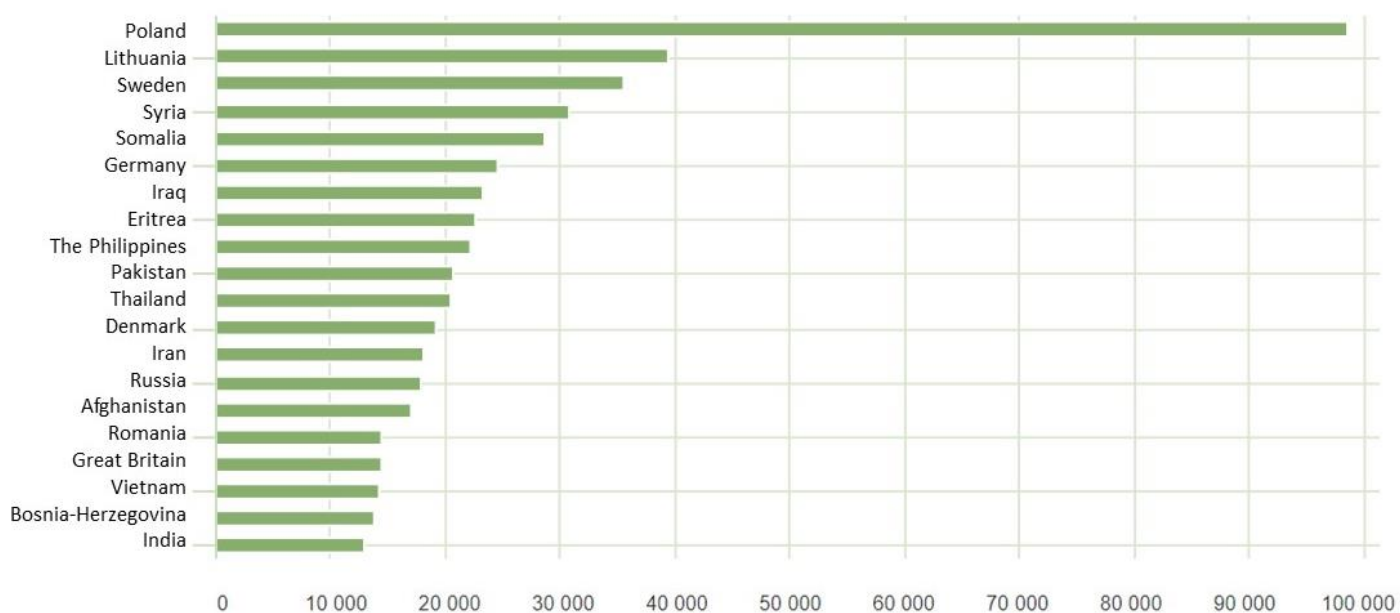
Yet, the *potential* scale and geographic spread of transnational living in Norway can be illustrated by the figures below. Figure 4 shows the size and the evolution of Norwegian immigration and emigration since 1952, and thus highlights the potential extent of transnational living among immigrants and emigrants. Figure 5 illustrates the most common country backgrounds among immigrants in Norway in 2019. Figure 6 shows Norwegian emigrants’ most common countries

of destination in 2019. Together, these figures partially illustrate the potential geographic spread of current transnational living among immigrants and emigrants.



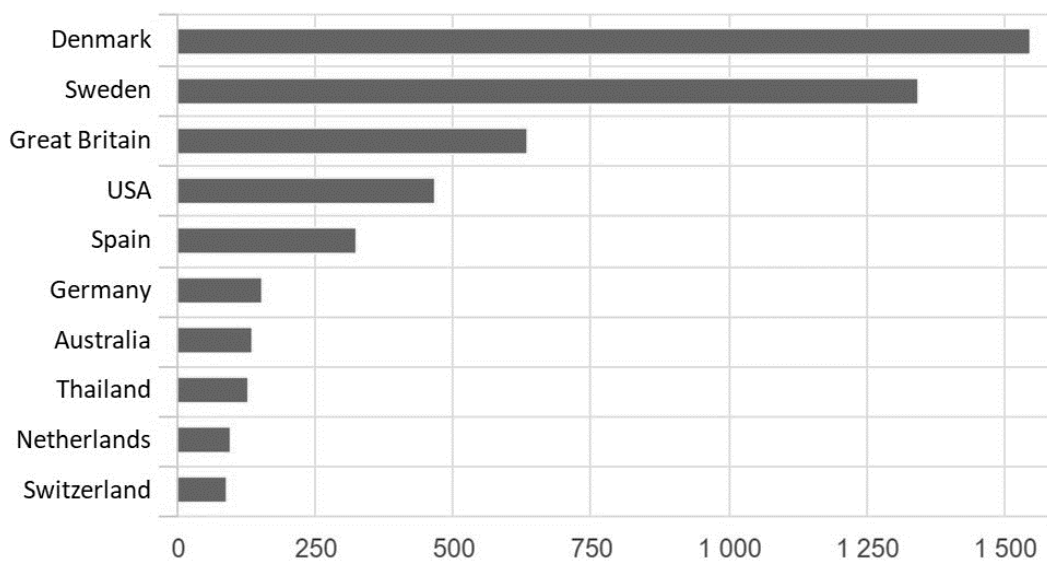
**Figure 4.** Number of immigrants to and emigrants from Norway, 1952-2018

Source: Statistics Norway 2019c



**Figure 5.** Most common countries of background among immigrants in Norway, 2019

Source: Statistics Norway 2019b



**Figure 6.** Most common destinations among Norwegian emigrants, 2019

Source: Statistics Norway 2019b

While interest into how transnationalism challenges the Norwegian welfare state logics has grown, no studies focus explicitly on the relationship between the state or the welfare system and the transnational population. For the universal welfare state, transnational living may represent a challenge. At the macro-scale – comprising legislation, procedures and communication – the international dimension adds overwhelming complexity. The relevant international and bilateral social security agreements represent a complex terrain (Brochmann et al. 2011). When people are not full-time members of the Norwegian welfare state exclusively, what are their rights and obligations? And when does people's transnationalism outpace their entitlement to nation-specific benefits? The welfare system is impacted by more than a normative framework and underlying ideologies. Welfare institutions' encounters with transnationals are also likely to be shaped by particular institutional practices, cultural filters and emotions that the individual bureaucrats employ (Graham 2002; Jonsson 1998). The realities of the encounter may thus play out differently at different scales and places in the Norwegian welfare system.

### **Delimiting the field: which welfare system?**

At the very beginning of my doctoral research I considered to focus on different, and several, welfare institutions. Initially, all four public welfare systems in Norway were potential candidates: the social security system (NAV), the school system, the tax system and the health system. To delimit my field, I carried out a set of pilot interviews with representatives from all four institutions before I finally narrowed my focus. The dissertation therefore builds on empirical data that I collected during fieldwork at NAV and, to a lesser extent, in the Directorate. NAV is the largest welfare provider in Norway, providing social security benefits and services to people who live inside and outside state borders. NAV also administrates one-third of Norway's national budget and takes responsibility for all public social security benefits, including major benefits such as old-age pensions, disability pensions, child benefits, sickness benefits, unemployment benefits, work assessment allowances and cash-for-care benefits (Regjeringen

2019b). Because many social security benefits are universal and not needs-based, NAV's clients include all segments of the population – including those who lead transnational lives. Seeking to shed light on how the welfare system encounters transnationals, I decided to do so from the perspective of its largest component: the social security system.

Before delimiting my field, however, I thoroughly considered the school system as an additional case. Here, I did fieldwork and carried out several interviews at the same time that I started my fieldwork at NAV. I eventually decided that in each of these welfare systems, the range of experiences with transnational living was too broad to do justice to them by including more than one in a doctoral research project. My final decision to focus on the social security system was based on five parameters: namely, it made sense, being the largest welfare system in Norway; I was attracted to the peculiarities of the case (for instance, NAV as a separate institution focusing on 'international issues'); I was intrigued by the positive feedback and enthusiasm I had experienced in the preliminary interviews; I was already given full access to the system through a gatekeeper (this is further discussed in Chapter 6); and finally, with social security expenditure being a major topic in the public discourse, I wanted to explore how and whether the realities at NAV reflected the discussions in the public debate.

While the fieldwork in the school system and my pilot interviews in the tax and health systems are not part of the data in the dissertation, the insights I gained from them fed into my understanding of the social security field. This broadened my knowledge on the linkages between the branches of the welfare system, which influenced my positionality and research interests during the fieldwork at NAV. For this reason, I include an outline of my fieldwork at the other three institutions and mention insights I gained.

### *The school system and preliminary data collection*

In the dissertation, I initially aimed to include data about children between six and 16 years old, so those in compulsory education consisting of primary and lower secondary schools. All children staying, or intending to stay, in Norway for more than three months are obliged to attend school, and compulsory schooling is thus a fundamental welfare institution. The legislative act relating to compulsory schooling asserts that a school principal may grant individual pupils leave of absence for up to two weeks. Thus, by law, no pupil can be absent from school for more than that during the school year without a medical declaration. This judicial framework may pose a challenge for transnational families and for schools with pupils who are part of transnational families. One report discussing compulsory schooling among Norwegian children with immigrant backgrounds highlights a need for more knowledge on how and when staying abroad becomes challenging in relation to the school system across different cases of transnationalism (Lidén et al. 2014). Drawing on this, I hypothesised that several of the challenges mentioned in the report would be applicable to non-immigrant and non-Norwegian pupils, and that schools' experiences with transnationalism would differ depending on the families' class, ethnicity or migration background. These issues were part of what I initially sought to investigate by including the school system in my fieldwork.

To ensure diversity in the categories of transnational families that the schools were involved with, I planned to choose schools with diversity across pupils and their families. I made a preliminary selection of eight schools located in different areas in Norway and two areas abroad. The aim of the broad selection was to have a wide reach, including schools with diverse compositions of pupils and internal diversity across class and migration background. I intended to interview principals and other members of staff. In the pilot interview phase, I had informal conversations with two staff from two different schools in Norway, and I carried out fieldwork at one school abroad, where I interviewed three staff.



Some of the insights I gained complemented my initial impressions from the fieldwork at NAV. While the experiences with transnational living diverged, similarities also existed. For instance, the feeling of uncertainty arose when there was question as to whether pupils would turn up or when they suddenly were reported to in abroad; the families of the pupils at the school were highly mobile, similar to NAV's transnational clients. The excitement of working at an 'international' school also came to resemble the excitement of working with international issues at NAV, a topic I return to in Article 3.

### *The tax and health systems: pilot interviews*

As with the social security system, the tax and health systems include units specifically designed to work on cross-border issues. They are the Norwegian Health Economics Administration's international unit (locally known as *Helfo Utland*) and the Tax Administration's foreign unit (*Skatt Utenlandsk*). I carried out formal conversations with a central person in each of these units. I also got a longer introduction to the Service Centre for Foreign Workers in Oslo, which is partly run by the Tax Administration.

Because I did these pilot interviews after carrying out a few at NAV, I could use them to clarify issues that had come up concerning the division of responsibilities between NAV, the Tax Administration and the Health Administration. These three units often collaborate closely in specific transnational cases. As I was told by the bureaucrats working with control at NAV, they would collaborate with the Tax Administration to track individuals' whereabouts and activities.

Since I only had preliminary conversations with these units, I did not get an overview or strong impression of how they encounter people who lead transnational lives. I understood, however, that some of the same issues, such as questions concerning equal service provision, control and communication, were high on the agenda in these welfare organisations too. While I believe it would produce policy-relevant and original knowledge to combine insights from NAV with insights from these two units, the pilot interviews led me to realise that I

could not fully grasp these cases without undertaking extensive research into each unit, as I finally did at NAV.

## **5. Methodology**

The theoretically grounded methodological framework of this dissertation combines institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory. This section details the content of this methodology. It briefly recounts how I discovered the two institutional analytical approaches, introduces both and explains how, in practice, they complement each other within one overarching methodological framework.

### **Neo-institutional theory and institutional ethnography**

Having a background in human geography and migration studies, I was not familiar with institutional analytical frameworks. To decide whether such a framework would be useful, I dove into the wide sea of organisation theory. Through reading and advice, I was guided towards neo-institutional theory. Here, I focused my readings on theory in the Nordics and Norway, in particular, and discovered a world of existing organisation theories and hypotheses about Norwegian public organisations, such as NAV. The range of structures and approaches was intriguing, but at the same time, these theories alone provided no methodological toolbox with which to investigate any of the organisational trends I read about.

Around the same time, I encountered institutional ethnography. I was introduced to it when I stumbled across Widerberg's (2004) notes from conversing with Smith on my department's website – Smith was the first to develop institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography takes the standpoints of individuals as a point of departure; for me, it resembled much of what I had missed from the theoretically rich organisational analyses. As an overall methodology, institutional ethnography was appealing. Moreover, it is increasingly being

applied not only in sociology, but also in human geography (see e.g. Billo and Mountz 2016). Yet, as I had focused my reading on organisation theory, I had become particularly inspired by the central tenet of neo-institutional theory: namely, the idea that organisations develop and are influenced by norms, values and informal structures (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Scott 2013). While I wanted to approach my fieldwork and analysis with openness, as encouraged in institutional ethnography and similarly with other approaches seeking to shift focus from verifying to generating theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I could not rid myself of the theoretical hypotheses I had learned from neo-institutional theory.

After examining both approaches more closely, I found that institutional ethnography could add much of what I had been missing from neo-institutional theory and vice versa. That is, ethnography inspires a more critical analytical approach, an orientation towards subjective stances and it provides a methodological and conceptual toolbox with which to discover the social from the standpoints of those who are ruled; neo-institutional theory provides a framework to guide and theoretically situate the analysis, drawing on formal and informal organisational aspects, processes of institutionalisation and hierarchical scales. I thus decided to be inspired by and draw from both, landing on a needs-based methodological framework based on a sensitive complementing of neo-institutional theory and institutional ethnography (the notion of sensitive complementing is explained in the final section of this chapter).

