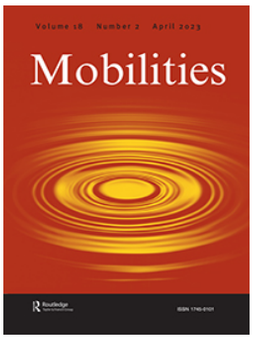

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Temporary transnational labour mobility and gendered individualization in Europe

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ABSTRACT

In a context of a new transnational division of labour, temporary international labour mobility is on the rise in Europe. In particular, recent decades have seen considerably more women seeking work experience abroad. Observers have been concerned with how such mobility is related to individualization, and in particular how it may challenge collective institutions, communities and families. The aim of this study is to explore such issues among women and men with international work experience. Using data from European Social Survey, the paper investigates previously mobile workers in terms of their current working and living conditions. Across genders, we consider different forms of individualization that may be associated with transnational labour mobility. While both women and men with transnational work experience generally feature strong strategic individualization, this is most pronounced among men. Hence, men's mobility is among other things associated with increased autonomy in working life, while – in contrast to women – it does not seem to hamper their integration in the sphere of social reproduction.

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Temporary labour mobility; transnational division of labour; Europe; sphere of social reproduction; sphere of production; individualization

Introduction

Observers have pointed to the turn of the millennium as marking a transition from an international towards a transnational division of labour. In the transnational division of labour, cross-country labour flows become just as important to the international economy as cross-country capital flows (Cohen 2006; Arat-Koç 2018; Silva 2018). Indeed, Europe, during the first decades of the new millennium, saw great political efforts to realise this scenario (Arnholtz and Lillie 2019; Gerőcs, Meszmann, and Pinkasz 2021). The emerging European 'regime of mobility' (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), involving increased temporary mobility of workers, has implications for the conditions of women and men workers, concerning work and family life and how to reconcile these spheres.

So far, international market integration has mostly been regarded as threatening the conditions of workers in any given country. One perspective has emphasised how the expanded options available to firms for relocating production to lower wage expenditures or find more attractive regulatory regimes abroad, might undermine workers' bargaining position (Gerőcs, Meszmann, and Pinkasz 2021; Hendricks and Powel 2007; Ross 2003). However, spatial relocation

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seems to be one of the few ways in which 'labour power can improve its strategic position in the market' (Offe 1985, 19). In such a perspective an increasingly transnational labour market might represent an improvement for European workers. Indeed, in response to the 2008 economic recession, further stimulating cross-country labour mobility in Europe was a key policy recommendation to alleviate the hardship of workers (Svejnar and Semerak 2009, 6).

However, economists have pointed to the 'stickiness' of real life, even at the face of substantial economic rewards to be reaped by mobile individuals (Banerjee and Duflo 2019). Most people see excessive mobility as something that may hamper other spheres of their lives, social life and family life in particular (Gordon 2003, 59). Indeed, surveys show European workers' general reluctance to seek work in other countries mainly because they fear of losing their social network (Eurofound 2014). If such concerns hold true, the transnational division of labour imposed on workers might be related to the growing contradiction between the extended transnational power of market forces and people's capacities for social reproduction (cf. Bakker and Gill 2003). In this sense the transnational division of labour may represent a further intensification of what Polanyi (1957) identified as the disembedding of markets from societies, a gradual separation of production and social reproduction.

In addition to deteriorating intimate relationships and social networks, transnational labour mobility may constitute an impediment to involvement in country-specific collective undertakings such as trade unions. Hence, transnational labour markets may reinforce processes of individualization. Women and men have markedly different positions in the sphere of production and social reproduction. This is reflected in transnational labour mobility. According to the United Nations (2017), globally, labour migration heavily reproduces traditional gender roles, with women migrants overwhelmingly employed in care jobs. A large proportion of these jobs are informal and undocumented, e.g. working as carers for older people or as domestic servants (Silvey 2005; Morokvasic 2014). Moreover, women labour migrants are found to be exposed to particularly poor conditions, such as lack of access to information on their employment and social rights, strong power imbalances in their relation to their employer and isolation and family separation. Due to care obligations at home (children, grandchildren, parents, other older relatives) a large share of women labour migration is temporary.

In the context of Europe that this study concerns, facilitating gender equality in labour markets has featured prominently on the European agenda (European Commission undated). Yet, within Europe important variance exists across countries as regards division of formal and informal (care) work between women and men (Kanas and Steinmetz 2022). In a qualitative study of mobile women scientists in Europe, Scheibelhofer (2008, 124) concludes that women 'are far more burdened with issues of child-care, partner relations and caring for the elderly.' Assuming that gender equality is relatively high among scientist couples, one may expect pronounced gendered patterns of individualization exist when considering transnational labour mobility in general.

While a substantial bulk of research focuses on permanent labour migration (see Ciobanu 2015; Heimann and Wieczorek 2017), temporary labour mobility has received much less attention. This is unfortunate, as the move towards service-intensive economies appears to change mobility patterns from long-term and permanent to diverse and temporary (Williams et al. 2004; Silm et al. 2021).

Against this background, this study assesses the phenomenon of temporary, transnational labour mobility and how it is associated with individualization among women and men. Empirically, the subject is related to a European context which advanced market integration has resulted in a specific 'regime of mobility' (Marques, Veloso, and Oliveira 2021; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). Through analyses of European Social Survey data, an assessment is presented of how temporary transnational work experience is associated with critical factors such as current job autonomy, social network, and family situation, that can be interpreted as reflecting different types of individualization.

The following section discusses the likely significance to the worker of temporary labour mobility in terms of various interrelated resources that may be reaped. While this scenario situates mobility in strategic agency, we subsequently discuss possibilities that it may also represent its counterpart, anomic individualization. The third section discuss tensions in European policies towards labour mobility simultaneously involving facilitating and impeding forces. The fourth section presents data and method. The fifth section analyses associations between temporary labour mobility and indicators of individualization pertaining to current working and living conditions. The final section sums up the discussion.

