

DeZIM Working Papers +

DWP #06 | 25 Berlin, August 7, 2025

Multiple Precarisation: The Living Situation of Eastern European Migrants in Urban Social Spaces

Using the example of the two Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld



DeZIM Working Papers +

DWP #06 | 25 Berlin, August 7, 2025

Multiple Precarisation: The Living Situation of Eastern European Migrants in Urban Social Spaces

Using the example of the two Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld

Polina Manolova and Thorsten Schlee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Zusammenfassung	4
Key findings	5
1. Introduction	6
2. Discourses on ‘migration from South-East Europe’ in politics and science	7
2.1 Political discourse on ‘poverty migration’	7
2.2 State of research	8
3. Study region and methods	9
4. Experiences of discrimination in the labour market, housing and access to social benefits	10
4.1 Precarious work and local labour markets	10
4.2 Cleared away: The housing situation of migrants in Duisburg-Marxloh and -Hochfeld	12
4.3 Access to social rights and bureaucratic bordering practices	14
5. Multiple precarisation	16
Bibliography	19
About the authors	23
About the project	23
Acknowledgements	23

Multiple Precarisation: The Living Situation of Eastern European Migrants in Urban Social Spaces

Using the example of the two Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld

Polina Manolova and Thorsten Schlee

ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of *multiple precarisation* among East European migrants in Duisburg's districts of Hochfeld and Marxloh. While EU freedom of movement has enabled increased labour migration from Romania and Bulgaria since 2014, many migrants face systemic exclusion despite formal EU citizenship. Drawing on participatory research, the project uncovers how precarious employment, unstable housing, and limited access to social benefits interlock to produce sustained precarity. Institutional and market-based mechanisms—such as subcontracting chains, and repressive local policies—reinforce socioeconomic marginalisation. Administrative practices, including bureaucratic barriers and forced evictions, further entrench exclusion under the guise of 'security risks'. The concept of *multiple precarisation* captures these interwoven dynamics that operate beyond conventional categories of discrimination. Our findings highlight the urgent need for policy interventions that go beyond problematizing migration and instead address the structural conditions that reproduce precarity at the local level.

Keywords: *multiple precarisation; migration from Eastern Europe; participatory research; socio-economic marginalisation, Germany*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Studie untersucht die Mehrfachprekarisierung osteuropäischer Migrant*innen in Duisburg-Hochfeld und -Marxloh. Während die 'EU-Freizügigkeit' seit 2014 eine verstärkte Arbeitsmigration aus Rumänien und Bulgarien ermöglicht, sind viele Migrant*innen trotz EU-Staatsbürgerschaft von systemischer Ausgrenzung betroffen. Auf Grundlage partizipativer Forschung untersucht das Projekt, wie prekäre Beschäftigung, unsichere Wohnverhältnisse und eingeschränkter Zugang zu Sozialleistungen nachhaltige Prekarität erzeugen. Institutionelle und marktorientierte Mechanismen – wie Subunternehmerketten und repressive Kommunalpolitik – verstärken die sozioökonomische Marginalisierung. Verwaltungspraktiken, einschließlich bürokratischer Hürden und Zwangsräumungen, verstärken die Ausgrenzung unter dem Deckmantel von 'Sicherheitsrisiken'. Das Konzept der *Mehrfachprekarisierung* erfasst diese miteinander verwobenen Dynamiken, die jenseits herkömmlicher Kategorien von Diskriminierung wirken. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Notwendigkeit politischer Maßnahmen, die über die Problematisierung von Migration hinausgehen und stattdessen die strukturellen Bedingungen angehen, die Prekarität auf lokaler Ebene reproduzieren.

Schlagwörter: *Multiple Prekarisierung; Migration aus Osteuropa; partizipative Forschung; sozioökonomische Marginalisierung, Deutschland*

KEY FINDINGS

- Migrants from Bulgaria and Romania experience overlapping forms of precarity across labour, housing and access to social rights which systematically undermine their rights as EU citizens and relegate them to the position of needy foreigners.
- The concept of ‘multiple precarisation’ describes how discriminatory knowledge, differential inclusion under social law, local administrative practices and local labour markets systematically marginalise migrant populations in segregated urban areas.
- Precarisation in the semi-formal (‘grey’) labour markets is marked by subcontracting and other flexible forms of employment which affects migrants’ sense of security and control over their lives.
- Precarisation through graduated access to social rights reflects the conditionality of access to social benefits on employment status which creates dependency on devalued and insecure work.
- Precarisation through migration control mechanisms refers to bureaucratic obstacles, forced evictions and surveillance that disenfranchise migrants legally and expose the fragility of their EU rights.
- Precarisation is a productive mechanism that actively shapes positions and identities, and sustains unequal labour and social relations at a local level.

1. Introduction

The official data for the German labour market paints impressive figures for the period 2014–2024: never before have so many people been employed in the Federal Republic.¹ The number of employed individuals has risen from 34.9 million to 39.1 million, and the number of women in employment has grown from 17 million to 18.7 million. Meanwhile, the number of foreign employees has more than doubled during this period, from 2.9 million to 6 million. The largest numerical increase was among employees from Eastern Europe who moved to Germany under the European Union right of free movement of persons. In 2023, approximately 588,000 people from Romania and 582,000 from Poland were working in Germany, making them the two largest national groups. In addition, more than half a million people from the Western Balkan states, some of whom benefit from the so-called Western Balkans regulation, also worked in Germany (Falkenhain and Raab 2022). Finally, more than 600,000 people who, according to the statistics of the Federal Employment Agency (BA) originate from the most important countries of asylum (Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey) are now part of Germany's workforce (BA 2024a).