### *Neo-institutional theory*

Epistemologically, neo-institutional theory and institutional ethnography have some common grounds. This similarity is illustrated through the historical development of organisation theory, which has crossed several academic traditions and disciplines at different points in time (Christensen 2012). In general, the multiple perspectives within organisation theory can be explained as falling within one of two major approaches: a top-down (instrumental) versus

bottom-up (institutional) approach (Bogason and Sørensen 1998; Christensen et al. 2013). In pragmatic terms, these two approaches represent an historical trajectory from when organisations were studied from an economic perspective – where formal structure was core and organisations were perceived as rational and goal-oriented (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Scott 2013) – to more recent times, when institutional values, agency of the individuals within the organisations and the broader organisational context have come to the fore.

Original instrumental organisation theory is thus informed by a functionalist kind of positivism ‘concerned with the generation of causal theories, as far general in scope as possible’ (Donaldson 2005: 17). The instrumental approaches – the ‘so-called classical organisation theory’ – focus on normative aspects of organisational life. Early studies often operated within a judicial-constitutional framework, later developing into organisation theory through the development of the bounded rationality theory and the inclusion of decision-making and political theories (Cyert and March 1963; Simon 1945; March and Simon 1958). An early aim was to study how organisations could be administered effectively. With origins in studies of private organisations and business firms, instrumental theories treated organisations as machinery and examined the various organisational processes from a structural perspective (Christensen 2012). Modern organisation theory, however, has moved beyond the normative approach and incorporated more analytical and descriptive dimensions.

Partly in parallel to this and partly in response to the instrumental approaches, a new strand of theories pivoted the focus towards the development of organisational values and informal norms. According to Scott (2007), these derived from economic studies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but shifted attention onto the social context of economic processes. These critical organisation studies increased the focus on power and inequality (Burrell and Morgan 1979). In the 1950s, Selznick (1949, 1957) developed the idea of institutionalism further, combining early and new theoretical developments that fronted a view of institutions as social systems with informal norms, values and cultures. This neo-institutional strand of institutionalism represented an anti-

positivist allegiance and the idea that there were no ‘social facts’ found greater acceptance among scholars (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005). While macro-structures and top-down processes remained at the core of organisation theory for the ensuing decades (Scott 2013), a growing body of work from the mid-1980s built on the classic work of Selznick (1949, 1957) and reasserted the significance of institutional theories (Peters 2000). In particular, March and Olsen’s (1989, 1994; Brunsson and Olsen 1993; Olsen and Peters 1996) work marked a revolution against the methodological individualism of the leading approaches focusing on formal structures, as well as behaviouralism and rational choice approaches. Since then, there has been an explosion of institutional theories, representing not only organisational studies and political science, but also sociology (see e.g. DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Scott 2013; Zucker 1987) and economics (see e.g. Alston et al. 1996; Khalil 1995; North 1990). Indeed, neo-institutional theory, with its focus on dynamics such as culture, myths and institutional environment, gained popularity and has become influential in organisations studies and public administration studies (Christensen 2012).

Current neo-institutional theory can be understood in multiple ways, and may differ depending on the geography, time and focus of research. As early as 1987, Scott (1987: 501) emphasized that evolving conceptual diversity demanded conceptual clarification, stating: ‘When someone announces that he or she is conducting an institutional analysis, the next question should be: Using which version?’ In response to this still crucial question, I identify the neo-institutional theory in this dissertation that resembles the theoretical conceptualisation often applied in Scandinavian public administration research. I focus on institutional informal norms, values and culture – which, as suggested by Christensen (2013), can be conceptualised as the ‘culture perspective’. Yet, I combine this with attention to bureaucratic and instrumental organisational forms (Christensen et al. 2013). The Nordic states have larger public sectors than most other countries. As such, public administration in the Nordic welfare states is characterised by strong hierarchical levels and a drive for consensus and collaborative decision-making. The characteristics of public organisations explain why the regional research

tradition has evolved to emphasise institutional facets while maintaining a focus on the structural features of public organisations (Christensen 2012; Læg Reid 2007). Hence, neo-institutional public administration research in Scandinavia highlights instrumental elements. My neo-institutional approach is in keeping, as I also focus on theoretical elements such as hierarchy, labour division, organisational forms and modes of specialisation (Christensen et al. 2013).

### *Institutional ethnography*

Institutional ethnography focuses on individuals within institutions and the social relations in which they are embedded. It aims to understand the everyday world as it is experienced from the standpoint of the research subject, (Smith 1987, 2005). The standpoint epistemology inherent in institutional ethnography emphasise the individual's subjective world perspective (Mann and Kelley 1997). It also supports the idea that all knowledge production is value-laden and a result of historical processes (Lund 2015). To understand the everyday world as it is experienced from the standpoint of the research subjects, the entry point of institutional ethnography is people's everyday worlds and actions and the institutional realities, including texts, that shape their experiences (Smith 2005).

Institutional ethnography is about exploring. While exploration is often associated with the natural sciences, many voices highlight a need for increased exploration in the study of society (Widerberg 2015). Rather than reproducing knowledge or studying the same phenomenon from different angles, social science should be about exploring and enabling social change based on the provision of new knowledge. Institutional ethnography is a theory, a methodology and a 'method of enquiry' that aims to explore and, by doing so, contribute to change (Smith 1987). Institutional ethnography has firm roots in specific ontological and epistemological viewpoints. The ontology regards humans as fundamentally social beings, born with a capacity and a need for interaction. The epistemology builds on this and regards knowledge as something humans produce through interaction with others. From an institutional

ethnographic perspective, research thus starts with the humans, the activities they do, their interaction with others and the experiences they have in their everyday life, for instance, in an institution (Smith 2005).

Institutional ethnography was developed as an approach to study institutions, focusing on the experiences of individuals in the institutions and the complex social relations in which they are embedded (Smith 1987, 2005). The point of departure is the people – the knowers within the institutions and their work knowledge – and the role of the researcher is to detect the trans-local relations that are woven into the daily institutional life. The core of this idea is to start the exploration from the individuals' lives and lived experiences rather than from existing theories. While institutional ethnography can be seen in some ways as being a theory, as it draws on other theoretical bodies, its ambition is to avoid theoretical grounding and thus avoid objectifying people and their activities (Smith 2005).

In contrast to institutional perspectives from organisation science, institutional ethnography provides a set of concepts that can be for exploration, not only explanation. The researcher can use these tools to broaden her perspective and assess the ruling relations within an institutional setting. First, an institutional ethnography should describe what people do in their daily lives and how their work is coupled with what other people do. Doing so, the researcher can make the individuals' knowledge visible for others and thus influence the social organisation of knowledge. There is no single way of doing institutional ethnography (Smith 2006), and the choice of method can be selected based on the study's guiding questions. It may also be limited to one method, such as interviews or observation, if the researcher deems it most suitable (Lund 2015). No matter how, the ethnography should be carried out in a manner that reveals taken-for-granted practices and aspects in people's everyday life (Smith 2006).

To help explain how people carry out activities, theorisation of material and active texts is crucial in institutional ethnography. Texts are here generously understood as 'material in a form that enables replication of what is written,

drawn or otherwise reproduced' (Smith 2005: 228). Texts are seen as representing the ruling relations because they coordinate human action and tend to be produced by people within the dominating system (Smith 2005). Thus, by investigating texts, the trans-local is observable in the local. Indeed, the idea is that through textual examination 'what is usually ascribed to abstract and objectifying theories about "the system," "the structure," [and] "the national," ... can be observed in concrete everyday practices'. (Lund 2015: 69). The feedback mechanisms that institutional texts coordinate actions – which again influence other actions, which may in turn influence institutional texts – are labelled 'institutional circuits' in institutional ethnography (Smith and Turner 2014). The texts are thus seen as part of the coordinating apparatus that makes something happen, and they are therefore an important part of institutional ethnographic analysis.

A final fundamental tool in institutional ethnography is mapping. By mapping the institutional structures from a subjective standpoint, the researcher can uncover ruling relations and existing objectifications of individuals and work tasks within the institutions (Widerberg 2015). As with the textual analysis, the researcher can explore links between the local and the trans-local and reveal how the individuals are influenced by a social and economic ruling relations. The ways I used concepts and tools in institutional ethnography, such as mapping and textual analysis, are further explained in Chapter 7 and, to a limited extent, Article 1.

Briefly summarised, institutional ethnography focuses on individuals within institutions and the social relations in which they are embedded (Smith 1987, 2005). Yet, as with other ethnographies (see e.g. Hammersley 2006), institutional ethnography challenges may arise from lack of clear spatial and temporal boundaries and the difficulty of determining which context is appropriate for understanding what is being studied in relation to the wider society. To overcome this, my dissertation draws on institutional ethnography in combination with neo-institutional theory. I largely make use of tools from institutional ethnography as a 'frame of reference' (Widerberg 2006: 80)



and understand research mostly as exploration, less as theoretical verification (Smith 2005). However, through the design of the dissertation's methodology, I aim to undertake both.

### *Predicting and exploring*

Generally, scientific theories are concerned with exploring, explaining and predicting phenomena. In the organisation-theoretical approaches described above, however, instrumental as well as the institutional perspectives focus more on explaining and predicting than exploring. Even though the interpretivist perspective criticises the early positivist paradigm, both approaches can be criticised for attempting to predict outcomes. This is one of the main reasons institutional ethnography can serve as a tool to improve the theoretical foundation for inductive exploration. It highlights the social-constructivist tradition, and potential, in institutional theory, which also can direct empirical focus onto the micro-level nuances, subjectivities and 'living' aspect of organisations (Christensen et al. 2013). There remain, however, notable differences between the two approaches. While neo-institutional theory forwards interpretivism, for instance, institutional ethnography minimises interpretation by allowing for 'self-representation' of participants (Smith 1987).

As a method of inquiry, institutional ethnography encourages a broad, subjective and bottom-up approach to researching social organisations (Smith 2005; Widerberg 2015). Perspectives from neo-institutional theory, on the other hand, can be useful to contextualise the experiences of the 'knowers' in public institutional complexes. These perspectives can enable explanation and prediction because they provide a systematic pathway along which to scrutinise the observed phenomena. When institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory are combined, they form a theoretically rich methodological institutional framework. By drawing on this framework, this dissertation applies an abductive research approach, rather than inductive or deductive (Blaikie 2000, 2010). It sees the social world as constructed and experienced differently by different

actors, and takes empirical observations as points of departure, without rejecting existing theories.

### **Sensitive complementing**

Institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory are complex in nature and application. There is no one obvious or natural seeming way to combine these ideas in an analytical framework, and the open-endedness of both approaches enables multiple combinations. Institutional ethnography offers a framework of ideas, but no rules or specific guidelines that must be followed (Smith 2006). Particularly in the Nordics, researchers are encouraged to use the parts of institutional ethnography that are relevant to their investigations; there are several examples – notably in studies of welfare institutions – where institutional ethnography has been successfully combined with other methods and theories (for examples, see Widerberg 2015).

When looking at the specific traditions of organisation theory in the Nordics, it also makes sense to combine the two theories. Lundberg and Sataøen (2014) suggest that institutional ethnography has a lot to offer what is called ‘Scandinavian’ neo-institutional theory and argue that institutional ethnography can inspire use of other types of data, which can lead to a different type of analysis, incorporate higher levels of reflection and provide fruitful avenues to address human actors and practices of power in institutional studies (Lundberg and Sataøen forthcoming). Another reason for a Nordic-specific alignment relates to how the Scandinavian tradition of institutional theory developed in relation to the nature of public organisations. In contrast to public organisations in the USA, for example, Scandinavian ones are considered culturally and structurally homogenous. They cater more to collective norms and values than to the rationality of the individual. In response to the characteristics of Scandinavian public organisations, the regional research tradition has evolved to emphasise not only hierarchical structures and formal aspects, but also

institutional facets (Christensen 2012; Læg Reid 2007). This, to some extent, resembles the focus in institutional ethnography.

Depending on the research focus, discipline and other factors, organisational researchers often apply different theoretical approaches. Indeed, one particularity of Scandinavian organisation research is the idea that ‘dialoguing with basic disciplines has helped the organisation theory perspective to pursue a broader intellectual and societal agenda’ (Thoenig 2007). The interdisciplinarity of both institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory thus allows researchers, like myself, to be sensitive to elements from both approaches at the same time, perhaps particularly in a dissertation on a Norwegian welfare institution.

Inspired by Pettigrew (1985), Roness (1997) identifies four modes of relating to several theories in an organisational or institutional study. They are: *prioritising*, by using one theory; *contrasting*, by applying several theories at the same time in a manner of comparison; *synthesising*, by including elements from different theories to form a new combination, and; *complementing*, by combining several theories in the same framework. In my research, I do not prioritise, contrast or synthesise theories. I do not develop a completely new approach. But, throughout the research process, I made use of different elements from both organisation theory and institutional ethnography where I deemed them useful. In retrospect, I can identify that my method of combination mirrors Roness’ (1997)s mode of ‘complementing’. I do not rigorously apply all facets of the two theoretical bodies; rather, I remain sensitive to both of them simultaneously. I thus term my approach ‘sensitive complementing’. Hence, my institutional analytical framework consists of a specific, needs-based strategic selection of tools and concepts taken from institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory. Elaborations on how this combination influenced my data collection and analysis are included in the two following chapters.

## **6. Fieldwork and data**

This section is an account of my fieldwork process. I describe how I entered the field, who the bureaucrats are and what data I have collected. Thereafter I reflect on the ethical implications of my fieldwork and the dissertation more broadly.

### **Accessing and entering the social security system**

At the onset of my research, I initiated contact with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) by emailing their main address. I was lucky. Soon after, I got a reply from a person in the Directorate who said he had been assigned the role of my contact person. It turned out that I had been given a highly suitable and well-positioned gatekeeper (Campbell et al. 2006). Since NAV represents a public institution, it is obliged to be transparent and open to the public and to research (NESH 2016: 23). That said, I did not believe I would be granted access so straightforwardly. I merely requested a conversation to discuss potential collaboration, but my contact person suggested a start-up meeting to talk about my project and discuss potential units for fieldwork. This experience reflects the importance of sending a well-drafted letter in advance when dealing with an elite target group. Ideally, this should be on ‘some sort of official stationery’, (Goldstein 2002: 671) and contain the basic outline of the research and the ground rules for the potential fieldwork. I gained credibility for future interviews through my initial email, even though it was not printed on my institution’s stationery. I believe how I presented my project, underscoring my affiliation with the renowned Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), may have eased the process. While others have described gaining and maintaining access to the field as emotional labour (Blix and Wettergren 2015), my experience produced a more pleasant tale.