Temporary transnational labour mobility

Spatial mobility within and across national borders is an growing part of working life. The willingness and capacity to commute, travel and relocate oneself for shorter or longer periods outside one's home has arguably become a condition for employability (Bastos, Novoa, and Salazar 2021; Gustafson 2006). Temporary labour mobility is only one among several expressions of this and is itself a compound phenomenon. There are 'posted' workers operating under a contract signed with a firm in their home country, and multi-state workers, who are simultaneously working in two or more states. Moreover, it concerns expatriation where the worker is sent to another country under the auspices of an international firm, and situations where individuals simply are seeking international work experience on their own.[1] Among the group, there might also be 'discouraged migrant workers' (i.e. workers having had the intention to settle down for good, but failed to find satisfying work or living conditions), or even people involved in more dynamic circular migration processes (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Steiner and Wanner 2019).

From the worker's perspective, seeking work abroad might be considered both a strategy to resolve current employment problems, relocating one's labour power to where a demand exists and as a 'transnational investment' in future chances in the labour market (cf. Munk 2009). In the investment perspective, such mobility may foster international social network ties, skills and competencies that might enhance workers' longer-term attractiveness in their national labour market on return.

Hence, temporary mobility may be associated with assets accommodated by the concept of 'network capital' suggested by Urry (2012). Mobility, Urry argues, potentially creates connections that hold the quality of being more specific to the person. Urry explains this quality of connections established through mobility through Burt's notion of 'structural holes' (Burt 1992). This notion concerns the advantage that an actor in a network holds when being the sole connection between different networks of actors. In this capacity as a 'bridge', brokering power is accrued, and the actor is more likely to receive 'non-redundant' information. A worker that has operated in transnational work environments may maintain unique connections, and unique competences in establishing yet more connections, even on return.

Similarly, a worker may improve technical and personal skills as well as cultural capabilities ('cultural awareness'), language skills and the ability to rebound both socially and professionally. Furthermore, it is possible that, in addition, transnational work experience may bestow a kind of symbolic resource upon the worker, demonstrating to an employer qualities such as flexibility, adaptability and future job mobility. Following Smith (2006), the latter may constitute a great resource when negotiating terms of employment. Smith argues that the issue of 'mobility power' in terms of the exit options seemingly available must be factored into any assessment of employee leverage in employment conditions.

Individualization and mobility

In the previous section, we emphasised a number of advantages that transnational mobility may bestow upon workers as individual agents in increasingly transnational labour markets. We may think of such advantages in terms of Mills's (2007) notion of *strategic individualization*. She relates this form of individualization with increased autonomy, a reflexive agency, and an ability to decouple oneself from social control and tradition. This reflexive agency is key to make strategic life choices: 'In a world of manifold options, strategic life planning becomes a way to reflexively organize future courses of action.' (Mills 2007, 68). A further trait she highlights is resilience, that is the ability to recover from adversity (Mills 2007, 66). Hence, the resilient individual has the capacity of successfully juggling roles from different domains of life (e.g. the roles as worker, parent and partner). This type of individualization aligns with conventional notions of individualization as 'upgrading individuals' capacities for autonomous and efficient problem management' (Genov 2018, viii; Rasborg 2017).

However, elaborating on Durkheim's classical perspective, Mills also identifies a contrasting type of individualization. Hence, *anomic individualization* applies when individualization is more a compulsion than a choice (cf. Banks and Milestone 2011). It refers to fragile individuals who find themselves lacking necessary social bonds, and who fail at securing stable connections to larger communities, including stable positions in the world of work.[2] In our case, we can consider workers who are somehow compelled to seek work abroad. A Portuguese study, for example, shows how a part of Portuguese workers' mobility is not based on individual initiatives, but on companies' expatriation practices (Coelho 2020). Another example is workers who migrate because their home labour market can only offer positions for which they are overeducated (urging them to migrate) or migrant workers who are relegated to positions in the receiving labour market for which they are overeducated (urging them to return home) (Genov 2018, 150–151; Chalari and Koutantou 2021).

While exploring such patterns of individualization, one should keep in mind that labour migration, even if individualized at face value, often entails strong degrees of collaboration founded on families and communities (Morokvasic 2014). As Botterill (2014) finds in her qualitative investigation of Polish people who had moved to Scotland for work, including an investigation of a group who had later returned, the family indeed often serves important affective and practical functions in facilitating mobility, while at the same time, is often the reason why people return home. Likewise, Frändberg (2014) in a Swedish study points out how young people's decisions to be intensively mobile on temporary basis is often explained by the presence of siblings abroad. Studying cross-border Estonia-Finland commuting, Telve (2019) argues that transnational labour markets are complemented by 'transnational families', who, supported by advances in communication technology and affordable travel options, are capable of inventing new family practices and maintaining family relationships across geographical distances. Countering the expectation that distance-relationships are the new site of individualization, Holmes (2004) argues how intimacy is often sustained even when stretched across physical distance.

In this paper we intend to explore how people with temporary transnational work experience are associated with indicators that tap into these contrasting dimensions of individualization. Hence, we conceive of such mobility as potentially both related to deliberate investments in one's own career (coming closest to strategic individualization), and taking the form of involuntary detachment from collectives such as family and social networks (coming closest to anomic individualization).

We theorize that individualization associated with transnational mobility displays a gendered pattern, due to the markedly different positions of women and men in the sphere of production and social reproduction in modern societies (EIGE 2021).[3] Hence, studies of modern life courses have appointed middle-aged men as the winners of globalization (Mills, Blossfeld, and Klijzing

2005). Mason (2004) associates strategic individualism with a privileged minority of men, who have decoupled themselves from interpersonal commitments.

That this could be the case might relate to the manner globalized labour markets affect domestic employment, where women employed in sectors exposed to strong foreign competition have been found to have higher risks of entering unemployment or inactivity (OECD 2007, 148n). That said, some evidence, concerning within-country mobility, suggests that women have more to gain from leaving a place in search for employment opportunities (Wessel and Magnusson 2020). Furthermore, previous research relates women's transnational mobility to higher degrees of personal emancipation and autonomy (Morokvasic 2014).