These unprecedented growth rates in foreign employment have by no means fully met the need for labour migration to Germany. The Institute for Employment Research (IAB) estimates that a net migration of 400,000 people per year will be necessary to mitigate the effects of demographic change in the coming future (Fuchs et al. 2021). In its skilled labour strategy, the Federal Government acknowledges (BMAS 2022: 26) that the labour force potential from Eastern Europe is declining and becoming hard to predict. Accordingly, the immigration policy framework is being adjusted to attract more skilled workers from third countries, though with limited success. In contrast, the Federal Republic

has become the primary destination for immigrants from Eastern Europe. The lifting of labour restrictions for Bulgarians and Romanians in 2014 has led to a significant increase in EU-2 labour migrations.² These groups are generally perceived as having very good integration opportunities, with the employment rate of people from Romania (67.2%) and Bulgaria (53.6%) remaining relatively high (Brücker et al. 2014; BA 2024a). At the same time, however, growing evidence suggests that EU-2 migrants often work in low-paid, precarious, and exploitative employment relationships. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the severe working conditions in sectors such as meat processing, agriculture, care work, and logistics were exposed and widely scandalised. The focus of public criticism was primarily on temporary, low-waged employment, violations of labour rights and hazardous working conditions (Bogoeski 2022; Ucluse and Bender 2022). Overall, EU-2 workers earn significantly less than other groups in the labour market: 44% of socially insured employees from Romania and more than 50% of Bulgarians receive wages below the nationwide low-income threshold (2,530 euros). They are also more frequently employed below their qualification level, and nearly half of them work in low-skilled jobs (BA 2024b).

Against this background, this report examines the structural conditions of migrant employment in Germany. It broadens the perspective by exploring the interplay between employment, local labour markets, (non-)access to social security benefits, and housing conditions. Building on research that highlights local socio-economic factors and labour market dynamics, the report also underscores the influence of local migration and integration policies beyond national regulations. The study focuses on Eastern European migrants, primarily from Romania and Bulgaria, and is set in two

¹ This publication is an abridged and revised version of the IAQ report published in 2024: Manolova, Polina; Schlee, Thorsten.; Wiese, Lena (2024): Multiple Prekarisierung – Zur Lebenslage osteuropäischer Migrant*innen in urbanen Sozialräumen: Am Beispiel der beiden Duisburger Stadtteile Hochfeld und Marxloh, IAQ-Report. <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/82507>

² EU-2 refers to Bulgaria and Romania.

neighbourhoods in post-industrial Duisburg.³ It analyses how work, housing, and access to social security are shaped by various forms of institutional discrimination, leading to a complex web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing forms of multiple precarisation.

The report starts with an overview of the discourses used by the political-administrative system to define and deal with ‘migration from South-East Europe’⁴ and ‘labour migration’, as well as the current state of research on intra-EU migration (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 introduces the study regions, the districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld. Finally, the fourth chapter provides an insight into the life situations of migrants and addresses their experiences of unequal treatment in the areas of employment, housing and access to social security. It is only with an integrated view of the living situations of EU-2 migrants that a nested system of inclusions and exclusions and multiple precarisation becomes visible (see Chapter 5).

2. Discourses on ‘migration from South-East Europe’ in politics and science

2.1 Political discourse on ‘poverty migration’

Before the granting of full freedom of movement to Romanian and Bulgarian citizen in 2014, fears of uncontrolled labour migration and the burdening of welfare systems grew throughout Western Europe (Gago 2023). The term ‘welfare tourism’ (Sozialtourismus), frequently used in the debate, was named Germany’s ‘bad word of the year’ in 2013. In the years that followed, national discourse on the economic and social effects of intra-EU migration was increasingly

overshadowed by the problematic framings of ‘uncontrolled’ refugee migration. Still, the debate perpetuated a number of legislative changes and administrative interventions that led to the tightening of freedom of movement.

A 2013 position paper by the Association of German Cities played a key role in rationalising concerns over the expected migration from the two EU-2 accession states under the problematisation of ‘migration from South-East Europe’ (Deutscher Städtetag 2013). The position paper intertwines social disadvantage in the countries of origin with ethnicised attributions and criminality. Its central argument asserts that immigration from Romania and Bulgaria is inevitable but offers little prospect for labour market integration. Since freedom of movement is primarily exercised as labour mobility rights, it suggests that many individuals are entering Germany under false pretenses.

The report distinguishes between ‘utilisable’ and ‘non-utilisable migrants’. While acknowledging that there are well-integrated migrants, it concludes that: “the significant problems with a large proportion of immigrants from South-East Europe must not be overlooked by referring to well-integrated Romanians and Bulgarians” (Deutscher Städtetag 2013: 4). It later continues by stating that “certain groups” (Senat Bremen 2014: 3) of migrants are inherently unable to integrate. Their experiences of marginalisation and discrimination, along with poor living conditions in their countries of origin, are said to exacerbate integration barriers. The classification of migrants with significant integration barriers is further made explicit as a ‘Roma integration’ problem. In this way an entire population is marked as ‘external’ to the majority society.