Aiming for in-depth and long-term fieldwork, I first inquired about the prospects of becoming an intern in a relevant unit at NAV. We discussed whether I could be engaged as an intern for a six-month period, while also doing interviews at the

same time. After contemplating this with his Directorate colleagues, my contact person responded that they did not see this as a good solution. They explained that a newly hired caseworker normally takes up to a half-year to train, meaning that training me would involve many resources. In addition, there was concern that six months may not have been a sufficient amount of time to truly get on the inside of the institutional complex, so there was a chance I would end up gaining little from the experience. But, he said, the Directorate had granted me access to do fieldwork wherever I deemed it relevant within the entire social security system. Of course, each office or unit had to accept, as did the individuals I approached, but I had the formal approval needed to ask for acceptance. Unsurprisingly, this turned out to be highly beneficial for accessing and entering the field in the major bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation NAV.

I still intended to examine ‘the inside’ of NAV, and planned to do this through interviews, extended fieldwork, participant observations and a collection of texts (as inspired by Smith 2005, 2006). To understand NAV’s encounter with transnationals, I decided to speak with people working in the ‘international branch’<sup>1</sup> – with the bureaucrats who deal with clients who lead transnational lives. I already knew that the office NAV International was charged with cross-border social security provision (for details on the origins of this particular office, see Article 3). Through discussions with my contact person, I realised that the international branch was spread across several offices. It was organised at the local, regional and national levels, and included councillors, caseworkers, administrative staff and policymakers who work with benefit provision to people across borders. In principle, everyone who has lived abroad for an extended period of time or who receives social security benefits from another country is processed by NAV International. In practice, this is not the case. Everyone can

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<sup>1</sup> ‘International dimension’ and ‘international branch’ are my translations of what is locally called ‘*utlandstilsnitt*’ and ‘*utlandsområdet*’. The ‘international branch’ includes the specific institution ‘NAV International’ as well as other institutions and sub-units working with cross-border social security recipients.

contact NAV through their local office – and one exists in every municipality nationwide. If someone applies for a benefit or requests information, the case process is started at their local office, before – if ever – it is sent to a national office, such as NAV International. Therefore, to grasp the entirety of NAV's encounter with transnationals, I decided to include local and other regional and national offices. This decision mirrored my aim to encounter all segments of the transnational population – including those currently in Norway.

Another decision I made upfront was which types of social security benefits to emphasise. My contact person urged me to choose one or perhaps two, such as retirement pension and unemployment benefit, in order to have time to specialise on the complex regulations the bureaucrats made use of. Most national and regional offices focus on a specific benefit, and within the local offices and NAV International, different sub-units specialise in specific benefits. I therefore tried to delimit my field. However, being unfamiliar with the field at the time, I feared that I would make wrong decisions if I decided on social security benefit types before going into the field. I agreed with my contact person to start at NAV International and visit several sub-units there before making any precluding choices. This decision proved wise. In the end, I did not reduce my field to any specific social security. The core of my research interests and findings turned out to cover the larger space of transnational casework at NAV. Challenges with specific regulative definitions and discretion were present, but I was rather drawn to explore cross-scalar and cross-benefit dilemmas.

I selected the specific field sites based on my initial interest, as well as insights from institutional ethnography and organisation theory. Drawing on the concept of trans-local relations (Smith 2005), I expected some links and power relations between units and people to be traceable only during fieldwork, through the exploration of people's work knowledge, who they contacted and what they did. For this reason, I kept the selection and number of offices I would visit open until the end of the fieldwork, except for two sites: NAV International and one local office. My choice to include offices from different organisational scales was also related to an awareness of the theoretical importance given to horizontal as well

as vertical structures in Nordic public organisations and the importance of these concepts in instrumental and institutional organisation theory (Christensen et al. 2013). Particularly compelled by the urge to investigate vertical communication (Christensen et al. 2019), I sought to ensure that all hierarchical scales were included in the study from the start.<sup>2</sup>

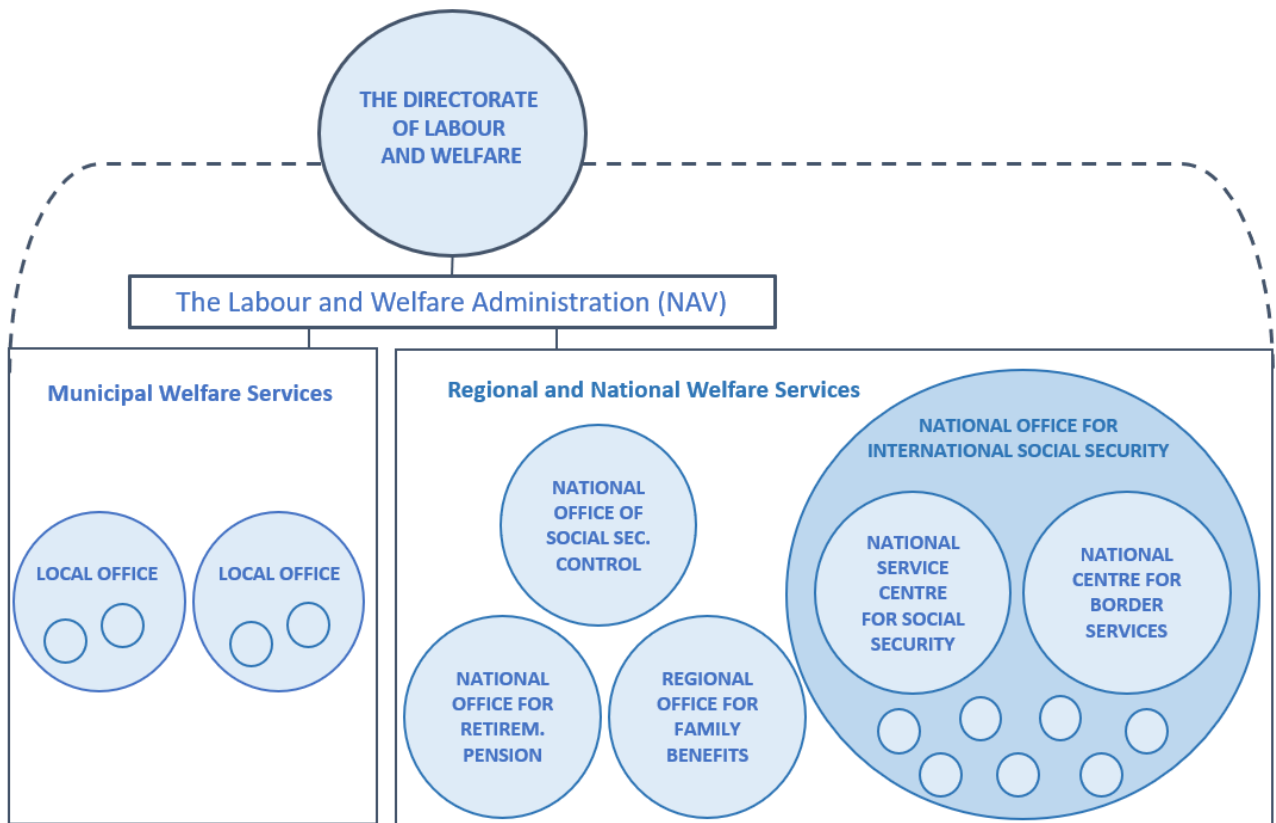
As soon as I decided on an office I wanted to visit, I notified my contact person at NAV and he established the initial link. All the office leaders he contacted (thirteen in total) agreed to let me do fieldwork at their office or unit, and they became sub-contact points. This reflects the importance of doing preparatory background work with people who are, to use Ostrander's (1993) term, 'in the know' before attempting to enter an 'elite' research field. Contacts should be made in the appropriate order, for instance, from top down, as I did. Gaining access is not the same as establishing the trust that is needed to get useful data, and a process of being 'checked out' is likely to occur at different stages during the fieldwork period (Ostrander 1993). After discussions with a leader at one of the local offices I initially contacted, the two of us agreed that another local office in a neighbouring municipality would be more suitable, as there were more transnational clients under the charge of that office. During the fieldwork, I decided on other research sites based on advice from people I interviewed. When several pointed me in the direction of one specific office or unit, I included it as part of the field. The two local offices were selected for their diversity. I went to two smaller cities that are both highly diverse, yet dissimilar, in terms of immigration and labour mobility patterns. The only office that I did not get access to via my main contact point was the national centre for border services. This office is grounded on a collaborative effort between several welfare and labour institutions in Norway and Sweden, and while they also work on social security information provision, they are only partly a sub-office of NAV International.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Norwegian social security system, the institutional hierarchical scale can be seen as made up of five vertical levels. From the bottom-up they are front-line work; casework; special unit coordination; administrative coordination; and Directorate policy-work.

During the fieldwork I also decided to include the Directorate as part of the field. Here, I contacted a few people directly, without going via my contact point.

In Figure 7, I map out the units in which I conducted fieldwork. All are part of the broader international branch of NAV, and all deal with cross-border social security issues – albeit to different extents. The two largest circles represent the Directorate and NAV International. The medium circles represent larger offices, including national and regional offices and sub-centres in NAV International. The smallest circles are sub-units within the larger offices, focusing on specific benefits or themes within the office.



**Figure 7.** Map of the units included in the fieldwork

To summarise, my main place of fieldwork was NAV International. The other units of fieldwork I included were the Directorate of Labour and Welfare (what I have called ‘the Directorate’ for short), the national office of social security control, the national service centre for international social security, the national



centre for border services, the national office for retirement pension, a regional office for family benefits and two local social security offices.<sup>3</sup> The remit of NAV International, including the national service centre for social security and the service centre for border services, is social security benefits for recipients travelling or residing abroad. At the national office for social security control, there is also a sub-unit that specifically focuses on clients while they are abroad. At the regional office for family benefits and the national office for retirement pensions, the transnational clients of focus include both those abroad and those who currently reside in Norway. At the local offices, the clients in focus are by and large living or working in the municipalities.

Selecting this field enabled me to collect insights on a large range of social security benefits and services in the social security system. It also compelled me to include a range of bureaucrats working with different tasks, across the scales of the organisation and with different experiences of transnational work.

## **The bureaucrats**

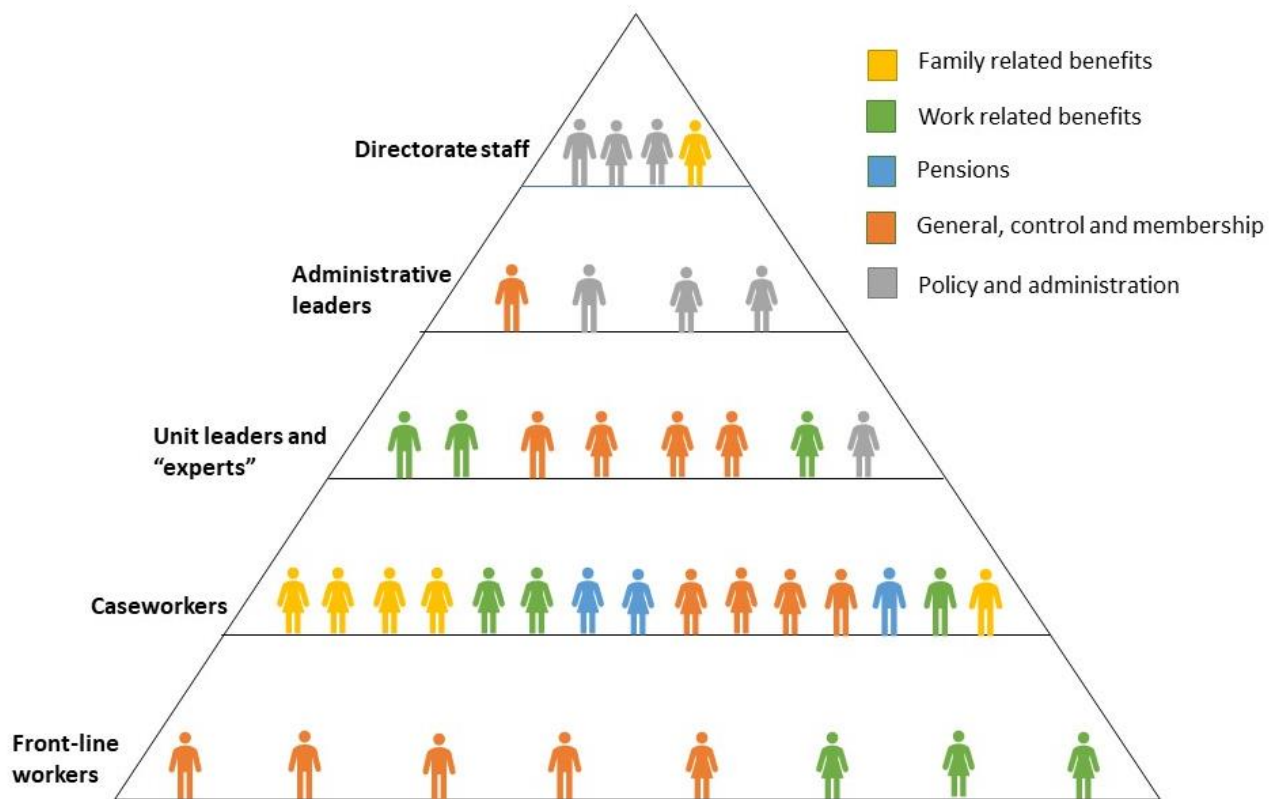
During the fieldwork, I interviewed 39 bureaucrats. These were not randomly selected. Though I chose which offices and units to visit, I was not able to select whom to talk with. In most cases, the office leaders, my contact points, pre-selected whom to interview. I was asked for selection criteria in advance only twice, and I noticed my contact points tended to ask people with high levels of expertise or lengthy work experience. This selection – largely no selection – can be ethically problematic in several ways, such as in relation to consent, anonymity, and bias in the data that are produced. At some offices I also identified and asked other bureaucrats to participate, for example, after another

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<sup>3</sup> The official Norwegian names of these units, respectively, are *NAV Internasjonalt*, *Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet*; *NAV Kontroll*; *NAV Kontaktsenter Utland*; *Grensetjenesten*; *NAV Pensjon*; *NAV Forvaltning*; and *NAV-kontor*. All interviews were conducted in Norwegian.

bureaucrat had talked about or recommended him or her. I was never turned down on these requests. My contact points were also included in the sample when I asked them, which I did if I deemed it relevant. In nearly all cases, I also engaged in introductory conversations with my contact points the first time I showed up at an office, where they told me about the general work going on at the place.