Tensions in the European 'mobility regime'

Labour mobility as a cornerstone in the European integration project was institutionalized already with the 1952 European Coal and Steel Community, and further exalted with the signing of the 1957 Rome treaty (Mechi 2018). It has been pursued by the European Union (EU) through the coordination of migrant workers' rights and extensive case law by the European Court of Justice (Saari and Kvist 2007). Labour mobility as a strategy to re-invigorate the European economy was strongly emphasised in the 2000 Lisbon strategy (Mechi 2018). In 2008, a common EU reference framework for qualifications, to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, was adopted (OECD 2010).

Yet, observers have pointed at several contradictions in the European mobility strategy, in particular surfacing in the recent decades along with EU's eastward enlargement (Marques, Veloso, and Oliveira 2021). To manage tensions, transitional periods allowed certain member states to restrict access to their labour markets (via moratoriums), even if they were partly circumvented by employers using 'posted' workers (Arnholtz and Lillie 2019). The rising flow of people from the EU periphery to central-northern Europe has been met with resistance, and transnational jobseekers have (unjustly)[4] been framed as 'welfare shoppers' (Andor 2014; Cenci 2018; Demetriou 2018).

In this climate, several EU-countries have taken steps to exclude EU labour migrants if their chances of obtaining work appear unrealistic (Lilli and Simola 2016). Furthermore, a policy trend, intended to prevent social security being 'exported', has been to replace cash transfers with non-portable social services, e.g. replacing child benefits (that a mobile EU citizen is entitled to even if the children reside in the home country) with offers of free or subsidized childcare (Martinsen 2013). In 2020, the realization of Brexit and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic combine to constitute a game-changer for European labour mobility, where longer-term consequences are unknown (Papademetriou and Hooper 2020).[5]

Methodology

Studying transnationally mobile workers is challenging. The group of interest may be underrepresented in national study samples precisely because they have left the country to work abroad, while at the same time not being sufficiently integrated into the new country to be represented in that country's sample (Steiner and Wanner 2019). Several studies have also emphasized that temporary mobility is hard to study due to the multiplicity of flows that can be termed under this notion, especially in cross-border regions (Silm et al. 2021).

The European Social Survey (ESS), distributed by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), offers a small window through which to study temporary transnational labour mobility from a comparative perspective. From ESS round 2 onwards, a retrospective question asks whether respondents have been in paid work in another country for more than six months during a reference period of 10 years ('WRKAC6M').[6] This study uses this variable in the most recent

survey, Round 9 (2018), and we also use data from Round 2 (2004) in order to assess the prevalence of mobile workers in countries represented in both rounds.

Among this group of mobile workers, in this study we shall assess gender differences in individualization. We aim to explore this along dimensions that we shall interpret in terms of strategic and anomic individualization. To this purpose, from ESS we have identified a number of indicators of individualization pertaining to the spheres of production and social reproduction. Some of these, as we shall discuss, easily tap into the different dimensions of individualization, while others require more interpretative discussion.

As an important indicator we consider whether people hold a temporary (limited) contract or not. Using the 'Type of employment variable' (WRKCTRA), respondents reporting to have a limited contract are coded as 1, while those with unlimited contracts are assigned the value of 0. Respondents reporting not having a contract are removed from the sample in this analysis.[7] Being employed on a temporary basis, we shall argue, represents a higher degree of individualism. Hence, like other types of contingent employment, temporary jobs are characterised by being episodic, transient, and consequently offering less social integration into the workplace and work community (Haunschild 2004). As Goffman (1952, 460) noted, the social identity of temporary workers boils down to 'not … really having the job.' Yet, the individualism inherent in such positions may also represent advantages to its holder, who through various short-term positions may accumulate diverse forms of skills, experiences and professional networks that enhances his or her marketable productivity (Cohen and Mallon 1999).

Not being unionized is another critical indicator of individualization. Indeed, trade unions are clear expression of collectivism (Stanford 2021). However, it is important to note that individuals can have collective inclinations, while still excluded from union membership, due to institutional factors. These may include employer aggressiveness towards unions and the state's issuing of anti-labour legislation (Peetz 2018). Under such circumstances, workers are individualized not by strategic choice to be 'free-riders' but by structures operating beyond their reach. Hence, as with type of contract, we cannot infer directly from lack of union membership to specific forms of individualization but need to consider the broader picture emerging from the analysis and in view of existing research on the topic. In our study, we use the variable 'Trade union membership' ('MBTRU'), coding non-members as 1 and members as 0.

Furthermore, we consider degree of job autonomy in present or most recent job. Having job autonomy is considered of utmost importance for job quality (Lup 2018). Indeed, exerting autonomy (in general) is one of the traits that Mills (2007) pointed at as reflecting strategic individualism. Job autonomy is measured by integrating two variables ('WKDCORGA' – the degree of control over the organization of one's own working day, and 'IORGACT' – the degree of influence on policy decisions at the work place) into an index ranging from 0 (no control) to 20 (full control in all areas).

We further consider indicators of individualism vis-a-vis the sphere of social reproduction. Here, low degree of socialising with colleagues, friends, and family, not living with a partner and not living with children is considered to reflect individualism. As regards the former, we use a question on the frequency of meeting socially with friends, relatives and colleagues, ranging from 1 ('never') to 7 ('daily') ('SCLMEET'). Given the importance attributed to social networks for general wellbeing, but also for strategically managing an increasingly connexionist world of work (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007), we consider low degree of socializing as coming closest to anomic individualization. As for not living with a partner, we coded married/cohabitating respondents into 0 and the remaining group as 1 ('RSHIPA2'). Respondents without children were coded as 1 and the remaining as 0. ('BTHCLD'). In light of Mills' emphasis on strategic life planning, we consider self-reported degree of planning for the future – ranging from 0 ('I plan for the future as much as possible') to 10 ('I just take each day as it comes') ('PLNFTR') as a measure where low scores can be interpreted to indicate strategic individualism. As qualitative research has suggested in a study among young British people (Keating 2021, 1106), transnational labour mobility

can both be related to straight-forward strategic planning- for example, 'an explicit desire for accruing skills to compete in the global labour market' - and less strategic dispositions, such as general cultural curiosity; but this indicator may suggest a general tendency. As a final indicator, we use the respondents' degree of emotional attachment to their country of residence[8] – ranging from 0 ('not at all') to 10 ('very emotionally attached') ('ATCHCTR'). The notion that strategic individualism is reflected in inclinations towards cosmopolitan rather than national sentiments is the rationale for including this variable.