According to this perspective, so-called ‘deviant mobility behaviour’, atavistic family or ‘clan’ structures, multiple-child families, lack of

³ Duisburg is the city with the highest concentration of EU-2 migrants in the Ruhr region. Ever since 2014, the city has been in the spotlight of ‘poverty migration’ debates and has been stigmatised as a nation-wide example of ‘failed integration’ with its patterns of socio-spatial segregation and high poverty rates. The case study’s specificity comes from the high concentration of a repressive set of migration management technologies; however, it also reveals some general patterns of institutional discrimination and its effects on the socio-economic marginalisation of migrants.

⁴ This term has established itself as an administrative categorisation of immigration from Romania and Bulgaria.

education, and detachment from the labour market are framed as inherent obstacles to integration. According to Künkel (2018: 285), the discourse on ‘poverty migration’ constructs social exclusion as a cultural deficiency of those affected. It perpetuates ethnicising and anti-Roma arguments and it exhibits institutionalised expectations of normality when it comes to life-course trajectories.

And finally, ‘migration from South-East Europe’ is placed in the context of criminal activities and thus within the remit of the police and public order authorities. This is evident in the claim that ‘organised traffickers’ prepare child benefit and self-employment applications for a high fee, as well as put further pressure on migrants to engage in illegal activities (Deutscher Städtetag 2013: 4).

Thus, the above-discussed position paper and the subsequent scandalisation of ‘poverty migration’ have framed EU-2 migration in two distinct ways: through the ‘securitising’ lens of the ‘risk dispositive’ and the ‘socio-pedagogical’ lens of the ‘support dispositive’ (Neuburger and Hinrichs 2023: 99).

According to the dominant interpretative framework, migrants exploit freedom of movement to gain access to social welfare systems in Germany while simultaneously import social problems from their countries of origin. Thus, they are simultaneously portrayed as perpetrators and victims of social conditions, necessitating both security and regulatory policies and special integration measures. From the perspective of municipalities, this implies the need to locally regulate the perceived misuse of labour mobility, which is framed as a symptom of a broader regulatory deficit at the European level. This interpretation allows room for divergent local political approaches, from integration-focused to exclusionary policies.

At the national level, the federal legislature positions itself as a guardian of the country’s social security systems against alleged abuse. This has led to a five-year exclusion of EU citizens from basic welfare provisions. This measure aligns with a broader trend observed in the older West European welfare states, where access to

residence and social rights is becoming increasingly pluralised and stratified (Morris 2003). In terms of both the number of affected individuals and local impact, this exclusion represents the most significant departure from the foundational principles of Germany’s inclusive social security system, which seeks to guarantee a minimum standard of dignified living and personal autonomy for all.

2.2 State of research

This type of problematisation of EU migration and the mechanisms for undermining migrants’ rights have only recently gained academic attention. Studies examine working conditions in migrantised and precarious sectors in Germany, such as the meat industry (Birke 2022), construction (Hüttenhoff 2023), industrial cleaning (Manolova 2024), logistics, and 24-hour care. These sectors operate in structurally analogous ways, characterised by temporary employment relationships, fixed-term employment, and systematic legal restrictions enforced through tightening legislation and regulatory measures. The wage structure and employment conditions in these sectors fail to provide a stable and adequate income, making it difficult for workers to sustain a liveable wage over time. Much of the existing labour market research emphasises the positive value of ‘labour market integration’, often overlooking the structural conditions in which ‘work’ and ‘participation’ do not necessarily align. Deregulated labour markets have a greater impact in combination with exclusion from basic social protection systems. As the German Council on Migration and Integration (SVR) recently noted:

“
The threat of exclusion from social benefits can exert immense pressure on resource-poor EU workers, forcing them to accept any kind of work, regardless of how precarious the conditions may be.

”
(Loschert et al. 2023: 15)

In addition to the legal exclusions from social protection, the mechanisms and effects of “bureaucratic bordering” (Manolova 2021) further hinder access to benefits. A survey conducted by the Association of German Social Welfare Organisations (BAGFW 2021) highlights the frequent, often unjustified rejection of benefit claims. Decisions made by ‘street-level bureaucracy’ are often guided by narratives about which migrant groups are deemed deserving of social benefits (Ratzmann and Sahraoui 2021). Literature examining the motivational causes behind the non-utilisation of social benefits primarily emphasises the bureaucratic obstacles involved in granting benefits (Baisch et al. 2023). Thus, local socio-political actors play a significant role in regulating migration within nation state borders, leading to the emergence of highly differentiated urban borderscapes (Fauser 2024). These combine racialized exclusion practices, ranging from the problematisation of ‘migration from South-East Europe’ to practices of containment, omission, and displacement, which are flexibly combined (Neuburger and Hinrichs 2023: 189).

A growing strand of research is concerned with the interaction of regulations at various levels of the political system and spatial socio-economic developments. Post-industrial municipalities repeatedly point to the specific nature of local migration (Stadt Dortmund 2022: 13) and the “special immigration pressure” (Entwicklungsgesellschaft Duisburg 2020: 2), which exists precisely because of a comparatively low-priced housing markets, as well as existing ethnic, linguistic and social networks. It is clear that there is no unified national social space, but increasingly differentiated “mosaic of regional economies” (Hirsch 1996: 105) and “local economies of exclusion” (Geiges et al. 2017: 249).