The final sample of bureaucrats working in the ‘international branch’ was thus highly diverse. To preserve anonymity, I cannot specify which benefit or task each worked on specifically, but I can group their work broadly as being oriented towards family-related benefits, labour-related benefits, pensions, administrative tasks and other. They also worked in five different types of positions, representing the scale of the organisation at five hierarchical levels. From the top these were: Directorate staff; NAV office administrative leaders; unit leaders and unofficial ‘experts’; caseworkers; and front-line staff, including councillors. Slightly more than half of the bureaucrats were women, and the group was spread across ages (27–67 years), with varying length of work experience (2–38 years), and with different educative backgrounds. The sample is illustrated in Figure 8. The different colours in the illustration signal their principal work area, though approximately half of the group had experience from other units and had worked with several different social security benefits. Nearly all the administrative leaders had long-time experience from being caseworkers themselves, and all the ‘experts’ or unit leaders also worked with casework or with front-line information provision.



*Figure 8. The interviewed bureaucrats' primary work areas, gender and institutional scale*

The nature of the bureaucrats' encounter with the transnational user group differed across the five vertical levels. The most notable difference is between the 'street-level bureaucrats' and the more policy-oriented and administrative bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010). This dissertation's understanding of 'street-level bureaucrats' includes front-line staff, caseworkers and the unit leaders and experts. All possessed some degree of discretionary power and relative autonomy from the administration. Of these, the front-line social workers and councillors had the most direct encounters with the users. They were either physically meeting users face to face – when individuals showed up at the local offices to fill out forms, provide documents or ask for advice – or they spoke to users over the phone when they called the local offices or service centre to ask for information or advice, or to complain.

In most cases, the caseworkers did not have direct encounters with the transnationals. They got to know their cases through the paperwork, mail and

email correspondence and phone calls. Calls took place whenever a user wanted to speak to the caseworker directly or when the caseworker needed to contact the user to obtain information. The same was true for the unit leaders and experts, who also worked as caseworkers or councillors, though, in addition, these bureaucrats had profound knowledge about the specific benefits they worked with. Furthermore, they had experience; most of them had worked across several areas in the organisation. They were responsible for some administrative tasks and played important roles in communication and information-sharing across the institution. As such, they were likely to be informed about the experiences of other bureaucrats and to play an important role in the institutionalisation of norms and practices.

Most of the administrative leaders and the directorate staff also had broad organisational experience. While they did not directly encounter the user group in their current positions, they did indirectly through interaction with the street-level bureaucrats over whom they were responsible. In this way, they were able to obtain relevant information about user-bureaucrat meetings and stay informed about any related frustrations. As such, they knew a lot about these encounters between the welfare system (and its bureaucrats) and the transnational population. However, this knowledge was based on personal first-hand experiences from the past and recent second-hand experiences collected through the narratives of other bureaucrats.

Differences between the scalar positions are relevant to highlight as they are likely to affect the bureaucrats' experience of the encounter with the transnationals. As Egeberg (2012) points out, the organisational context surrounding a decision-maker affects the selection of alternatives available. The formal norms for practices and the formal roles of the bureaucrats differ across the administrative levels, and this affects decision-making and how tasks are carried out (Christensen et al. 2019). As documented in all the articles in this dissertation, the administrative level appears to be of less importance for establishing perceptions of transnationals and of more importance for the implications of these perceptions.

When I write about my impressions from the collective group of interviewees, I label them as ‘bureaucrats’. I do not highlight characteristics or traits among the individuals in the group, unless – where relevant and possible – it is to highlight the bureaucrats’ specific work position. I occasionally also mention which office or benefit a cited bureaucrat works with. I only do this in cases where I am confident their anonymity is ensured. With the exception of education and length of service, research has shown that most demographic factors do not appear to have a strong effect on individual actions (Christensen and Læg Reid 2009; Suvarierol 2008: 160). Thus, while there are multiple differences in the characteristics, experiences and viewpoints among the bureaucrats, this study aims to discover tendencies and prevailing norms and actions among bureaucrats representing the welfare state. It is therefore not always necessary to highlight the differences among the bureaucrats when I refer to observed institutional tendencies, norms or widespread perspectives.

## **The data**

The dissertation builds on empirical data that I collected during fieldwork between October 2015 and June 2016. The dataset includes interviews with 39 bureaucrats, five specific occasions of participant observation, supplementary observations and a compilation of collected texts. The next section provides details on each type of data and the process of data collection.

### *Interviews*

With one exception, all the interviews were carried out in a meeting room or in the individual bureaucrat’s office space. The exception was an interview with a nearly retired caseworker. She preferred to carry out the interview at a café close to the office. Two of the interviews involved speaking simultaneously with two bureaucrats. In both these cases, the two bureaucrats had collaborated or were collaborating closely on a specific project or task, and it made sense to interview them at the same time to discuss that specific matter in

detail. All the other interviews were carried out with only one bureaucrat. The average interview lasted for one and a half hours (the shortest was 51 minutes; and the longest was three hours and 40 minutes). The interviews most often ended with a continued conversation after the recorder was turned off, while they walked with me to lunch or showed me out the building. I recorded all the interviews, and took supplementary and analytical notes during and directly following the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed.

Before entering the field, I was conscious that objectivism is obsolete in social scientific research. I see interview data as shaped by the informant *and* the researcher (McDowell 1992). To some extent, I expected to experience elite and specialised interviewing, where ‘the interviewee teaches the interviewer what the problems are’. (Dexter 1970). Bureaucrats with specialised knowledge, whether considered elites or not,<sup>4</sup> hold an advantageous position as they sit on information the interviewer needs (Becker and Meyers 1974). Others have found that ‘the researcher can significantly influence the success of interviewing elites by decreasing the status imbalance between the researched and the researcher’ (Mickey 2012: 483). In line with this, I familiarised myself with the basic regulations the bureaucrats dealt with as a way to gain respect and to be able to challenge the bureaucrats on regulative subjects (Harvey 2011; Zuckerman 1972). Yet, I did not demonstrate my knowledge unless I deemed it useful in the

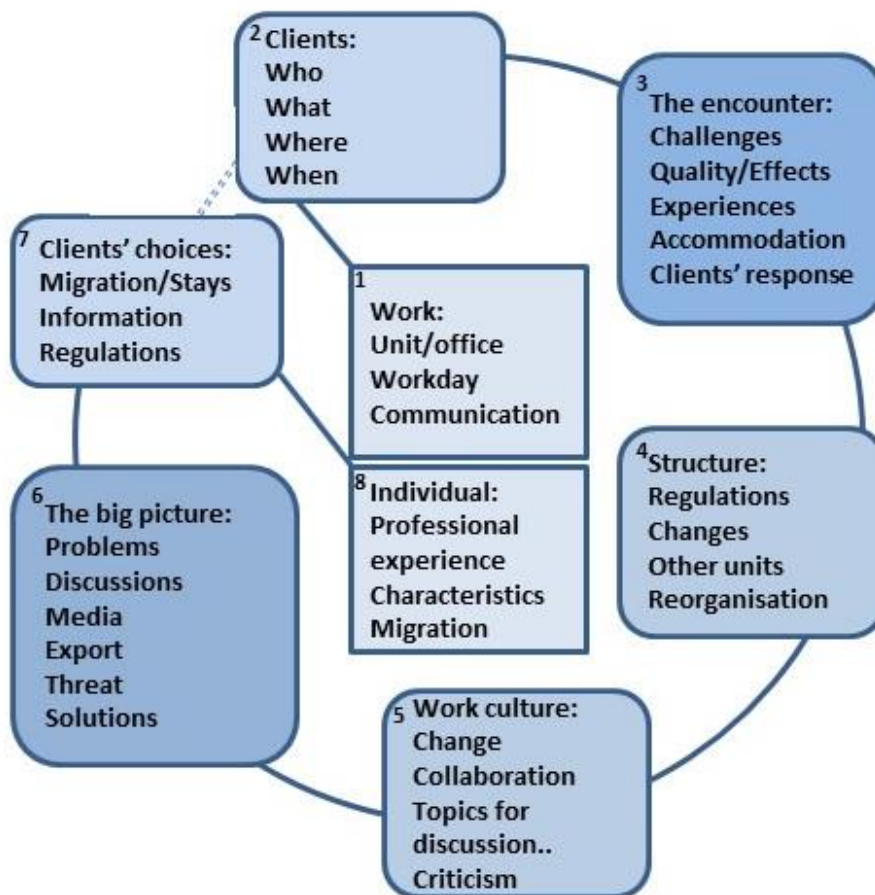
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<sup>4</sup> Qualitative research has various definitions of ‘elites’. Harvey (2011) underscores the absence of a clear-cut understanding and explains how scholars tend to adopt different definitions and their own terms such, as ‘ultra elites’ (Zuckerman 1972), ‘professional elites’ (McDowell 1998) and ‘hybrid elites’ (Parry 1998). It is not necessarily only the figureheads or leaders of institutions who have the greatest claim to elite status. People in other positions may have extensive relevant professional and social networks. If they do not hold top positions, they may be in better strategic situations within relevant social structures where they can exert influence and argue for their cause (Harvey 2011). This dissertation does not label any of the bureaucrats as ‘elites’. Yet, without terming them as such, it considers all of them to hold specific information of interest, from their respective standpoints, that can only be reached through interviews.

interview situation. I rather sought to minimise the risk that the interviews developed around my own pre-set expectations about bureaucrats and transnational living. I wanted to be clear-minded when I entered the 'everyday' experiences of my informants and to focus on the activities and experiences they have in their specific contexts (Smith 1987, 2006).

The initial interview structure was therefore largely inspired by the standpoint theory entrenched in institutional ethnography (Smith 2005) and by my initial research question: *how does the Norwegian social security system encounter people who lead transnational lives?* To address this, I needed to learn 'how things worked' at NAV. Therefore, my pilot interviews took the form of conversations loosely structured around four topics: the individual's everyday work, the workplace, the transnational group of clients and their encounters.

The first interviews moved in several different directions, as the open-ended questions encouraged the informants to talk about various matters of importance to them. Following the first three conversations I had at NAV, I expanded the interview guide and brought in several topics I deemed relevant to my investigation and in accordance with what had already been discussed to this point. These topics were media, regulations, client groups, work culture, practical challenges, organisational history, internal communication, differences among units, quality versus effectiveness and immigration and the welfare state, among others. As new topics continued to arise during the ensuing interviews, I found it difficult to maintain an open and unstructured approach while also covering all the topics earlier informants had raised. I decided therefore to structure the interview guide around some overarching themes, according to the underlying ideas I had from institutional ethnography, notions relevant to neo-institutional theory and my original interests and sub-research questions. Figure 9 illustrates the organisation of my final interview guide, including the eight clusters of themes to be discussed (for previous versions of the interview guide, see the appendices).



*Figure 9. The final interview guide used during most of the fieldwork at NAV*

In clusters 1, 2 and 8, I drew on institutional ethnography and focused on the individuals, their everyday work, texts, the workplace mapped from their standpoints and personal experiences. In clusters 3, 6, and 7, I drew on a combination of my initial interests and other topics that interviewees raised themselves. In clusters 4 and 5, I asked about specific elements from instrumental and institutional theory. Here, I focused on structure – history, hierarchy, relationships between units and processes of reorganisation – and on work culture – norms, values, changing perspectives and individuals' experiences of such processes.

While the development of my interview guide is a methodological component of the research, it very much relates to the analytical process as well. Since I drew



on ideas from both institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory in the interviews, it became useful to build on the same theoretical concepts, and others, during the analysis. When analysing what the bureaucrats talked about in relation to cluster 4 (structure), for example, it became clear that the historical traits of the international branch of NAV influenced how the bureaucrats responded to current organisational change – much in line with the idea of ‘path-dependency’ in organisation theory (Steinmo et al. 1992). Likewise, I found that structural changes were often driven by individual agency as well as external structures, a revelation that related closely to ideas about ‘institutional entrepreneurship’ (Garud et al. 2007) and ‘myth’ (Meyer and Rowan 1977). In Chapter 7, I elaborate further on how concepts and approaches from my methodological framework influenced my analytical process.

### *Observation*

To get on ‘the inside’ of NAV, I aimed to supplement the interviews with extensive field observation to see what the bureaucrats did, not only what they said they did (Laurier 2010). While I had originally aimed to do extended participant observation, either as an intern or by hanging around, this did not materialise. As mentioned, I was not given the opportunity to perform the work tasks myself, though I still aimed at spending time in the offices to observe the bureaucratic work. However, this proved more difficult than expected. While most of the offices and units I visited had space where I could position myself for observation, I quickly saw how hanging around would be of little use. The units were small and busy, and the bureaucrats spent the bulk of their time in their own office spaces. To linger by the coffee machine would be inappropriate, lonely and awkward. I would clearly become an institutional ‘outsider’ (Laurier 2010: 118).

Yet, when it felt natural, I was able to observe everyday work practices while waiting around offices between interviews or waiting for lunch – if a bureaucrat had invited me to join. I was also allowed to observe parts of casework processes as carried out by the individual bureaucrats in their office rooms. I only carried

out five specific instances of participant observation. These included two sessions where I listened in on 33 phone calls with transnationals; one weekly roundtable meeting during which all the caseworkers got involved to solve difficult cases; one casework training seminar; and one staff lunch, which ended up running particularly late due to a discussion on migration and mobility. Through these observations, I witnessed first-hand how experiences with transnationals shaped institutional perceptions and practices.

Supplementary observation data were collected at public events organised by and for the welfare administration and through several informal conversations. One of the events was NAV's annual conference in 2015, locally called FARVE, which focused on the theme 'immigrants and the labour market'. Here, I listened to and talked with several bureaucrats and policymakers about my research project and the topic of my dissertation (29.10.2015). In total, I had more than twenty informal conversations such as these with my contact points and with other people I met while walking between interviews or during staff lunches. While all these conversations influenced my general impressions, I only included notes from five of them in my physical dataset.