Analyses are run separately for women and men. As intersectional data we can only loosely posit a temporal structure with a *past* (age, education, ethnicity etc.), *recent past* (transnational mobility within the recent 10 years) and *present* (current work and life situation). The groups of variables falling in the latter category are difficult to disentangle from one another. For this reason, variables that represent the respondents' present situation are only used, one at a time, as dependent variables.[9] In addition to transnational labour mobility, the following independent variables are used in all models: age, migrant background, whether the respondent belongs to an ethnic minority group, education, type of occupation in current or most recent job (using the ISCO-88 occupational classification system on a one digit-level, which is conventionally used in studies of labour mobility) and country of residence. Migrant background is included to account for the fact that some reporting work experience from abroad may refer to such experience in their country of origin (prior to migration). Ethnic minority background is included as minorities may have a special pattern of labour mobility facilitated by ethnic networks and hence less individualistic (Zimmermann 2005).

Analyses are confined to those aged 18–60 years. This age span was selected with a view to the effective retirement age for women and men in the different European countries (Henkens, Hendrik, and Solinge 2021). Correcting for different probabilities of selecting respondents from certain types of households, we apply the ESS design weight in all analyses. We use regression analyses to assess associations between mobility and the above indicators. Following Gomila (2021), OLS linear regression was preferred over logistic regression also for the models using dichotomous dependent variables. Even so, to assess the robustness of the results of these analyses, stepwise logistic regression was also used (results are available on request).

As an explorative investigation of intersectional data our aim is not to identify causality but to explore generic profiles of mobile workers. To improve our understanding of gendered individualization and mobility further, we interpret our findings leaning on a number of qualitative studies among different groups of mobile European workers.

European developments in temporary transnational labour mobility

Table 1 presents proportions of women and men in the different European countries reporting to have worked in another country during the recent ten years prior to the two ESS surveys conducted in 2004 and 2018 respectively. This overview is restricted to countries represented in both ESS rounds.

Between 2004 and 2018, we observe a considerable increase in temporary labour mobility. For men the increase has been almost 25 percent, for women almost 50 percent. Indeed, these numbers parallel the general feminization of migration that observers have pointed at (Botterill 2014). People in the six Eastern European countries represented in both surveys have seen an increase of 87 percent, and in particular this increase is carried by women (111 percent).

We may discuss patterns of mobility in different countries along social geography, i.e. in terms of the peripheralized or centralized localities of labour markets (Wallerstein 1976). The countries that occupy positions peripheralized to the European economic centre may have populations prone to migrate permanently, rather than only temporarily (e.g. South European periphery and Eastern European EU member states). People in countries that are arguably on the semi-periphery (Eastern Europe), appear prone to undertake employment abroad for certain periods. For a

Table 1. Proportion of people reporting to have worked abroad for at least 6 months during the ten recent years prior to the survey by gender 2004 and 2018.

Country	Year of survey	Gender	Percent	Percent − S.E.	Percent + S.E.
Belgium	2004	Men	7.68	6.71	8.65
		Women	3.69	3.00	4.39
	2018	Men	8.38	7.39	9.36
		Women	5.41	4.59	6.23
Switzerland	2004	Men	6.86	6.00	7.71
		Women	5.74	5.01	6.48
	2018	Men	5.77	4.89	6.66
		Women	7.17	6.15	8.18
Czech Republic	2004	Men	6.35	5.63	7.07
		Women	5.02	4.42	5.62
	2018	Men	7.95	7.01	8.89
		Women	8.56	7.71	9.40
Germany	2004	Men	4.18	3.61	4.75
		Women	2.17	1.76	2.58
	2018	Men	5.55	4.87	6.24
		Women	4.57	3.92	5.21
Denmark	2004	Men	6.61	5.66	7.56
		Women	4.52	3.74	5.30
	2018	Men	9.34	8.32	10.36
		Women	7.03	6.05	8.01
Estonia	2004	Men	9.56	8.46	10.67
		Women	5.01	4.33	5.69
	2018	Men	17.42	16.06	18.78
		Women	5.07	4.38	5.77
Spain	2004	Men	8.73	7.67	9.78
		Women	6.97	5.88	8.06
	2018	Men	9.84	8.72	10.97
		Women	8.61	7.49	9.73
Finland	2004	Men	5.39	4.63	6.14
		Women	3.59	2.99	4.18
	2018	Men	5.65	4.83	6.46
		Women	2.84	2.27	3.41
United Kingdom	2004	Men	8.14	7.18	9.10
		Women	4.19	3.53	4.86
	2018	Men	8.09	7.20	8.97
		Women	6.16	5.44	6.87
Hungary	2004	Men	3.47	2.66	4.27
		Women	1.32	0.88	1.76
	2018	Men	7.77	6.67	8.87
		Women	4.35	3.64	5.06
Ireland	2004	Men	10.34	9.26	11.41
		Women	8.09	7.20	8.97
	2018	Men	9.53	8.56	10.50
		Women	7.13	6.31	7.95
Netherlands	2004	Men	9.69	8.60	10.78
		Women	5.94	5.17	6.71
	2018	Men	5.67	4.85	6.49
		Women	4.22	3.50	4.94
Norway	2004	Men	7.19	6.32	8.07
		Women	5.68	4.87	6.49
	2018	Men	6.10	5.22	6.98
		Women	5.20	4.27	6.12
Poland	2004	Men	9.89	8.73	11.06
		Women	3.54	2.83	4.25
	2018	Men	13.52	12.08	14.97
		Women	7.63	6.55	8.71
Portugal	2004	Men	7.64	6.52	8.76
		Women	3.93	3.20	4.66
	2018	Men	11.32	9.67	12.97
		Women	9.22	7.93	10.50
Sweden	2004	Men	6.16	5.37	6.95
		Women	4.42	3.72	5.11

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued.