This working paper investigates the interactions and relationships between inclusion and

exclusion in the labour market, social security, and housing within a specific local context. The aim is not to dismiss the problematisations of urban and community development outlined above as unfounded or to question their focus on social effects. On the contrary, the goal is to understand the root causes of these social problems. If they are not only seen as migration related and ‘imported’, then we need to recognise their causes, which are interwoven with the local organisation of work and mobility.

3. Study region and methods

The data presented here stems from the “Discrimination beyond categories” project (2023–2024), funded by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS). Conducted in close collaboration between the *Institute for Work, Skills and Training* (IAQ) at the University of Duisburg-Essen and the associations *Stolipinovo in Europa*⁵ and *Solidarische Gesellschaft der Vielen*⁶, the study gathered data from the Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld. The initial goal of the overall research project aimed to capture the dynamics of discrimination faced by Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, particularly in relation to employment, housing conditions and access to social benefits.

More than 25,000 people from Romania and Bulgaria (IT-NRW 2024) live in Duisburg, the majority of whom have arrived after 2014 following the opening of the German labour market to EU-2 migrants. Over half of them reside in the two post-industrial districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld.⁷ Both neighbourhoods exhibit patterns of socio-spatial segregation reinforced by multiple overlapping factors: deindustrialisation and the decline of the coal and steel industries, high unemployment and significant dependence on basic income support,

⁵ <https://stolipinovoeuropa.org/de/>

⁶ <https://sgdv.org/about/>

⁷ In 2023, this amounted to 13,409 people, the majority of whom were Bulgarian nationals (10,811). Informal and temporary accommodations remain uncounted. The number of registrations and de-registrations indicates a high fluctuation among European citizens (Special analysis upon request by the Office for Statistics and Elections, 2024).

budget constraints, and deteriorating infrastructure. These dynamics are interdependent and drive the growing inequalities between regions, municipalities, and even within city districts. As a result, residents face unequal living conditions, limited access to the formal labour market, and restricted availability of essential services. Approximately 40% of Marxloh's and 34.6 % Hochfeld's residents are categorised as 'poor', including those engaged in temporary and low-paid employment (Entwicklungsgesellschaft Duisburg 2021: 9f.).

Our research, grounded in participatory research approaches, prioritises the lived experiences and perspectives of migrants over purely administrative problem descriptions. The two associations not only support migrants in their daily lives but also serve as platforms for amplifying the voices of those underrepresented in political and public discourse. As part of the project, social counselling centres were established in both districts to provide direct support. Reflecting the linguistic diversity of the local migrant population, individuals with Bulgarian, Romanian, Turkish, and Romani language skills were recruited for temporary project work and employed by the associations for the duration of the project. These community researchers underwent training through multiple workshops to prepare for their advisory and research roles. A key principle of the project was to ensure that individuals in precarious situations were not expected to provide voluntary support. For this reason, the community researchers were compensated for their work, albeit within the constraints of limited funding and temporary contracts. The social counselling sessions served not only as a space for data collection on the living conditions of EU migrants but also as a means of actively shaping local social conditions. This approach, integrating knowledge production with social service provision, placed those directly affected at the centre of both research and action.

Between November 2023 and June 2024, a total of 720 social counselling cases were registered in the two districts. As expected, the majority of those seeking these services were from Bulgaria and Romania. However, individuals from

Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Italy, Nigeria, and Germany also turned to these services, which were open to all in need of support. The nature of the inquiries was similar in both districts, focusing primarily on school and kindergarten enrolment, access to basic income support for job seekers, child and parental benefits, housing issues, unpaid wages, rent arrears, and debts.

The issues raised in social counselling sessions often required more than a single appointment to resolve. As a result, many individuals attended these sessions regularly. This ongoing engagement allowed researchers and social counsellors to provide long-term support, assisting with correspondence and communication with authorities, landlords, banks, and employers. It also offered deeper insights into the lived experiences of those seeking advice, revealing the multi-layered and interconnected nature of their challenges.

4. Experiences of discrimination in the labour market, housing and access to social benefits

4.1 Precarious work and local labour markets

The trend towards the deregulation of labour relations and the weakening of workplace rights is widely recognised as a broader development in Western welfare states (Borelli 2022). However, beyond this overarching shift, local labour markets are also shaped by specific factors, including sectoral and functional divisions of labour (Rogaly 2020), local migration patterns, and socio-spatial segregation trends (Massey 1994; Peck 1996).

Between 1980 and 2020, the dominant forms of wage labour in Duisburg — much like in the broader Rhine-Ruhr region — underwent significant shifts. Unionised employment in heavy industry, once a cornerstone of the local economy, has largely been replaced by precariously paid jobs in logistics, delivery and transport, warehousing, and construction. By 2019, 76.6% of all employees in the Ruhr region

were working in the tertiary sector. In Duisburg alone, 9.6% were employed in logistics, 8.4% in service industries such as cleaning and security, and 12% in warehousing and postal services (NRW Bank 2021).