### *Texts*

Before entering the field, I started to read up on NAV through its website, focusing particularly on regulations concerning social security membership and export. However, I realised after the first few interviews at NAV that I needed to dive deeper into the specific regulations concerning each benefit type; in the interviews, my unfamiliarity with certain subjects or protocols prevented me from understanding everything. I needed to share common grounds of knowledge with the bureaucrats to create and maintain quality conversations during the interviews (Thagaard 2018).

Keeping in mind my contact person saying it would take a half-year to grasp the reality of working with any of the benefits, I did not aim for comprehensive

understanding. Still, I had to read up to grasp various components of the work. The regulative frameworks they related to were largely spelled out in the National Insurance Act, but also in the acts and regulative guidelines (*forskrifter*) concerning specific types of benefits. All are available on the Lovdata Foundation website ([www.lovdata.no](http://www.lovdata.no)), while summaries of different regulations can be found on NAV's website ([www.nav.no](http://www.nav.no)). I did not download these regulations from the website, but took note of which were relevant, particularly in specific cases where the bureaucrats struggled to perform a task in compliance with the rule. During the fieldwork process, I decided to focus on these texts as well as others that the bureaucrats referred to in their everyday work. I included these as part of the dissertation's data material, in line with the importance attributed to texts in institutional ethnography.

The regulations were the most authoritative of the texts I collected; they were 'higher order' texts (Smith 2006: 79). However, other texts seemed equally important in shaping the bureaucrats' work. When talking about migration, organisational change and work structures, internal institutional guidelines and strategy plans were widely referred to. To get access to these texts, I often asked the bureaucrats during the interview if they could share the documents with me – and they often did. I also emailed a few of the unit leaders to ask for specific documents that had been brought up in the interviews with the bureaucrats working there.

When doing this, I also gained access to less influential, but still interesting, texts. Most noteworthy is NAV International's internal newsletter. When mentioning the unique work culture at NAV International, both presently and in the past, some bureaucrats referred to the newsletters. They still received internal news via email, but I was told this was nothing like before. An office leader had stored a pile of newsletters from 1999 to 2004, which I was permitted to copy. The newsletters, called *Trygdens Gang*, had been produced on a near-monthly basis. In addition to institutional news, such as new hires, regulative changes and updates from an apparently policy-active group of leaders, it included interviews with staff members, humorous information about the empty office gym and

insights from difficult – or funny – transnational casework processes. I gained similar impressions of work cultures from office posters, for example one providing guidelines for how to behave towards colleagues and difficult clients. I photographed some and include them in my textual material, drawing on a generous understanding of what constitutes ‘texts’ in institutional ethnography (Smith 2005).

The final type of institutional texts I included in my material were external texts such as statistics and media coverage. When a specific news item or opinion piece was mentioned by a bureaucrat, I tried to trace it down following the interview (I was not always able to, as I did not always have enough information to find the exact piece). I also collected statistical data from NAV to obtain quantitative information about the volume of social security export and the transnational clients, but also to follow up on the bureaucrats’ statements, as some cited statistics to illustrate changes or activities within the transnational client group.

The collection of these texts became part of my data material, though I have used them for different purposes and in different ways in the three articles in the dissertation. I referred most actively to the ‘higher order’ texts in Article 1, where I analysed sayings, doings and texts to explore the workings and emergence of institutional circuits – the interrelations between texts and actions (Nilsen 2017). The internal newsletters and the historical anecdotes, as well as insights from older strategy documents, were of much value in Article 3, where I aimed to present the historical development of NAV International. In general, I took it upon myself to read and refer to the texts during the analytical process, to understand the ruling relations and institutional anchoring in the bureaucrats’ everyday lives (for further details on the analytical process, see Chapter 7).

## **Ethical reflections and positionality**

I followed the ethical norms and guidelines for conducting qualitative research as given by Norway’s National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences (NESH 2006). During the data collection and ensuing analysis, I followed the

Norwegian Social Science Data Services' (NSD) guidelines and requirements to ensure that necessary measures were taken to secure research participants' confidentiality during data collection and in the output (e.g. my articles). I followed NSD's advice for safe computer storage of data. It must be noted that even though ethical guidelines should be considered, they are not always easy to apply. As underscored by Van Liempt and Bilger (2012), qualitative social research will always be influenced by moral judgments, beliefs and feelings that go beyond any set of rules or guidelines.

I asked most of the bureaucrats for consent twice. First, in an email, in which I sent them a flyer about my project and the consent form, and later, at the start of the interviews when I confirmed they had read through the information and summarised it to them orally. I also brought the flyer and the form with me to the interviews (these documents are included in the appendices). I made sure to inform everyone about their right to withdraw at any point. Still, I interviewed these individuals in their positions as bureaucrats. They were at work. Their leaders had asked them to do the interviews with me. While I was assured of the participants' informed consent, the way I approached and accessed the field merits reflection on coerced consent (Miller and Bell 2002). What if they did not want to participate, but felt obliged to? I was conscious of this during each interview, and was therefore grateful to witness a general enthusiasm among the interviewees. Many expressed honest gratitude, stating that they were happy someone finally wanted to talk about the topic with them. As such, I felt confident that these individuals would have agreed to be interviewed even if their leaders had not asked them to do so.

I have strived to ensure the anonymity of the bureaucrats. Because many knew who was being interviewed at each office or unit, I have given everyone pseudonyms; at times I described them as working with a benefit that they had prior experience from – not the benefit they currently were working with. When my Directorate contact person asked for a list with all my interviewee's names, I explained that I could not share these details, as I had assured all the interviewees that I would uphold my promise of anonymity.

In terms of positionality, I was clearly an ‘outsider’ when it came to knowledge. I did not know enough details to be on the inside; plus, I was interested in the bureaucrats for their expertise. As a PhD researcher, I was both on the outside of NAV and also ‘on the periphery of the academic community’ (Roesch-March et al. 2011: 250). Yet, I was met as a researcher – not a student – while in the field, and this was useful to establish the trust I needed. I believe I gained some credibility from being part of a larger team including well-known senior researchers, notably Grete Brochmann. She is the lead author of two publicly well-known white papers, publicly recognised as ‘the Brochmann reports’ (Brochmann et al. 2011, 2017) on the Norwegian welfare state and immigration. Her name was mentioned in my information flyer, and in some of the most high-level interviews I also referred to her work directly at the outset, positioning me as a colleague and/or supervisee of Brochmann.

The bureaucrats acknowledged me as a researcher and my topic of focus, and several showed appreciations for my knowledge about the regulations they worked on. Yet, I found I could also profit from displaying my relative ignorance of the field. When, for instance, a bureaucrat was particularly eager, talking about a challenge or a specific client, I could use my lack of regulative insights to encourage the bureaucrats to go more into detail. Upon asking ‘Could you clarify the regulations concerning that case for me?’, the bureaucrat would not only explain regulative context, but also talk more in depth about the case or the topic of interest. This also led many to explain things to me in a meta-descriptive way, reflecting on the larger reasons for why they performed a specific task in a specific way.

I see my dissertation findings as a result of the collaborative effort between me and those I researched. It is therefore particularly important for me to employ critical reflexivity regarding my positionality and biases. While I may believe that I have a solid awareness of my opinions and beliefs, I cannot fully rely on my own idea about myself as an unprejudiced and objective participant. Indeed, it may not be possible to be aware of all of one’s own bias and blind spots (Rose 1997). Still, what I do know is that from the very outset I assumed the existence of some

problematics and frictions in the bureaucrats' encounter with the transnationals. I also assumed that the bureaucrats would have a strong tendency to generalise across immigrant groups and perhaps take a more negative approach towards people who lead transnational lives in general – as discussed in Article 1, my latter assumptions proved wrong. In addition to my expectations of findings, I was influenced by my behaviours towards Norwegian bureaucracy; for instance, I dressed formally for meetings and interviews with administrative and directorate staff but somewhat less formally when I went to local offices and NAV events. I also introduced myself and the research project somewhat differently according to my assumptions about the bureaucrats and the different hierarchical scales they represented. While I believe most of these strategies proved useful and suitable, I cannot be sure that the bureaucrats' impression of me influenced how they approached me. Perhaps the data would have been different if I had behaved differently in the various settings? If I had not been visibly pregnant (as I was at the time)? Or if I were a 45-year-old man rather than a woman in her late 20s? I cannot know for sure, but I believe that despite my own positionality, biases concerning expectations and any unconscious prejudices, I gained and produced solid, reliable data (Berg and Mansvelt 2000).

Furthermore, I reflected on the research participants' positionalities. Given that the bureaucrats were aware of my research interests and the fact that the project was closely related to the normative political question of how the welfare state should respond to migration, to what extent were they influenced when they responded to my questions? Did they want to convey political messages in their responses, to answer in a way that represented NAV or perhaps in a way that satisfied me? Any of these motivations may very well have been the case. Yet, as most interviews lasted for more than an hour and a half, I experienced how their formality and demeanour changed during the interview. Towards the end, the bureaucrats were more reflective, had lower shoulders and talked more freely – at least, that is the impression I got. This transition has led me to the conclusion that, among those who did react in this way, I got beyond their formal mask. Their

viewpoints and knowledge represented both their position as bureaucrats and as ordinary and unique individuals.

Concerning the bureaucrats' positionality, a final ethical reflection is in order. In this dissertation, I ask how the welfare system encounters people who lead transnational lives. Yet, what I mean by 'the system' here is, in practice, institutional texts and these individual bureaucrats. To what extent can I claim that the data I collected are sufficiently representable to generalise concerning 'NAV bureaucrats', NAV or the entire social security system? The goal with qualitative research is not to generalise, and this has not been an aim in my work (Thagaard 2018). I have, however, aimed to shed light on patterns of experiences and perceptions at NAV. Through the interviews, I have gained highly informed insights, which have enabled me to contextualise and understand the phenomenon in focus. Through diverse, yet comparable, and in some cases corresponding information, I believe that my findings reflect the general experiences of my specific fieldwork at NAV. Further, I believe I can to some extent make analytical or 'moderate' generalisations about the nature of the processes I have observed (Gobo 2011; Williams 2002). Indeed, I am confident that the findings I reached and the claims I make mirror the general patterns of experiences and perceptions in this segment of the Norwegian welfare system.

## **7. Analysis**

I started the analytical process in the field, and continued as I transcribed the interviews, read through the data, coded the material and finally wrote the articles. The major analytical work happened through the process of coding. I used the software NVivo to store and systematise the data material, including interviews, the collected texts and my observation and conversation notes. I made a rough coding scheme based on my interview guide, which already was structured on the basis of the bureaucrats' insights, relevant theories and my own research interests. I added codes on impressions that had been formed during the



fieldwork. I coded all the data in line with this codebook, and started the writing process on one of the articles.

I subsequently carried out the final four interviews at the Directorate level. I used these interviews as a means to triangulate my initial thoughts and findings (Flick 2004), and discussed these with the Directorate bureaucrats. This influenced the way I perceived some of the data, and I restructured parts of my coding scheme. An example of this was when the Directorate bureaucrats elaborated on the reasons for lengthy and poor horizontal communication, stating how this reflected a general challenge at NAV, not only in its international branch. This knowledge allowed my interpretation of the other bureaucrats' narratives to be less skewed. From coding all their relevant accounts as 'organisational/structural challenges related to transnational casework', I divided the bureaucrats' narratives in two and coded nearly half as 'organisational/structural challenges related to casework (in general)'. This analytical process illustrates how all phases of the research become part of my analytical framework. My experiences reflect the general advice for qualitative research: that constant and critical reflection is important to gain a deep understanding of the topic in focus (Rose 1997).

The analysis of the data was highly inspired by the conceptual perspectives and existing discourses in the research fields I built on. Notably, my choice of focus in Article 1 drew on the conceptualisation of transnationalism; the focus in Article 2 partly derived from the discourses on welfare magnets in the welfare studies literature; Article 3 was more inspired by the discussions of welfare state sustainability in light of migration. Yet, the methodological-theoretical insights on institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory were also highly influential in shaping the process of analysis. In the articles, I presented the analysis as part of the theoretical or topical discourses they belonged to, and therefore less highlighted my methodological insights. To illuminate the other side of the analysis – what was omitted due to word limits and corresponding prioritisation of article content – I described how these ideas influenced the analysis underlying Article 1 (the article itself is summarised in Chapter 8). This illustration also shows how the sensitive complementing approaches in the

methodology produced a richer analysis than might have been yielded through one perspective alone. The following example describes how I used the idea of institutional circuits and the concepts of institutionalisation and institutional soul, culture and values to understand how bureaucrats categorised their transnational clients.

### **Exploring categories through ‘institutional circuits’ and ‘institutionalisation’**

Article 1 focuses on how NAV bureaucrats categorise their transnational clients. I was inspired by the scholarly discussion on migrant categorisation processes, in which scholars commonly blame politicians, policymakers, bureaucrats and practitioners for using institutional categories as a top-down approach to ‘fix dynamic social processes into rigid structures’ (Collyer and de Haas 2012). I also drew on research on institutional and bureaucratic categorisation more broadly. Here, categorisation along specific lines is seen as a useful work tool (Lipsky 2010) and as a mechanism that produces boundaries between ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ clients. Along this line of inquiry, I explored the labels bureaucrats used to talk about their clients, seeking to understand if and how transnational individuals were perceived as a specific category.