Country	Year of survey	Gender	Percent	Percent − S.E.	Percent + S.E.
	2018	Men	9.62	8.53	10.71
		Women	7.64	6.64	8.64
Slovenia	2004	Men	5.00	4.00	6.00
		Women	1.91	1.34	2.48
	2018	Men	8.13	6.96	9.31
		Women	4.04	3.23	4.85
Slovakia	2004	Men	7.80	6.69	8.90
		Women	3.77	2.95	4.60
	2018	Men	11.40	9.85	12.95
		Women	8.98	7.67	10.28
Average across countries	2004	Men	6.67	6.47	6.86
		Women	3.87	3.73	4.00
	2018	Men	8.26	8.03	8.48
		Women	5.75	5.56	5.93

S.E.: standard error. ESS2 (2004) $n = 34{,}968$; ESS9 (2018) $n = 28{,}946$.

skilled worker, being in a peripheralized location may be a significant push factor for going abroad, while the dynamic growth that has marked their home countries until the recent recession, may have provided a stimulus for eventually returning home, with new coveted skills and tacit knowledge resulting from being part of stimulating collegial networks (Urry 2012).

Table 2 presents main results from a series of regression models, assessing the association between peoples' experience with temporary labour mobility and indicators of individualism in the sphere of production.

Our analyses show that women and men with transnational work experience share a number of characteristics in terms of indicators of individualization. They are more likely to hold a temporary contract and not to be member of a trade union. This could indicate a more marginal position in the labour market, but it does not necessarily mean this. First, given the fact that we are studying tendencies across a number of highly different societies, the group we are focusing on is likely to be constituted by both workers who find themselves in a marginalized position (coming close to anomic individualization) and groups who voluntarily opt out of 'binding communities' as represented by stable, regular, organized employment. For this latter group, we may think in terms of the *portfolio worker* – the specialists for whom mobility is a strategic decision in order to accumulate experience and connections (Cohen and Mallon 1999).

That such an interpretation may be valid for part of the group with transnational work experience is supported, when looking at the job autonomy variable. Hence, we observe that men with a history of temporary mobility are in fact showing higher degrees of job autonomy in current or most recent job.

Table 3 presents analyses broadening the perspective to the sphere of social reproduction. For neither men nor women is work experience from abroad associated with reduced socializing with colleagues, family and friends. However, considering more intimate relationships, important gender differences occur. Hence, we observe how women are less likely to have children. This tendency aligns with the literature documenting impediments for women both pursuing a career and children (Monte and Mykyta 2016).

For men, on the contrary, transnational mobility seems to be related to a stronger integration in the sphere of social reproduction. These men are more likely to live with a partner, and to have children. We observe that both women and men with transnational work experience are more likely to plan ahead, rather than taking each day as it comes. This is a personal characteristic which is quite clearly connected to *strategic* individualism. Likewise, for both women and men, having worked abroad is associated with being less emotionally attached to the country in which one is residing. Hence, in light of the theory on strategic individualism,

Table 2. Linear regression analyses of indicators relating to 'Sphere of production' – work autonomy, labour contract and trade union membership.

	Work autonomy		Temporary contract†,‡		Non-unionized†	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
(Constant)	6.055***	7.373***	0.598***	0.596***	0.846***	0.799***
Temporary transnational job mobility	0.573***	0.015 n.s.	0.049***	0.033**	0.032**	0.055***
Age	0.053***	0.047***	−0.007***	−0.008***	−0.003***	−0.003***
Belongs to ethnic minority	−0.245 n.s.	−0.709***	0.05***	0.06***	−0.021 n.s.	−0.011 n.s.
Born in foreign country or both parents foreign	−0.791***	−0.025 n.s.	0.03**	0.023*	0.025**	0.029***
Education (Ref.: ISCED5-2)						
Other education	0.133 n.s.	−2.708**	0.143 n.s.	−0.002 n.s.	0.055 n.s.	0.028 n.s.
ISCED1	−1.891***	−3.288***	0.115***	0.103***	0.089***	0.105***
ISCED2	−1.387***	−2.612***	0.031*	0.076***	0.051***	0.068***
ISCED3a	−0.894***	−1.785***	0.022 n.s.	0.018 n.s.	0.044***	0.066***
ISCED3b	−0.719***	−1.650***	0.007 n.s.	0.015 n.s.	0.025*	0.040***
ISCED4	−0.128 n.s.	−0.867***	−0.005 n.s.	0.013 n.s.	−0.003 n.s.	0.015 n.s.
ISCED5-1	−0.461*	−0.473**	−0.001 n.s.	0.012 n.s.	0.018 n.s.	−0.001 n.s.
Occupations (Ref.: elementary occupations)						
Managers	8.796***	7.151***	−0.202***	−0.202***	−0.006 n.s.	−0.017 n.s.
Professional	5.469***	3.550***	−0.164***.	−0.142***	−0.078***	−0.131***
Technicians and associate professionals	4.855***	2.882***	−0.16***	−0.153***	−0.094***	−0.065***
Clerical support workers	2.663***	1.779***	−0.12***	−0.149***	−0.129***	−0.042***
Service and sales workers	3.090***	1.893***	−0.098***	−0.083***	−0.067***	−0.031***
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	7.380***	6.679***	−0.076*	0.052 n.s.	−0.029 n.s.	0.074**
Craft and related trades workers	3.023***	0.383 n.s.	−0.149***	−0.106***	−0.058***	−0.018 n.s.
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	0.759**	−1.376***	−0.135***	−0.08***	−0.085***	−0.010 n.s.
Other occupations	2.902***	2.330***	−0.049*	−0.12***	−0.046*	−0.012 n.s.
Countries (Ref.: Slovakia)						
Austria	−1.454***	−1.336***	−0.123***	−0.138***	−0.003 n.s.	0.073***
Belgium	−0.110 n.s.	0.303 n.s.	−0.033 n.s.	0.031 n.s.	−0.157***	−0.070***
Bulgaria	−4.089***	−3.561***	−0.104***	−0.087***	0.233***	0.242***
Switzerland	−0.308 n.s.	0.220 n.s.	−0.063**	−0.071**	0.179***	0.214***
Cyprus	−2.247***	−0.885*	0.026 n.s.	0.054 n.s.	0.040 n.s.	0.134***
Czechia	−2.295***	−2.134***	−0.006 n.s.	0.042*	0.229***	0.256***
Germany	−0.087 n.s.	0.538*	0.021 n.s.	0.026 n.s.	0.137***	0.233***
Denmark	0.947**	1.432***	−0.053*	−0.054*	−0.423***	−0.421***
Estonia	−0.317 n.s.	0.293 n.s.	−0.123***	−0.113***	0.238***	0.284***
Spain	0.677*	1.309***	0.109***	0.148***	0.136***	0.184***
Finland	1.548***	1.310***	0.036 n.s.	0.16***	−0.213***	−0.324***
France	0.363 n.s.	0.930**	0.018 n.s.	0.030 n.s.	0.194***	0.247***
UK	0.448 n.s.	1.336***	−0.079 ***	−0.039*	0.134***	0.151***
Croatia	−2.571***	−2.497***	0.000 n.s.	0.049*	0.173***	0.204***
Hungary	−2.817***	−2.680***	−0.089***	−0.071**	0.227***	0.240***