Since the late 1980s, the city has primarily focused on developing the logistics sector. Duisburg has become one of the largest hubs for consumer goods distribution in the heart of Europe (Glassman and Voelzkow 2004). At the same time, despite the decline in steel production, the city remains Europe's largest steel producer, employing 20,000 workers. Despite the sectoral shifts, the districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld have retained their fundamental function as migrant labour pools. While employment structures have evolved, many residents continue to work in low-skilled and unskilled jobs in industrial and commercial cleaning, construction, delivery services, food, agriculture, warehousing, and packaging (Manolova 2024). Although these sectors vary in terms of regulations, labour processes, and bargaining power, they share common characteristics — namely, exposure to irregular, precarious, and unequal working conditions. Many of the people we interviewed were employed on fixed-term contracts with a six-month probationary period. These contracts typically do not guarantee minimum or maximum working hours, yet actual monthly working hours range from 60 to 70. Notably, only one of the 20 cleaners was employed full-time.

Although these contracts formally comply with minimum wage regulations, various informal practices undermine workers' earnings and protection. Overtime is frequently unpaid, social security contributions are withheld, and deductions are made for work clothing and transport costs. Travel expenses are not reimbursed, and workers often lack access to sick pay or holiday entitlements. Some contracts were not even officially registered, leaving employees without social insurance despite being employed. A common practice involves issuing contracts with reduced working hours while paying the remainder 'under the table', allowing both employers and employees to avoid social insurance contributions — though at the

cost of the employee's long-term social security. Additionally, the legal 18-month overtime limit for temporary work is routinely bypassed by rotating employees between different, informally connected temporary employment agencies.

In short, the migrants we interviewed found themselves navigating a landscape of 'grey labour' (Gambino 2017; Rigo and Dines 2014) despite their secure status as EU citizens. This system is marked by practices that, while formally compliant with the law, create numerous loopholes that enable profit maximisation through severe forms of labour exploitation.

The structure of local labour markets in Marxloh is shaped by two key dynamics: subcontracting — where hiring is outsourced to third parties — and segregation, which confines migrant workers to a limited niche outside the 'regular' employment relations. Subcontracting has been used as a strategy through which large companies bypass regulatory restrictions, such as collective bargaining agreements, and for maintaining a flexible, low-cost workforce on demand (Borelli 2022). While subcontracting became more closely associated with the expansion of the low-wage sector in the 2000s, large industrial complexes in the Ruhr area — such as Thyssenkrupp Steel — began implementing long subcontracting chains for the most demanding labour tasks as early as the mid-1970s. Investigative journalist Günther Wallraff (1985) reported on 400 small recruiters supplying precarious migrant labour to the former Thyssen Group.

Decades later, little appears to have changed in industries like industrial cleaning. A defining feature of this system is a highly fragmented network of subcontracting agreements. This consists of a core of multinational staffing corporations, an intermediary layer of regional contractors, and a broad network of small local service providers and labour brokers (Manolova 2024). This complex and opaque structure diffuses responsibility, making it easier to circumvent labour protections, as well as safety and health standards. For example, while large-scale industries today enforce strict control

procedures for their primary contractors, these regulations are often disregarded at the second and third subcontracting levels. During our fieldwork in Marxloh, we gathered numerous accounts of industrial accidents and hazardous working conditions leading to serious injuries and long-term health issues, including chronic back pain, broken ribs, and lung diseases. In most cases, these accidents go unreported due to employer pressure, leaving affected workers without compensation or support from social and health insurance systems.

Beyond the interplay of formal and informal contractual practices and the flexibility introduced by subcontracting, local labour markets are also shaped by well-established ethnic and linguistic networks. For many Bulgarian and Romanian migrants, securing employment often depends on connections with second-generation Turkish-speaking residents or better-integrated compatriots. Due to limited German language skills and a shared sense of vulnerability, many migrants rely heavily on these informal job placement channels. While such networks provide easier access to jobs, they also create dependency and can hinder pathways to stable, regulated employment with better conditions. Many interviewees described their working conditions as 'unfair' and 'exploitative'. This sentiment was particularly evident in the accounts of those who actively sought to bypass intermediaries and approach employers directly in the hope of securing better contracts. However, they were often shut out due to insufficient German language skills and a lack of qualifications, even though they had already been performing the same tasks for subcontractors for many years, according to their accounts. For example, a temporary cleaner at a large industrial company, who wanted to transition from his Turkish subcontractor to a larger company offering full-time, permanent contracts, was told that his German skills were inadequate to proceed with the application process.

In these network-based employment relationships, the boundaries between work and life often blur. Employers frequently assume dual roles as landlords, lenders, and document

collectors, and thus entangle migrants in forms of invisible 'double exploitation' (Birke and Bluhm 2020). For instance, one of our interviewees shared how his boss, the owner of a small construction company, transferred his salary payments directly to his landlord, who was also his business partner. While migrants can quickly build connections in various aspects of life upon arriving in a new country, this intertwining of roles increases their dependence and creates opportunities for extreme exploitation.

As part-time workers without social insurance contributions, who frequently shift between fixed-term contracts and periods of unemployment, EU migrants are not eligible for regular access to unemployment insurance, health insurance, or social welfare. In this precarious situation, they are at risk of homelessness, poverty, and, in some cases, irregular employment. Social exclusion pressures many into accepting any employment, while the structure of the labour market in many cases prevents regular access to social security systems.