Empirically, Article 1 tells a story of surprise: contrary to my assumptions, it turned out that the bureaucrats shared an institution-wide approach that regarded transnationalism and cross-border mobility among clients as the ‘new norm’. Nevertheless, although my informants aimed to avoid generalisation and simplification, they frequently used specific labels to describe segments of their clients, ranging from formal categorisations, such as ‘EEA citizen’, to informal ones, such as ‘naïve Norwegians abroad’. Methodologically and theoretically, the article is also a story of how I arrived at these findings by building on elements from institutional ethnography and neo-institutional analysis. In short, I started to map ‘institutional circuits’. My take on institutional circuits is inspired by Smith and Turner’s (2014) understanding of the concept as sequences of text-

coordinated actions that make people's actualities representable and actionable within the institutional frame. I build on this idea and view an institutional circuit as a process wherein institutional texts influence and mandate subjective action (e.g. practices of categorisation), followed by a feedback mechanism where subjective action, informed by other structural dimensions, in turn influences institutional texts (e.g. categories in text). This work helped me discover how the modes of categorisation used in the organisation revealed what can be called 'an institutional soul' – the unique culture and informal values of an institutionalised organisation (Christensen et al. 2013). I bridged these findings to other institutional traits I had found, which signalled previously undiscovered aspects of institutionalised culture and shared values. I drew on this, and again traced the signs of values and culture as part of other institutional circuits within NAV. I elaborate this in the following paragraphs.

During the interviews, I noticed that the bureaucrats used many labels when talking about transnationals in a mix-and-match approach, applying formal and informal categories, including stereotypes. Formal categories were part of the regulative framework, such as 'client', 'EEA citizen', and 'cross-border worker'. Informal categories included factual descriptions, such as 'sailors' and 'airline employees', and a few more unconventional ones, such as 'people who live in a country with slow mail delivery'. These were not recognised as legal categories, though some had an officially recognised purpose. Stereotypical presentations were oversimplified, and often negative, such as 'naïve Norwegians abroad' and 'single men in Thailand'.

When I asked specific questions about some of the groups, the bureaucrats often referred to specific documents and other texts. I therefore investigated these texts as mediators of ruling relations and explored how they shaped the bureaucrats' use of client categories. I mapped institutional circuits and traced how and if specific categories were present in texts such as internal newsletters, unit guidelines, institutional strategy documents and official website information. Reading through these texts, I noticed that both formal and informal categories were deployed abundantly here as well. Both formal and informal descriptions

were commonly used in unofficial internal documents, but surprisingly, informal categories also occurred in the high order texts, such as the NAV website and steering documents.

I found that all the formal categories used by bureaucrats had been derived from regulative 'boss', or high-order, texts, which explains why they were widespread in the institutional jargon. The text-reader conversation (Smith 2005) regarding informal categories was less clear. While some informal categories occurred in texts or speech only, others were present in both. 'Fishermen', for instance, was present in texts and speech, often used to explain how specific regulations applied to transnationals. While there are no legal distinctions coupled to fishermen, there are regulative differences concerning workers on ships registered to different countries, who sail in different territories and live in different countries. 'Fishermen' (and, similarly, 'sailors' and 'flight crew') seemed to be used as a shorthand term to encapsulate legal specificities within a group. In other words, terms like this served to simplify groups in which there were many differences between individual members and the regulations that applied to them. I found that the use of 'fishermen' in authoritative texts thus derived from spoken accounts, originating from a need to make things easier in the bureaucrats' everyday work. 'Fishermen' was not a formal category in the legal sense, but bureaucrats used it to codify a larger set of regulations and diversities that applied within a specific group of clients.

The texts and the bureaucrats' spoken accounts contrasted in that bureaucrats repeatedly said they did not want to categorise their clients, unlike the texts that included formal categories. However, this did not mean opinions and perspectives among the bureaucrats were all the same. Those who worked with pensions, for instance, were likelier to use a stereotype, such as 'retirees moving to sunny areas'. But the bureaucrats' overall reluctance to categorise while also using categorical labels to describe groups was striking. This example points to the notion of an institutionalised culture in neo-institutional theory (Christensen et al. 2013); when a public organisation develops informal norms and culture it becomes 'institutionalised'. Institutionalised elements and identities shape, and

are shaped by, the members of the organisation and influence how they act. In the international branch of NAV, it appeared that the habit of applying labels *and* the general reluctance to categorise, as well as the overall openness towards transnationals, were institutionalised in the work culture. It struck me that this was part of the institutional ‘soul’ (Christensen et al. 2013): it was a uniqueness shared among those dealing with transnational casework at NAV.

The organisational practice of categorising is, in Selznick’s (1957: 1) words, ‘infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand’. Tracing the institutional circuits of categories at NAV helped me see how the organisational values and norms were represented differently in texts and speech. While formal and informal categories and stereotypes were all institutionalised at NAV, formal categories were largely derived from authoritative texts; some of the informal categories had spread from speech to texts, including authoritative texts, which then reinforced their use in spoken accounts. Some stereotypes were also institutionalised, but they were not apparent in the authoritative texts.

From this analysis, I concluded that the bureaucrats maintained an open approach to who transnationals were, though they used a large variety of labels to describe them. These contours of institutional soul urged me to look for traces of culture more generally at NAV by reading texts. I detected other institutional elements, particularly when talking with senior bureaucrats. I read decades-old institutional texts that described historical traits of the organisation. Building on this work, I mapped institutional circuits that lined up with the notion of ‘path-dependency’ (Christensen et al. 2013) and showed how traits of the institutional soul (e.g. the feeling of doing superior or special casework) had been kept and maintained through texts and actions. Indeed, this journey evolved to become the basis of my next articles, which focused on bureaucratic dilemmas, entrepreneurial solutions, welfare state values and organisational change.

## 8. Presentation of the articles

This section provides an overview of the three articles included in the dissertation. It presents the core findings of each and how they relate to my dissertation's research questions and overall framework. The articles are single-authored by me. Journals and status of publication are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. List of the articles

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Research sub-question</b>	<b>Journal and status</b>
<b>1</b>	Who are the transnationals? Institutional categories beyond 'migrants'	How do the welfare system and bureaucrats <i>approach</i> the dynamic and diverse group of people whose lives span national borders?	Published in the journal <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
<b>2</b>	Reconciling transnational mobility and national social security: what say the welfare state bureaucrats?	How do social security bureaucrats <i>perceive</i> individuals' agency as they reconcile the conflicting acts of claiming national benefits and living transnationally?	Published in the <i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>
<b>3</b>	Accommodating transnational living in the Norwegian welfare system	Given the sedentary and national anchoring of the Norwegian welfare system, how do bureaucrats and institutional structures <i>adapt</i> to accommodate an increasingly transnational population?	Submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal

## **Article 1: Who are the transnationals? Institutional categories beyond 'migrants'**

*Talleraas, C. (2019) 'Who are the transnationals? Institutional categories beyond "migrants"'. Ethnic and Racial Studies. Doi: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1599133.*

Article 1 explores the institutional categorisation of people who lead transnational lives. It conceptualises 'transnationals' – drawing on Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994)'s take on the term – as people who are mobile or lead lives across national borders while being attached to more than one nation-state. While the extent of people's transnational ties varies, what is consistent is a sense of simultaneity across borders. Dahinden (2016) questions the use of migration-related categories and the automatic inclusions of migration and ethnicity as categories of difference. The article builds on this and further argues that oversimplified categories impede our understanding of transnationalism. The analysis takes the standpoint of bureaucrats who work with Norwegian social security delivery and deal with clients receiving Norwegian welfare benefits abroad. The transnationals these bureaucrats encounter are mobile between, or lead lives in, two or more countries while remaining attached to Norway, at a minimum through their claiming of Norwegian social security. The analysis reveals an inclusive albeit ambiguous approach towards these clients. Their cross-border living habits are seen as a new norm, an act carried out by all segments of the population. When describing people who lead transnational lives, the bureaucrats move beyond migrant labels, citing a broad array of formal and informal categories and stereotypes. The blurring conceptualisation of who is considered transnational signals institutional uncertainty about how to approach increasing cross-border mobility in the welfare system. Yet, the article reveals how the bureaucrats showed a comprehensive, inclusive understanding of who the transnationals were – and this adds substance to the plea to move beyond migrant exceptionalism in migration research. While nationality and migration history often are points of

departure in studies on transnational migration, most of the bureaucrats deemed these background characteristics irrelevant, focusing instead on what the transnational did, not who they were.

In sum, this article responds to the first research question through three empirical discoveries. First, the bureaucrats shared an institution-wide inclusive attitude that transnational living was a new norm carried out by all segments of the population. Second, the myriad formal and informal categories contradicted the bureaucrats' efforts to avoid overgeneralisation. This signifies uncertainty about how to label and approach people leading transnational lives. Third, stereotyping occurred when the bureaucrats possessed strong feelings or opinions, illustrating the dilemmas the bureaucrats faced as well as moral judgements they passed. This reflected the bureaucrats' difficulty aligning the institutional norms of being inclusive with their individual opinions on transnational behaviour.

## **Article 2: Reconciling transnational mobility and national social security: what say the welfare state bureaucrats?**

*Talleraas, C. (2019) 'Reconciling transnational mobility and national social security: what say the welfare state bureaucrats?' Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 45 (1): 151-169. Doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1408.*

Article 2 focuses on how social security bureaucrats perceive their transnational clients' agency and behaviour. The analysis speaks to the growing, albeit separate, academic discourses on welfare states and migration as well as transnational social policy. While existing studies on transnational social protection assess individuals' strategies, agency and mobility (Bilecen, Çatır, and Orhon 2015; Coldron and Ackers 2009; Faist et al. 2015; Gehring 2017), this article scrutinises the institutional perspective – that is, the subjective viewpoints of state employees working in social protection delivery. Existing quantitative inquiries



focusing on welfare state and migration relations broadly find that mobility patterns are affected by states' welfare regulations, although the extent to which people's mobility is affected remains vague (Borjas 1999; D'Addio et al. 2015; Holzmann and Werding 2015; Verschueren 2014). The few qualitative studies addressing the link between individuals' agency and mobility and national welfare regulations tend to stick to particular migrant groups, focus on mobility as a one-directional event and fail to cover commonalities within the broader group of transnationals (see e.g. Coldron and Ackers 2009; Gehring 2017). By cross-pollinating research on welfare states, migration and transnational social protection with institutional analysis, this article helps further and integrate these multiple conversations. As the welfare state and migration discussion is broadened to include transnational mobility, formal state social security becomes part of the discourse on transnational social protection. Viewing the link between individuals' agency and mobility and welfare regulations through an institutional lens adds dimensions to the established way of researching the nexus between welfare states and transnational mobility.

The analysis reveals bureaucrats' perceptions of individuals' agency and behaviour as they reconcile their transnational mobility with national social security. It answers the dissertation's second sub-question through three main conclusions. First, the bureaucrats perceive two factors as monumentally shaping transnationals' agency and decision-making when they reconcile national social security entitlement with transnational mobility: the transnationals' level of regulatory awareness and their level of regulatory compliance. Second, despite broad agreement that generalisations could not be drawn, the bureaucrats' accounts of how transnationals navigated the system consistently referenced specific types of behaviour. These were: planned abuse or use, informed abuse or use and unaware abuse or use. The bureaucratic discourse does not necessarily mean these forms prevail among transnational social security recipients, but it illustrates the bureaucrats' predilection for simplification and categorisation. Third, the bureaucratic perspectives on transnationals' agency and behaviour have implications for transnational social security delivery. The widespread view

of what factors influenced transnationals' agency as well as the commonly referenced types of behaviour constitute an important aspect of bureaucrats' discretionary power; individual and prevailing approaches affect which information and advice they provide to transnationals, how they process a case and the extent of check and control in transnational casework processes.

### **Article 3: Accommodating transnational living in the Norwegian welfare system**

*Submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal.*

Article 3 investigates how institutions and bureaucrats adapt to accommodate transnational living. It does so with an historical perspective and through a scalar analysis. It sheds light on the Norwegian experience of adapting to globalisation, and how the lack of mechanisms to cater to cross-border clients produces frictions in the national welfare system. The analysis draws on other research fields addressing the national encounter with transnationalism, including transnational migration (e.g. Faist et al. 2015; Levitt 2001; Vershinina et al. 2019); service delivery and superdiversity (e.g. Boccagni 2015; Phillimore et al. 2016); and transnational social policy and social work (e.g. Collins-Dogrul 2012; Crettaz 2017; Furman et al. 2008; Hunter et al. 2010; Righard 2019). By highlighting social security – which is less physically and locally oriented than other strands of social policy, such as social work and health service provision – the analysis helps broaden the discussions and thus illuminates the mobile and overseas part of the transnational population. The article develops a model to map national welfare organisations' transnational work. The model is used in the analysis to map the extent of formalisation and transnationalisation in NAV's transnational work and whether they operate at the micro-, meso- or macro-scale of the organisation.

Through its analysis, the article addresses the third research question guiding the dissertation: how NAV and the bureaucrats who work there are challenged by and

respond to an increasingly transnational population. It finds that the social security system has a history of steadily accommodating transnational living by adjusting policies, adapting tasks and expanding the workforce. The scalar analysis, focusing on one specific social security office, namely NAV International, finds that NAV adapts differently to accommodate transnational living at the micro-, meso- and macro-scales. Here, work practices, structures and dynamics are formal and transnational to different extents. In micro-scale practices, the bureaucrats centre on the transnational aspects of their clients and casework in a selective manner, as only a few specific work practices are cross-border in nature. While transnational specialisation on regulations, language and culture is widespread, these adaptive measures have no formal anchoring. Meso-scale structures are more formalised, and many innovative ICT solutions have been incorporated in official work processes, although these structures mainly focus on solving challenges within the Norwegian system. Less formal structural adaptations are more transnationally geared, for example, the culture of using email and phone calls to communicate with clients abroad. Macro-scale adaptations appear furthest removed from the transnational realities on the ground. International policy collaboration, for example, is not geared towards solving day-to-day challenges in bureaucratic work. A recent and top-down organisational restructuring seeks to mainstream transnational work practices into the nationally oriented structures. While there is a strong need for specialised knowledge and transnationally geared structures, macro-scale dynamics signal that these are not at the core of the welfare system's concerns. Insights from this article raise more general questions about nation-states' responsibilities. The analysis reveals how frictions and evolving responses in encounters between the national and the transnational play out in the Norwegian social security system. It reveals how bureaucratic entrepreneurship surfaces when state structures are inadequate and offers some reflections on how mainstreaming has surpassed specialisation to become the Norwegian social security system's main approach to accommodating transnationalism.