(*continued*)

Table 2. Continued.

	Work autonomy		Temporary contract†,‡		Non-unionized†	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Ireland	−1.086***	−0.575*	0.078***	0.073***	0.129***	0.143***
Iceland	1.120**	2.257***	0.025 n.s.	0.006 n.s.	−0.545***	−0.477***
Italy	−0.180 n.s.	0.005 n.s.	0.049*	0.057**	0.156***	0.220***
Lithuania	−3.364***	−3.092***	−0.061*	−0.099***	0.208***	0.271***
Latvia	−0.892*	−0.671*	−0.056*	−0.045 n.s.	0.268***	0.235***
Netherlands	−1.293***	−1.424***	0.133***	0.268***	0.152***	0.220***
Norway	0.814**	0.792**	0.098***	0.086***	0.137***	0.166***
Poland	1.446***	1.968***	0.007 n.s.	−0.012 n.s.	−0.192***	−0.235***
Portugal	−2.819***	−2.778***	0.035 n.s.	0.076**	0.192***	0.233***
Sweden	1.841***	3.032***	0.083**	0.086***	0.148***	0.205***
Slovenia	−1.618***	−2.891***	0.091***	0.135***	0.162***	0.181***
R2	0.25	0.23	0.12	0.13	0.22	0.27
n	13 892	15 065	11 253	13 125	14 955	16 656

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; n.s.: not significant; †dichotomous variable; ‡analysis confined to only to respondents with either permanent or temporary work contract.

Table 3. Linear regression analyses of indicators related to the 'sphere of social reproduction' – living without a partner, not having children, ways of planning ahead, emotional attachment to country and degree of socializing.