4.2 Cleared away: The housing situation of migrants in Duisburg-Marxloh and -Hochfeld

The structural changes and deindustrialisation in the Ruhr area are also reflected in the housing situation of many of those who sought assistance at our social counselling sessions. While the districts of Hochfeld and Marxloh differ in terms of their location, local transportation connections, and selective efforts to upgrade, the experiences of the people who used our services were strikingly similar in both districts. The dynamic of declining purchasing power, population loss, disinvestment, and high vacancy rates, driven by the departure of the heavy industry, has a similar impact across various post-industrial municipalities, leading to comparable housing policy challenges (Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung 2021). This dynamic is further reinforced by the financialisation of housing, which gained momentum particularly in the early 2000s. In Duisburg, a unique aspect of this trend is the shift of former company housing from the downsized

Thyssenkrupp conglomerate into the hands of private equity funds. In 2004, Thyssenkrupp sold 48,000 residential units across the Ruhr area. At the same time, Duisburg, like many other municipalities across the country, has seen a decline in the proportion of publicly subsidised housing. Due to long-term population decline, however, the vacancy rate in Duisburg remains relatively high, with significant variation between different districts (Amt für Soziales und Wohnen 2020).

However, this relatively high vacancy rate does not translate into easy access to housing for those who sought our social counselling services. Shared experiences suggest that the regular housing market is virtually inaccessible to individuals with Romanian or Bulgarian-sounding names. Ethnic and origin-based discrimination against foreign residents on the housing market is well-documented (ADS 2020). These experiences of discrimination are corroborated by statements from property owners we spoke to during our housing search, who openly admitted they would not rent to Romanians or Bulgarians. Such individuals were often seen as high-risk tenants, with a history of debt. Landlords feared defaults on rent and anticipated payment issues with the Job Centre.

There is also a significant shortage of housing for families with children. Individuals with a negative credit score are routinely rejected by both private landlords and the municipal housing association (Gebag). This combination of discrimination and socio-economic precarity forces many of the people we interviewed and supported into the 'grey' area of the housing market. Rental relationships revealed in social counselling are often characterised by informality. This is expressed through: cash-in-hand payments; service charge statements that are not issued by landlords or are only issued with a delay; terminations issued via WhatsApp or voice message; pressure on and threats to tenants to leave their flats; frequent (unlawful) entry into the private living space.

The dependence on this 'grey' area of the real estate market stems from the fear of losing one's home, not being able to find a new one, and from double dependencies when both employment

relationships and housing are managed by the same person, as well as from insufficient knowledge about rights. Precarious living conditions and socio-spatial disinvestment dynamics simultaneously create business models for landlords who, for example, acquire properties and generate the highest possible rental dividends with minimal capital investment, overpopulate and wear down the properties (MHKBD 2019).

On the other hand, municipalities address the socio-spatial downward dynamics of certain neighbourhoods and streets under the label 'problem properties', which is directly linked to the topos of 'migration from South-East Europe':

“
These represent a residential area where rents are low and many flats are available. Population groups with low incomes or who are at risk of being disadvantaged in their housing search live here disproportionately. Intra-European migration from South-East Europe is also directed towards these neighborhoods. [...] This rental practice can quickly lead to the deterioration of entire buildings, with corresponding negative effects on the urban planning, housing economy, and social fabric of entire streets and neighborhoods.

”
(Own translation; MHKBD 2019: 4)

Local authorities are required to counteract such socio-spatial downward trends, identify exploitative and health-endangering living conditions, and put an end to them. A wide range of regulatory policy instruments is at their disposal: The Public Order Authorities' Law and various special laws, such as Building Planning Law, Building Code, Monument Preservation Law, Housing Supervision Law, and the Administrative Enforcement Law, provide municipalities with various intervention opportunities to actively promote urban and social space development and prevent abusive usage practices (Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen 2013: 68).

The tools and procedures that municipalities use to address such misdevelopments are a matter of local political decision-making. The city of Duisburg takes a unique approach by employing the massive use of forced evictions. These evictions are carried out by the 'Task Force Problem Properties', which has existed since 2014 with the involvement of various local authorities. Since 2021, ten buildings in the district of Hochfeld have been evicted, affecting nearly 500 residents, according to our information. This typically happens with reference to fire safety reasons and an acute danger to the residents of the problem properties. Overall, the City of Duisburg reports (as of March 2022) that 96 house inspections have been conducted, and the use of 79 buildings has been prohibited (Rat der Stadt Duisburg 2022). The evictions, despite their lengthy bureaucratic process, are carried out without prior notice to the residents and using the usual harsh methods of forced evictions. Families lose their homes, their social context, and are effectively pushed into a vulnerable social existence within a few hours. The affected individuals classify the city's approach as openly discriminatory and racist. However, public protests against the evictions occur only in rare cases (see Wiese 2024; Schlee and Wiese 2024).⁸

The practice of unannounced yet planned evictions is a distinctive local policy feature in Duisburg. Despite the availability of other options in neighbouring municipalities, it continues to be politically upheld. The eviction policy has a strong symbolic component, with which the city indicates how it handles 'migration from South-East Europe'.

4.3 Access to social rights and bureaucratic bordering practices

The association between 'migration from South-East Europe' and the allegation of abuse of national social security systems — often linked to

anti-Roma stereotypes — is well documented (Neuburger and Hinrichs 2022). Like other municipalities, Duisburg has established a special unit for curbing social benefits fraud. While its inspections are widely publicised in the media and often accompanied by high-profile political figures demonstrating decisive action (Duisburg Police 2024), there is no public data available on the results of these investigations or legal proceedings.