## **9. Conclusions**

My ambition with this dissertation is to shed light on the nation-state's encounter with transnational living by developing new knowledge. To help accomplish this ambition, I seek to disentangle how the Norwegian welfare system encounters people who lead transnational lives. The main research question guiding this work is addressed through three sub-questions. In addition to generating insights about the Norwegian social security system, the dissertation serves to expand and further develop academic discourses across distinct, and multiple, research fields. The contributions to the literature and my conclusions to the research questions are elaborated below.

### **Contributions to the literature**

In this dissertation I provide empirical and theoretical insights that have contributed to conceptual, theoretical, contextual and methodological bodies of knowledge. First, in terms of conceptual contributions, I contribute to discussions of what transnational living is and more generally to migration studies. The notion of transnational living is not yet fully conceptualised, and the way I operationalise the concept and reach findings regarding transnational living develops the discourses on transnational mobility, living and practices in migration studies. Through the empirical exploration of who the bureaucrats perceive the transnationals to be, the dissertation enters the critical and reflexive discourse in the field by showing how the category of transnationals moves beyond traditional conceptualisations of migrants. I do not only question the use of migration-related categories in bureaucratic practice, but also in academia. This reflective stance, which evolved in response to the empirical discoveries I made at NAV, develops into a critique of the mainstream tendency to differentiate 'the migrant' from other people, the former being a pre-defined narrow category with a specific set of traits and characteristics.

With regard to theoretical anchoring in welfare state and welfare studies, I bridge and combine thoughts from these various strands. The majority of previous studies on welfare in relation to transnationals or migrants operate within one of three academic discourses – welfare state, (transnational) social policy and (transnational) social protection – or within narrower sub-conversations concerning concepts such as the welfare magnet hypothesis or immigrants’ access to health services. I draw on a range of studies operating within the three fields, covering several of the sub-conversations. This enables me to compare my findings to other strands of research, but it also contributes to the development of the separate discourses. By bridging them, both in my analytical process and the articles, I reveal potential crossovers and overlaps between these fields, which may encourage future studies to cross-fertilise these academic breeds. In addition, Article 3 includes a theoretical contribution: a model that serves to map national institutions’ transnational practices. The model responds to my analytical need, but also contributes a roadmap with which to research and analyse the extent of transnationalism and formalisation of transnational work practices. This tool is repeatedly called for in transnational social policy research.

In the Norwegian context, this dissertation furthers the research discourses on the welfare state and migration. Transnational perspectives have not hitherto been prominent in Norwegian welfare research; therefore, the mere topic of the dissertation develops the focus of Norwegian research in the welfare state-migration nexus. My findings, as elaborated below, reveal aspects in this nexus not highlighted before, such as the presence and an awareness of transnational work dilemmas in the welfare system and the ambiguity in terms of adaptation to and accommodation of transnational clients, including transnational Norwegians – not only the immigrated population.

My final major contribution to the literature is the development of a new methodological approach which draws on institutional ethnography and neo-institutional theory. Through sensitive complementing of these two, I illustrate how the normally detached theoretical and methodological strands can be fruitfully harmonised. Together, institutional ethnography and neo-institutional

theory make up a methodological framework for institutional analyses from the standpoint of bureaucrats, along with a strong consideration of formal, institutional and external structures. This methodology has yielded rich insights into the Norwegian social security system and its encounter with transnationals. The data analysis exemplifies the practical aspects and the, arguably, highly useful combination of the two.

### **Addressing the research questions**

The dissertation sheds light on multiple and scalar dimensions of the Norwegian welfare system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives. In the assessment of the three sub-questions in the dissertation, the welfare system is understood as the Norwegian social security system, including NAV and the Directorate of Labour and Welfare (what I have called 'the Directorate' for short). The bureaucrats are understood as councillors, caseworkers, administrative leaders, policymakers and other bureaucrats working with transnational issues in the social security system. People who lead transnational lives are understood as the segment of this group that the welfare system encounters: in other words, those that lead their lives in multiple countries while – at a minimum – being attached to Norway through the social security system.

<b>1</b>	How do the welfare system and bureaucrats <i>approach</i> the dynamic and diverse group of people whose lives span national borders?
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As elaborated in Article 1, the welfare institution NAV and the bureaucrats who work there approach the group of transnational individuals in an open, yet ambiguous, way. Among those who work with cross-border benefit provision at NAV, a culture of acceptance towards transnational living appears to be institutionalised. The diversification and growing size of the transnational group is heralded as positive and a natural development.

The ambiguousness in the welfare system's approach towards transnationals is apparent through textual and spoken categorisation. The complexity of the casework and relevant regulative frameworks triggers the bureaucrats to simplify and, at times, stereotype their narratives about transnational cases and clients. An uncertainty in how to best approach these individuals, for instance, whether to respond to their differences or commonalities, is apparent. The bureaucrats' experiences signal a lack of a coherent and clear policy approach to transnationals in the social security system. While this reveals a need to further investigate policy and political responses to increased transnational living, it also exposes scalar variation in the welfare system's approach to people who lead transnational lives.

2	How do social security bureaucrats <i>perceive</i> individuals' agency as they reconcile the conflicting acts of claiming national benefits and living transnationally?
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Article 2 addresses this question in detail. It reveals that welfare state bureaucrats perceive social security recipients' agency as highly shaped by their awareness of social security regulations, as well as their ability or will to adhere to these regulations. Individuals' potential to reconcile transnational living and national benefits is seen as limited by regulatory complexity. The bureaucrats underscore how the multiple sets of legislation that regulate transnationals' social security entitlements make it difficult for the transnationals to understand and comply with the system.

The bureaucrats do not believe that transnationals generally seek to exploit the welfare system. Yet, they repeatedly mention a set of possible types of behaviour among the transnationals. The bureaucrats highlight planned, informed and uninformed behaviour among individuals who reconcile their transnational living with national social security. In other words, the transnationals are perceived as being strategic about their life and social security planning to varying

extents. The bureaucrats also underscore different degrees of proper use and abuse, implying that they perceive the transnationals' lawfulness to vary. Moral judgement of the transnationals' behaviour, however, is not always clear-cut. While strategic and compliant use of the welfare system at times is deemed immoral, for instance when disability pensioners travel extensively abroad, welfare fraud is at times considered understandable, especially in circumstances when cheating the system is the only way people can claim social security while living transnationally should living transnationally be the obviously best alternative, for example, to sustain a household.

Acknowledgement that people may rely on other forms of social protection is largely absent from the bureaucrats' accounts. This underscores the fact that the bureaucrats' perceptions remain perceptions – they do not represent the transnationals' real agency and behaviour. Nonetheless, bureaucratic perceptions influence bureaucratic work, and this will inevitably influence how transnationals are encountered and catered for in the welfare system. These findings point to the importance of knowing how bureaucratic perceptions influence transnationals and which factors shape transnational agency. To get there, further research – from the transnational social security recipients' standpoints – is imperative.

3	Given the sedentary and national anchoring of the Norwegian welfare system, how do bureaucrats and institutional structures <i>adapt</i> to accommodate an increasingly transnational population?
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Article 3 concerns challenges and processes of adaptation at NAV International. It addresses the third sub-question by showing how the institutional structures that accommodate transnationals have changed over time, in response to evolving migration dynamics and national political landscapes. Institutional adaptations take place across the micro-, meso- and macro-scales in the social security system, and the analysis of these reveals major scalar differences regarding work practices with and for the transnational population.



The bureaucrats respond dynamically to challenges brought by increased transnational living. Specialisation and innovative solutions are practices the bureaucrats use as means to adapt. Yet, infrastructure is lacking at the meso- and macro-scales of the organisation, and the scant vertical collaboration is insufficient to strengthen the organisational foundations to better accommodate transnational clients. This reveals frictions not only between nationally oriented welfare system transnational living, but also within the social security system. To tackle these frictions, an organisational change is – at the time of research – about to take place at NAV. While the Norwegian social security system has accommodated transnationalism through specialisation in the past, the organisational turnaround mainstreams transnational accommodation into NAV's nationally oriented fundament.

Through exploring the three sub-questions, the dissertation has addressed the main research question guiding the dissertation. That is:

In light of the inherent contradiction between *national* state structures and *transnational* living practices, how does the Norwegian social security system encounter people who lead transnational lives?

This dissertation concludes that the Norwegian social security system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives is shaped by how the bureaucrats *approach, perceive* and *accommodate* their transnational clients. These aspects of the encounter are starkly influenced by institutionalised structures, including the organisation of the welfare system, the underlying ideals of Norwegian welfare provision and the historical and cultural evolution of the institution dealing with Norwegian cross-border social security provision. As approaches, perceptions and modes of accommodation vary at NAV and the Directorate, the dissertation finds that the welfare system's encounter with people who lead transnational lives differs within and across scales and space, and over time, in the social security system.

This finding uncovers how the sedentary and nationally oriented ideals in the national welfare system are challenged by, and respond to, increased and diversifying transnational living practices. The system adapts slowly, but incoherently – the multiple reactions that evolve within the social security system signal the lack of a national and coherent umbrella approach to guide different segments of the welfare systems in their encounter with people who lead transnational lives. This lack may be explained through the slow evolutionary character of transnational living practices in Norway, where practical needs and lacking resources have shaped the development of transnational casework practices more than strict top-down principles. Yet, if the increase and diversification in transnational living patterns continue, this will likely lead to further institutional uncertainty. My findings therefore suggest that the transnational-national frictions in the welfare system may need to be discussed – if not prioritised – on the national political agenda.

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## **Part III - Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Information sheet

### Informasjonsskriv til deltakere i forskningsprosjektet *Transnational Lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)*

Mitt navn er Cathrine Talleraas og jeg er stipendiat ved Institutt for fredsforskning (PRIO). Jeg samler inn data som skal inngå i min doktorgradsavhandling i samfunnsgeografi ved Universitetet i Oslo. Som en del av prosjektet ønsker jeg å snakke med ansatte i norske velferdsinstitusjoner som forholder seg til brukere som permanent eller tidvis oppholder seg i utlandet. Målet med intervjuene er å forstå møtet med brukere i utlandet fra saksbehandlerens vinkel, og å få innsikt i ulike problemstillinger velferdsinstitusjoner står ovenfor i et samfunn preget av økt mobilitet på tvers av landegrenser.

#### Hva handler prosjektet om?

Et økende antall mennesker lever livene sine i to eller flere land. De kan enten arbeide i et land og bo i et annet, og fordele tiden sin i de to landene, eller de kan bo hovedsakelig i et land, mens de mottar velferdsoverføringer eller velferdstjenester fra et annet. Jeg er interessert i problemstillinger knyttet til velferdsstatens møte med nye migrasjonsmønstre, der mennesker bor eller arbeider i flere land samtidig. Jeg ønsker å lære mer om dette møtet fra statlig side gjennom samtale med mennesker som jobber i velferdsstatens institusjoner og som må håndtere utfordringer knyttet til nordmenn eller innvandrere som tidvis oppholder seg i utlandet.

#### Hvem er ansvarlig for prosjektet?

Forskningen er en del av prosjektet *Transnational Lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)*. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd, og er en vitenskapelig studie som utføres av uavhengige forskere, ikke av myndighetene. Prosjektet er et samarbeid mellom PRIO, Universitetet i Oslo og Erasmus-universitetet i Rotterdam, Nederland. Prosjektleder er forsker Jørgen Carling ved PRIO. Hovedveilederen min er Grete Brochmann. Du finner mer informasjon om prosjektet her: [www.prio.org/transwel](http://www.prio.org/transwel)

#### Hva vil det bety å delta i studien?

Jeg ønsker deg velkommen til å snakke med meg i et individuelt intervju. Dine tanker og erfaringer vil være veldig verdifulle for meg. Intervjuet utføres på et tidspunkt og sted som passer deg. Intervjuet vil vare rundt 1,5 time. Jeg kan intervjuer deg på norsk eller engelsk. Med din tillatelse, vil jeg ta lydopptak av intervjuet for å sikre så nøyaktig gjengivelse av dine utsagn som mulig i min analyse og fremstilling.

#### Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle opplysninger om deg vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og datamaterialet om deg vil anonymiseres. Intervjuene vil bli transkribert basert på eventuelle lydopptak som deretter slettes, senest innen slutten av 2018. Ingen andre enn meg vil ha tilgang til lydopptaket. Andre forskere i prosjektteamet vil få tilgang til den skriftlige, anonymiserte transkripsjonen av intervjuet. Vi vil lagre disse tekstene for prosjektteamets videre bruk, og vil slette dataene etter tretti år. De lagres på passord-beskyttede datamaskiner.

Vi vil skrive vitenskapelige artikler og formidle forskningen vår til et allment publikum. Vi oppfordrer ikke til noen bestemt politikk, men håper at vår forskning kan bidra til at myndighetene kan fatte velinformerte beslutninger. Andre personer vil ikke kunne kjenne deg igjen i våre publikasjoner.

#### Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle intervjudata som du har bidratt til bli slettet.

#### Hvordan kan jeg kontaktes?

Nøl ikke med å ta kontakt dersom du skulle ha noen spørsmål. Du kan kontakte meg per e-post eller telefon. Cathrine Talleraas, tlf. 93436355, [cathrinetalleraas@prio.org](mailto:cathrinetalleraas@prio.org)

Ved andre spørsmål, ta kontakt med prosjektleder Jørgen Carling [jorgen@prio.org](mailto:jorgen@prio.org)  
Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

## Appendix 2: Project information flyer (Norwegian)



**Forskere**

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Transnational Lives  
in the Welfare State  
(TRANSWEL)

**Et forsknings-  
prosjekt om å  
leve i to land**

 PRIO

Foto (fra venstre mot høyre fra forsiden): Vincent van der Pas, Johan Bekker, Michele Solmi, Raban Haajik, Thomas Marthinsen, Pascal Heymans, János Balázs, Jørgen Carling. Gjengitt under CC-lisens.



### Hva betyr det å leve transnasjonalt?

Stadig flere mennesker bor delvis i ett land og delvis i et annet. De deler for eksempel arbeid og fritid mellom to land, bor delvis året i hvert land, eller bor i et annet land enn der de har sine velferdsrettigheter. Vi kaller slike liv 'transnasjonale liv'. Noen mennesker har mulighet til å bruke mye tid i hvert av landene de er knyttet til. Andre er begrenset av jobb eller barnas skolegang, for eksempel, men investerer tid og ressurser begge steder.