	Is not living with a partner †		Is not having children †		'Taking each day as it comes' vs. 'Plan for future'		Emotional attachment to country		Socializing with friends, family and colleagues	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
(Constant)	1.098***	0.797***	1.423***	1.139***	4.099***	3.345***	6.357***	6.633***	6.287***	5.930***
Temporary international job mobility	−0.035**	−0.008 n.s.	−0.025*	0.062***	−0.188**	−0.224**	−0.406***	−0.404***	0.014 n.s.	−0.040 n.s.
Age	−0.014***	−0.009***	−0.021***	−0.019***	0.009**	0.027***	0.020***	0.024***	−0.027***	−0.023***
Belongs to ethnic minority	−0.007 n.s.	0.024 n.s.	−0.025 n.s.	−0.046***	0.067 n.s.	−0.107 n.s.	−0.270*	−0.172*	−0.053 n.s.	−0.073 n.s.
Born in foreign country or both parents foreign	−0.022*	−0.017 n.s.	−0.062***	−0.047***	−0.141*	−0.185**	−0.145 n.s.	−0.113*	−0.172***	−0.190***
Education (Ref.: ISCED5-2)										
Other education	0.022 n.s.	0.183*	0.021 n.s.	−0.004 n.s.	0.814 n.s.	0.871 n.s.	0.108 n.s.	0.111 n.s.	0.113 n.s.	−0.180 n.s.
ISCED1	0.062*	0.006 n.s.	−0.018 n.s.	−0.133***	1.925***	1.732***	−0.208***	−0.124 n.s.	−0.127 n.s.	−0.375***
ISCED2	0.047**	0.013 n.s.	−0.055***	−0.080***	1.360***	1.139***	−0.314 n.s.	−0.067 n.s.	−0.037 n.s.	−0.183***
ISCED3a	0.045**	0.044**	−0.013 n.s.	−0.003 n.s.	0.613***	0.631***	−0.067 n.s.	−0.106 n.s.	−0.042*	−0.061 n.s.
ISCED3b	0.031*	−0.007 n.s.	−0.045**	−0.094*	0.868***	0.833***	−0.039 n.s.	−0.127 n.s.	−0.130 n.s.	−0.243***
ISCED4	0.011**	0.037*	−0.025 n.s.	−0.030 n.s.	0.537***	0.527***	−0.081 n.s.	−0.121 n.s.	−0.025 n.s.	−0.049 n.s.
ISCED5-1	0.009 n.s.	0.004 n.s.	0.004 n.s.	−0.010***	0.288**	0.230**	0.062 n.s.	−0.071 n.s.	−0.003 n.s.	0.005 n.s.
Occupations (Ref.: elementary occupations)										
Managers	−0.294***	−0.151***	−0.236***	−0.079***	−1.149***	−1.073***	0.501***	0.325***	0.073 n.s.	0.200***
Professional	−0.241***	−0.136***	−0.155***	−0.053***	−0.768***	−0.779***	0.223**	0.288***	−0.011 n.s.	0.148***
Technicians and associate professionals	−0.225***	−0.118***	−0.166***	−0.034**	−0.874***	−0.765***	0.392***	0.207**	0.003 n.s.	0.077 n.s.
Clerical support workers	−0.146***	−0.131***	−0.069***	−0.038**	−0.621***	−0.571***	0.390***	0.121 n.s.	−0.115 n.s.	0.037 n.s.
Service and sales workers	−0.132***	−0.075***	−0.089***	−0.026**	−0.481***	−0.382***	0.238***	0.110*	0.061 n.s.	0.095**
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	−0.136***	−0.121**	−0.108***	−0.044 n.s.	−0.626***	−0.283 n.s.	0.492**	0.195 n.s.	0.057 n.s.	0.032 n.s.
Craft and related trades workers	−0.191***	−0.131***	−0.149***	−0.064***	−0.389***	−0.199 n.s.	0.389***	0.084 n.s.	−0.065*	0.040 n.s.
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	−0.167***	−0.105***	−0.142***	−0.047*	−0.371***	−0.184 n.s.	0.295***	−0.103 n.s.	−0.122*	0.003 n.s.
Other occupations	−0.143***	−0.075*	−0.112***	0.034 n.s.	−0.310 n.s.	−0.321 n.s.	0.015 n.s.	−0.431**	−0.203 n.s.	0.070 n.s.
Countries (Ref.: Slovakia)										
Austria	0.045*	0.031 n.s.	0.029 n.s.	0.050**	−0.668***	−0.714***	0.586***	0.371***	0.057*	0.278***
Belgium	0.007 n.s.	0.004 n.s.	−0.001 n.s.	0.022 n.s.	0.584***	0.838***	−0.618***	−0.786***	0.142 n.s.	0.234***
Bulgaria	0.055**	0.066**	−0.025 n.s.	−0.038*	−0.445**	−0.448**	0.082 n.s.	−0.067 n.s.	−0.066*	−0.039 n.s.
Switzerland	0.010 n.s.	0.058*	0.106***	0.169***	0.092 n.s.	0.590***	0.456***	0.233*	0.158***	0.398***
Cyprus	−0.058 n.s.	0.022 n.s.	−0.103***	−0.015 n.s.	−0.350 n.s.	0.337 n.s.	1.051***	0.582***	−0.476***	−0.432***
Czechia	0.035 n.s.	0.033 n.s.	0.001 n.s.	0.032 n.s.	0.954***	0.853***	0.256**	0.082 n.s.	−0.439 n.s.	−0.235***
Germany	0.047*	0.034 n.s.	0.081***	0.092***	−0.191 n.s.	0.118 n.s.	−0.050 n.s.	−0.501***	−0.029***	0.025 n.s.
Denmark	−0.033 n.s.	0.003 n.s.	0.014 n.s.	0.034 n.s.	0.574***	0.569***	1.047***	0.999***	0.430***	0.635***
Estonia	0.032 n.s.	0.045*	−0.026 n.s.	−0.065**	0.379**	0.585***	0.198 n.s.	0.347**	−0.806*	−0.690***
Spain	0.025 n.s.	0.074**	0.041*	0.118***	0.129 n.s.	0.812***	0.175 n.s.	−0.253*	0.149	0.382***
Finland	0.001 n.s.	0.006 n.s.	0.010 n.s.	0.047*	0.351*	0.542***	0.878***	0.858***	−0.112 n.s.	−0.008***
France	−0.019 n.s.	0.024 n.s.	−0.054**	−0.005 n.s.	0.711***	0.820***	0.443***	−0.015 n.s.	0.193**	0.339 n.s.

(*continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

	Is not living with a partner †		Is not having children †		'Taking each day as it comes' vs. 'Plan for future'		Emotional attachment to country		Socializing with friends, family and colleagues	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
UK	0.040 n.s.	0.033 n.s.	0.021 n.s.	−0.008 n.s.	0.468**	0.667***	−0.707***	−1.213 n.s.	−0.466***	−0.151***
Croatia	0.079**	0.083***	0.027 n.s.	−0.002 n.s.	−0.323*	−0.749***	0.170 n.s.	−0.435***	0.617***	0.598*
Hungary	0.054*	0.080**	0.065**	0.103***	−1.051***	−1.096***	0.270 n.s.	−0.043***	−1.416***	−1.470***
Ireland	0.063**	0.055*	0.051*	0.001 n.s.	0.754***	0.689***	0.302*	0.301 n.s.	−0.539***	−0.394***
Iceland	−0.008 n.s.	0.025 n.s.	−0.106***	−0.040 n.s.	0.522**	0.808***	0.485**	0.551***	0.098 n.s.	0.431***
Italy	0.086***	0.104***	0.119***	0.184***	−0.157 n.s.	−0.205 n.s.	0.688***	0.349***	0.021 n.s.	−0.033 n.s.
Lithuania	0.071**	−0.034 n.s.	−0.066**	−0.050**	−0.609***	−0.821***	0.522***	0.513***	−0.677***	−0.564***
Latvia	0.162***	0.121***	−0.021 n.s.	−0.049*	0.057 n.s.	0.197 n.s.	0.236 n.s.	0.045 n.s.	−0.169 n.s.	−0.127 n.s.
Netherlands	0.140***	0.065*	−0.029 n.s.	−0.005 n.s.	−1.212***	−1.236***	0.221 n.s.	−0.244*	0.727***	0.695***
Norway	0.011 n.s.	−0.011 n.s.	0.058**	0.102***	0.576***	1.028***	−0.472***	−0.658***	0.287***	0.650***
Poland	0.039 n.s.	0.057*	0.017 n.s.	0.101***	0.361*	0.413**	0.625***	0.709***	0.565***	0.703***
Portugal	0.096***	0.009 n.s.	−0.009 n.s.	−0.025 n.s.	0.078 n.s.	0.216 n.s.	0.792***	0.730***	−1.124***	−1.092***
Sweden	0.036 n.s.	0.037 n.s.	0.010 n.s.	0.031 n.s.	0.406*	1.615***	0.902***	0.814***	0.810***	0.681***
Slovenia	0.182***	0.154***	0.033*	−0.013 n.s.	−1.471***	−1.336***	−0.185 n.s.	−0.341**	0.386***	0.520***
R2	0.20	0.08	0.16	0.29	0.09	0.11	0.07	0.08	0.15	0.16
n	14 955	16 656	14 955	16 627	14 906	16 602	14 891	16 593	14 915	16 603