Beyond such symbolic policies, it is primarily the Job Centres, the Family Benefits Offices and Municipal Social Welfare offices that manage access to various entitlements. Our observations focus mainly on the activities of the Job Centre, which is responsible for granting basic income support for jobseekers under SCB II (SGB II).⁹ The Bulgarian and Romanian migrants we spoke to typically come into contact with the Job Centre when they apply for subsistence benefits, submit new applications due to frequent job changes, fulfil documentation requirements, and/or file renewal applications for existing entitlements.

The first structural barrier that confronts them is the extensive documentation required to determine eligibility for benefits. This includes, among many others, bank statements, rental contracts, payslips, employment certificates, and proof of health insurance. On average, the list of required documents consists of 25 items, many of which are difficult to obtain for the people in our social counselling service or involve additional financial burdens. In her study on Job Centres, Nora Ratzmann (2022) claims that this excessive documentation requirement creates an unreasonable 'duty of proof' for benefit claimants.

The structural barriers in the application process stem from the normative expectations embedded in the standardised documentation requirements, which often fail to align with the lived realities of precariously employed migrants. These obstacles, long waiting times for

⁸ See for example the activities of the initiative 'Marxloh Nachbarn': <https://youtu.be/ZCWbWIIUfLg> and the documentary film of 'Netzwerk Hochfeld': https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9FZFa0UtbSj4-Vh_o5rBvA.

⁹ It refers to the German social law that governs the provision of basic income support for job seekers (unemployment benefits II or Hartz IV) to those who are unemployed or underemployed and in need of financial assistance.

appointments and prolonged processing periods, led some of our interviewees to forego their claims entirely. As a result, individuals in particular need, fall through the cracks of social security systems, despite playing a crucial role in sustaining migrant-dominated economic sectors through precarious employment. For instance, Metin, who works as a part-time cleaner, told us that he has been waiting six months for his SCB II (SGB II) application to be processed. He earns a net salary of 630 euros, from which he must support both his pregnant wife and his grandmother. He is put in a situation where he sees no other option but to return to Bulgaria.

Whatever the procedures and motives may be behind these extremely long waiting times, many of the people we spoke to felt that the delays and repeated resubmissions were deliberately built-in administrative hurdles designed to deter them from claiming social benefits. As a 'bureaucratic instrument', such delays force applicants into a state of passive waiting, shaping their daily routines and subjecting them to the rhythms and timelines of labour market policies (Andersson 2014).

This dependency has significant effects on individuals' sense of autonomy, leading to self-disciplining effects (Manolova 2021). At the same time, the prolonged waiting periods trigger feelings of 'fear', 'chaos' and 'instability' among our interviewees, further exacerbating their already precarious living conditions.

Finally, the insistence on using German as an official language in administration processes also leads to exclusions from social security systems. Despite various efforts, such as translation support from the Municipal Integration Centre during the school enrolment process or the Job Centre offering Romanian and Bulgarian-language phone support, our researchers reported that poor German language skills were often scolded during phone calls, and further information was withheld. Despite selective efforts by organisations, the handling of multilingualism in both the application process and in direct interactions is still in its infancy.

One consequence of the various administrative barriers to accessing social benefits is a thriving

informal service economy. The areas of activity of informal intermediaries — often second — or third-generation migrants with Turkish language skills —span various aspects of life. 'Support services' range from child benefit applications and banking transactions to loans, employment and rental contracts. This informal service economy is a double-edged sword: while it helps migrants gain a foothold in various areas of life, it often demands outrageous fees, further exacerbating the precarious living conditions for many newcomers. For instance, translating a one-sided official letter may cost between 10 and 20 euros, while assistance with filling out forms for an SCB II (SGB II) application can cost between 30 and 50 euros. Booking an appointment can be arranged for 50 euros. Particularly in the housing market, these 'gatekeepers' charge fees of up to 1.000 euros. The spread and development of such informal services can be seen as part of local arrival infrastructures (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). These infrastructures exist alongside other support services for migrants, such as those offered by welfare associations, the Municipal Integration Centre, and the social counselling provided in the framework of our study. They primarily supply newcomers with information and services that are otherwise inaccessible to them due to their linguistic, social, economic and symbolic positioning, while simultaneously directing them into certain paths within the local economy and housing market (Manolova 2021).

Contrary to the widespread narrative about 'social benefit abuse', the migrants we work with only hesitantly claim welfare state benefits. In some cases, they actively rejected our suggestions to apply for state assistance. This reluctance to claim social rights has various causes: it is initially driven by shame or fear of stigmatisation. Others fear penalties and repayments and express a deep-seated distrust of state institutions. They do not believe in the fairness of procedures. However, the most common reason cited by our interviewees is the expectations and forms of disciplining associated with claiming social benefits. For them, an SCB II (SGB II) application means losing control over areas of their life, which would then have to follow the procedural requirements, objectives and schedules of the Job Centre. This is evident in

various statements made during our interviews: “They [the Job Centre] make your life hell. You have to report every little thing.”, “I tell newcomers to stay away from the Job Centre. It's not worth the stress and effort.”