### Hva er TRANSWEL-prosjektet?

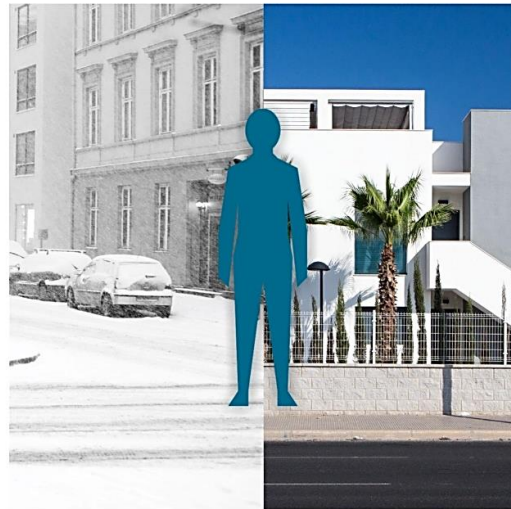
*Transnational lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)* er et forskningsprosjekt som gjennomføres av forskere i Norge og Nederland. Vi har utviklet ideen til prosjektet fordi vi mener temaet er viktig og interessant og vi har fått finansiering fra Norges forskningsråd.

### Hva er forskningsprosjektets målsetninger?

- Dokumentere erfaringer, gleder og frustrasjoner ved å bo delvis i ett land og delvis i et annet.
- Finne ut hvem som ønsker å dele livet sitt mellom to land snarere enn å bo fullt og helt i ett.
- Undersøke hvordan mennesker som bor i to land opplever møtet med offentlige myndigheter i hvert land.
- Undersøke hvordan offentlige institusjoner i Norge og Nederland forholder seg til mennesker som lever transnasjonale liv.
- Utforske hvordan velferdsstaten kan tilnærme seg fordelene og utfordringene ved transnasjonale liv.

### Hvorfor er dette viktig å forske på?

Vi er interessert i transnasjonale liv fordi det dreier seg om hva det betyr å være del av et samfunn. I tillegg er det en form for globalisering. Vi tror at mer kunnskap kan bidra til god politikkutvikling og til å redusere unødvendige byråkratiske frustrasjoner.



*TRANSWEL-prosjektet utføres i fellesskap av tre institusjoner:*

Institutt for  
fredsforskning  
(PRIO)

Institutt for sosiologi og  
samfunnsgeografi ved  
Universitetet i Oslo  
(UiO)

Sosiologisk institutt  
ved Erasmus-  
universitetet i  
Rotterdam  
(EUR)

### Hvordan spres resultatene fra prosjektet?

**1** Vi skriver artikler til vitenskapelige tidsskrifter, som kvalitetssikrer forskningen og sørger for at prosjektet bidrar til den internasjonale forskningsfronten.

**2** Vi publiserer forskningsfunn i form av *PRIO Policy Briefs*, som er korte og let tilgjengelige sammendrag av innsikt fra forskningen.

**3** Vi bruker media og sosiale medier for å dele det vi lærer gjennom prosjektet og stimulere til debatt.

Nettsted

[www.prio.org/transwel](http://www.prio.org/transwel)

Besøk nettstedet for å lese om deltagelse i prosjektet og se våre publikasjoner.



Facebook

[www.facebook.com/transwel](https://www.facebook.com/transwel)

Lik oss på Facebook for å få oppdateringer om hva som skjer i prosjektet.



## Appendix 3: Project information flyer (English)

**Researchers**

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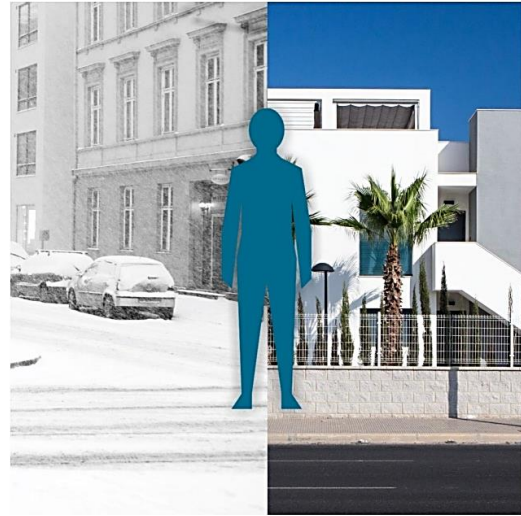
Transnational Lives  
in the Welfare State  
(TRANSWEL)

**A research  
project about  
living in two  
countries**

 PRIO

Photo credits (left to right from front page): Vincent van der Pas, Johan Bakker, Michele Solmi, Raban I. Jaak, Thomas Marthinsen, Pasca. Heymans, János Balázs, Jørgen Carling. Photos reproduced under CC licenses.





### What is transnational living?

A growing number of people lead their lives partly in one country and partly in another. They for instance split work and leisure between two countries, spend part of the year in each, or live mainly in a country other than the one that provides social security. We call such lives 'transnational lives'. Some people are able to spend a lot of time in each country every year. Others are limited by work or children's school, for instance, but invest time and resources in both countries.

### What is the TRANSWEL project?

*Transnational lives in the Welfare State (TRANSWEL)* is a research project carried out by researchers in Norway and the Netherlands. We developed the idea for the project because we think the topic is important, and we obtained funding from the Research Council of Norway.

### What are the aims of the research project?

- Document the experiences, joys, and frustrations, of living partly in one country and partly in another.
- Find out who *wants* to live in two countries, as opposed to settling completely in one.
- Examine how people who live in two countries experience the encounter with state institutions in each country.
- Examine how state institutions in the Netherlands and Norway engage with people who lead transnational lives.
- Explore how the welfare state can approach the benefits and challenges of transnational living.

### Why is this important to study?

We are interested in transnational living because it concerns what it means to be part of a society, and because it as an aspect of globalization. We believe that more knowledge can help develop better policies and help reduce unnecessary bureaucratic frustrations.

*The TRANSWEL project is carried out jointly by three institutions:*

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo (UiO)

Department of Sociology at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)

### How are results from the project disseminated?

**1** We write articles for scientific journals, which serves to guarantee the quality of research and ensures that the project contributes to advancing the international research frontier.

**2** We publish findings in the form of *PRIO Policy Briefs*, which are short and accessible summaries of selected insights from the research.

**3** We use the media and social media to share what we have learned through the project and stimulate debate.

Website

[www.prio.org/transwel](http://www.prio.org/transwel)

Visit the website to read about participating in the project and to see our publications.



Facebook

[www.facebook.com/transwel](https://www.facebook.com/transwel)

Like us on Facebook to receive updates about what is happening in the project.



## Appendix 4: Pilot interview guide

### **Pilot intervjuguide**

*Generell informasjon, anonymitet, opptak..*

1: Arbeidshverdagen din

2: Arbeidsstedet: oppgaver og organisering

3: Den transnasjonale brukergruppen: hvem er de?

4: Møtet med disse brukerne: hvem, hva, hvordan, hvorfor?

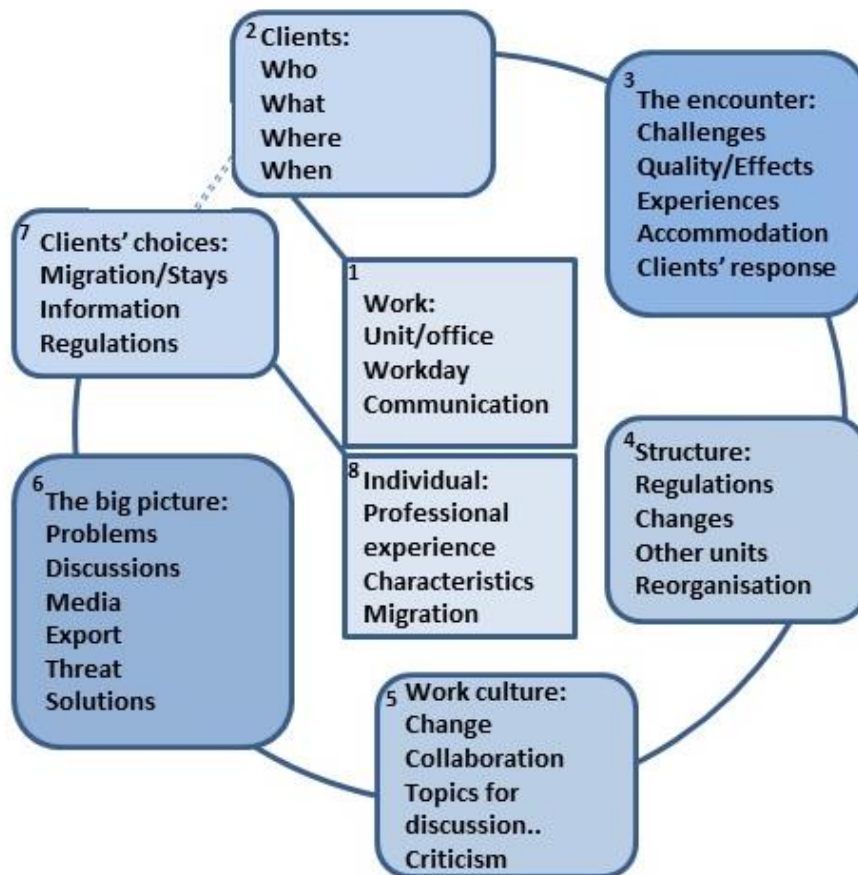
*Noe annet?*

## Appendix 5: Preliminary interview guide

Intervjuguide september 2015	
Fase 1: Rammesetting	<b>1. Uformell prat</b>
	<b>2. Informasjon (5-10 min)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Tematikken i prosjektet</li><li>- Hva intervjuet skal brukes til, taushetsplikt og anonymitet</li><li>- Spør om noe er uklart og om informanten har spørsmål</li><li>- Informer om opptak, sørg for samtykke til opptak</li><li>- Start opptak</li></ul>
Fase 2: Erfaringer	<b>3. Bakgrunn: (15 min)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Arbeidsplassen, sentrale oppgaver og stillingsoppgaver.</li><li>- Arbeidshistorikk</li><li>- <b>Historikk NAV</b> Internasjonalt /FFU</li><li>- EØS medlemskap</li><li>- EU utvidelsene</li><li>- NAV reformen</li></ul> <p>(Nå og opp igjennom: Hvordan er <b>arbeidsfordeling</b> mellom NAV lokalkontor, forvaltning, pensjon og kontroll)</p> <p><b>Regelverk</b> nasjonalt versus EØS og andre trygdeavtaler. (Kan jeg få se systemene?)</p> <p><i>For å forstå ulike problemstillinger de ulike avdelingene står ovenfor i situasjoner fra arbeidshverdagen der man har kontakt med utlandsfeltet :</i></p> <p>Brukergruppen? <b>Hvem er brukerne?</b> (mennesker som oppholder seg i utlandet &amp; arbeidsinnvandrere i Norge? Innvandrere, Nordmenn, alder, sosioøkonomisk bakgrunn, typiske ytelser for typiske grupper?)</p> <p><b>Hvilken type kontakt?</b> Hva skjer, reelt, ila en arbeidsdag? Forskjell i opplevelsen av de ulike menneskene man møter.</p>

<p><b>Fase 3: Fokusering</b></p>	<p><b>4. Nøkkelspørsmål: (40-50 min)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hvordan er <b>opplevelsen av møtet</b> mellom velferdsstaten og mennesker som bor i flere land. (Forskjeller i ulike avdelinger?)</li> <li>- Hva er positivt med dette møtet, hva er negativt?</li> <li>- Tanker om <b>utfordringer</b> med å levere velferdsytelser til mennesker som ofte eller alltid er i utlandet.</li> <li>- Arbeidskultur og normer for slike situasjoner. <b>Håndtering</b> av utfordringer.</li> <li>- Hvordan blir tematikken oppfattet på arbeidsplassen.</li> <li>- Hvordan regelverket legger føringer og hvordan man forholder seg til dette. I hvilke situasjoner blir påvirket av saksbehandlers <b>skjønn?</b> (mellom regler og handling)</li> <li>- Hvordan man oppfatter <b>brukernes opplevelse</b> av møtet. Variasjon?</li> <li>- Blir brukerne i utlandet påvirket av regelverket? Påvirker det valgene deres om bosted/arbeidsland, hvor de er registrert osv?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Utfordringer velferdsstaten</b> har, eller kommer til å få, dersom stadig flere bor i flere land.</li> <li>- Tanker om pågående <b>diskusjoner i media, eksport/barnetrygd/kontantstøtte.</b></li> <li>- Konseptet om <b>likebehandling/universalisme</b>– føler du det blir levd opp til?</li> <li>- Hvordan håndteres det i de ulike avdelingene? Hva har skjedd før/Mulige <b>løsninger for fremtiden?</b></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Egne erfaringer</b> med å bo i utlandet og forholde deg til Norge eller andre staters institusjoner?</li> <li>- Bakgrunnsinformasjon, valg av arbeidssted, interesse, utdanning, erfaringer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fase 4: Tilbakeblikk</b></p>	<p><b>5. Oppsummering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evt. nye spørsmål.</li> <li>- Oppsummere samtale.</li> <li>- Spørre om det er noe informantene vil legge til.</li> <li>- Takke for deltagelse</li> </ul>

## Appendix 6: Final interview guide



## Appendix 7: Attribute form

<input type="text"/>	<b>Informant ID</b>	
<i>e.g. A1, B3</i>		
<b>Intervju</b>		
<input type="text"/>	Intervjulengde	<input type="text"/>
		By
<input type="text"/>	Dato	<input type="text"/>
		Sted
<b>Informantbakgrunn</b>		
<input type="text"/>	Fødselsår	<input type="text"/>
		Kjønn: M: Male eller F: Female.
<input type="text"/>	Arbeidssted	<input type="text"/>
		Avdeling
<input type="text"/>	Stillingstittel	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>		År med relevant arbeidserfaring
<input type="text"/>		Tidligere arbeidserfaring
<input type="text"/>		Type utdanning
<input type="text"/>		Migrasjon /transnationalisme erfaring
<input type="text"/>		Statsborgerskap
<input type="text"/>		Språkkunnskaper
<input type="text"/>		Familie/bekjente som lever i to eller flere land
<b>Kommentarer</b>		
<input type="text"/>		