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; n.s.: not significant; †dichotomous variable.

transnationallymobile workers stand out as sharing a strategic impetus, being better able to decouple themselves from traditions and binding communities.

Concluding discussion

Temporary transnational labour mobility has risen in Europe in the recent decades, and we witness a feminization of such mobility. This has happened during a period where mobility has been strongly encouraged through the European integration project, while simultaneously, some national governments have adopted important countermeasures. In sum, the European mobility regime is ambiguous; some groups of workers may have found it enabling for pursuing transnational careers in Europe, while others may have run into obstacles. A limitation of the present study is that it provides only a perspective on overall tendencies as they manifest as the averages of different social groups' diverse experiences.

Considered together, workers who choose to seek work experience abroad seem to be leading more individualistic lifestyles compared to their stay-at-home counterparts. Across the diverse group of European countries mobile workers reflect a profile of *strategic individualism* as most clearly indicated by their inclination to plan their lives, and to be less emotionally involved in their country of residence. Indeed, it is this ability to free oneself from traditions and 'imagined communities' which observers point out as a key competence for workers in the new, transnational economy (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). That we also see associations between mobility and temporary employment and not being unionized, on the other hand, point more towards *anomic individualism*. However, it is likely that subgroups of workers with transnational work experience deliberately avoid the collectives represented by permanent work contracts and trade unions for strategic reasons.

With a further increase in transnational labour mobility, such tendencies of individualism, whether strategic or anomic, may be seen as worrisome to those representing interests bounded to territory, nation states and binding communities. Indeed, as regards trade unions, a decline in unionization observed in Europe has partly been related to increasingly transnational labour markets (Schmitter-Heisler 2019).

While we cannot draw causal inferences, it could seem that on return, men with transnational work experience are able to convert their obtained network capital, and related competencies harvested through their stay abroad, into advantages. Hence, they display stronger work autonomy, which is a strong indicator of strategic individualism. We do not see this pattern for women. While transnational mobility among men in fact seems to be associated with a stronger integration in the sphere of social reproduction, we also observe that mobile women tend to lose out in this sphere. In this sense, the transnational labour market still seems to be favouring men workers. Yet, the fact that women during the first decades of the new century are gradually catching up with men in seeking work experience abroad can be interpreted as an incremental move towards more gender equal European labour markets.

Around the turn of the century, modernization theorists such as Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1991) and Ulrich Beck (Beck 1999) foresaw an accelerating individualization that would liberate people from historical gender fates. Critics argued that this development was likely to only create new lines of gender demarcation and domination (Banks and Milestone 2011). The present, generic exploration of the profiles of women and men with transnational work experience somewhat supports the latter perspective. While women have gotten new possibilities for transnational careers, still, in most arenas, men display a tendency of being winners in the transnational division of labour.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. The social rights of the posted and multi-state workers derive, with some exceptions, from the sending country, while expats and individual, international jobseekers are subjected to the social legislation of the receiving country.
2. In between these opposites, Mills also identifies *conformist individualization* – where people adopt the same individualized biographical patterns as 'everybody else', e.g. being compliant with larger trends of postponing marriage, postponing childbearing or forming one-person households. In relation to our subject, we can think of workers who 'go with the flow' in searching jobs abroad as a response to trends in their peer group (perhaps being inspired or fearing being left behind) as an example of this. Yet, in the present exploration we shall stick to the notions of strategic and anomic individualization.
3. The 'sphere of social reproduction' in our context designates the parts of life outside work that one devotes to family life and socialization with friends and acquaintances.
4. Overall, intra-EU migrants contribute more through taxes than they get from the welfare state in the receiving country (Lilli and Simola 2016, 11).
5. While mobility has long been crucial to the idea of territorial governance of European Union as a monotopic space and ordering of a uniform, frictionless space of flows (Jensen and Richardson 2004), the pandemic has shown in fact how heterotopic European Union and adjacent space (non-EU neighbouring countries) are when challenged with the crisis governance.
6. Here, and elsewhere in this section, abbreviations in parentheses refer to the ESS variables on which the variables used in this study were based.
7. Jobs without a contract tend to be deeply embedded in informal social networks. They may be regarded as individualized in being detached from public regulations and collective agreements, and the risks involved in carrying out the work tend to be borne by the individual worker (cf. Stitz 2004). Yet, we abstain from analyzing whether the respondents have a work contract or not due to rather low numbers of respondents reporting not to have one.
8. In this context, 'country of residence' equals country of origin, with the exception of migrants.
9. It can be argued that current or most recent occupation, which we do use as an independent variable, represents the respondents' present situation. However, we assume that people's placement in the occupational hierarchy is relatively stable, and hence largely determined by early (past) educational and occupational choices, even if some respondents may have experienced recent upward or downward movements in this hierarchy. (Only three percent of Europeans change their occupation each year, and most of these changes happen within the same level in the occupational structure, as represented by ISCO-88 one-digit structure, and moreover most changes happen among young people between 18 and 24; Bachmann, Bechara, and Vonnahme 2019).

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