However, this should not be understood to mean that these individuals do not consider themselves to be in need of social assistance. On the contrary, there is a clear awareness of their precarious socio-economic position. The respondents emphasise — very similar to a study from the Netherlands (Deneva 2024) — their contribution to society as workers and hard-working taxpayers, but they do not want to subject themselves to the invasive procedures and demands of bureaucracy.

The unequal treatment of European citizens from Romania and Bulgaria is legally legitimised under social law and with reference to the overload of national social security systems. This legal foundation simultaneously operates in the bureaucratic bordering practices at the micro level of administrative actions. An already highly stratified social security law is further fragmented by additional bureaucratic inclusions and exclusions, leading to increased insecurity (Tervonen and Enache 2017). The impact of these exclusions particularly affects those who least fit the inadequate expectations of the welfare state: individuals who, due to precarious employment conditions or insecure housing situations, have already been pushed to the margins of society. Many of these individuals are also excluded from access to social security due to the complex interplay of factors described, inevitably leading to poverty and existential threats. It is a question of direction and the future of social policy: where should responsibility for the persistent and stable production of precariousness lie? Is it in the integration barriers and cultural deviations of the ‘clientele’, or in the programmatic orientations and administrative procedures, which often worsen the already precarious situations instead of strengthening and supporting individuals in difficult life circumstances?

5. Multiple precarisation

Our aim was to capture the interplay of labour, access to social security, and housing within a specific spatial arrangement in which the conditions for structural discrimination arise. Although we originally framed this goal based on a concept of structural discrimination, our field experiences are difficult to reconcile with this framework. We encountered a variety of experiences that, on the one hand, can be attributed to a specific institutional or administrative domain. On the other hand, our analysis reveals the interaction of factors in the labour market, housing market, and access to social rights — an interwoven network of actions that cannot be solely attributed to one actor or a single institutional structure. Additionally, our findings are hard to capture within the typical categories of discrimination research. We are primarily writing about individuals from Eastern Europe who are affected by the mechanisms described here, yet we are not dealing with targeted discrimination against Eastern Europeans per se. Rather, we observe how anti-Roma stereotypes persist in the problem descriptions related to ‘migration from South-East Europe’ and ‘social security abuse’, and how these exclusionary effects unfold on different migrant groups.

Due to these conceptual difficulties, we describe the interconnections outlined here as ‘multiple precarisation’. The mechanisms referred to by this term draw on discriminatory knowledge and systematically produce the experience of unjustified unequal treatment. Precarisation is a long-established concept in social sciences that originally described the effects of the transformation of labour relations in a post-Fordist economic structure (Standing 2011; Kalleberg 2011). In our interpretation, we base our understanding of precarity on its expansion beyond formal employment, encompassing various axes of social differentiation and addressing economic, political-legal and social relations (Bourdieu 1998). It operates through overlapping inclusions and exclusions (‘differential inclusion’) of individuals who, for instance, are legally residing and working in Germany but do not have access to certain rights,

who are included in the labour market and economic activities but are excluded from entering formalised standard employment relationships, and so on.

In this way, precarisation refers to both the role of the public sector, its discursive practices, and its legislation, as well as to the administrative restriction of access to services or the introduction of sanctions that push people into insecure work. It also points to private actors such as employers, intermediaries, housing and financial institutions. While precariousness, insecurity and risk can be highlighted as general conditions of social life (Marchart 2013), doing so overlooks the extent to which the overlap of citizenship and social rights, as well as economic regulations, particularly affects migrant populations (Neuhauser and Birke 2023).

The three forms of precarisation that we have identified are:

1) Precarisation in semi-formal, 'grey' labour markets:

The institutional background of this mechanism consists of flexible labour markets, with possibilities for structuring employment relationships through temporary work, zero-hour contracts, self-employment, and other forms of contractual differentiation. As we have shown in [Section 4.1](#), the life situation of individuals in these conditions is characterised by fluid transitions from formality to informality. This has significant effects on the sense of security of migrants, their ability to plan, and their control over their life situation. When discussing low-skilled jobs in migrant-dominated economic sectors, it is important to consider this level of uncertainty and pressure.

2) Precarisation through graduated access to social rights

The processes of labour market fragmentation and the flexibilisation of employment relations only function in this form in combination with inequalities along the axis of migration/citizenship/status. In our case, the exclusion of EU citizens from

social benefits makes their residence and access to social services dependent on their economic performance. As we describe in [Section 4.3](#), those who are pushed to the margins of labour markets are particularly affected by limited access to social benefits. Conversely, work as a condition for inclusion in social security systems maintains the dependency of migrants on symbolically and materially devalued labour.

3) Precarisation through migration control mechanisms

In our study, the bureaucratic barriers to accessing social benefits, forced evictions, and raids in segregated migrant neighbourhoods with an increased surveillance were the most prominent examples of the tension between integration promotion and exclusion. In [Section 4.2](#), we have demonstrated the connections between such practices of administrative control and the legal disenfranchisement of migrants and their constantly contested EU citizenship rights.

These factors do not simply exclude people from society, but have productive effects. They create a field of social positions within which migrantised individuals move and 'subjectivise'. Through repeated interactions with exclusionary institutions, legal uncertainty, and precarious work, migrants internalise and navigate identities shaped by marginality, dependency, and conditional belonging. These mechanisms play a central role in the relatively stable production of social and labour relations within a specific local context. City policy is just as responsible for the functioning as the social exclusion of migrants and the situation in the housing market.

The freedom of movement for workers from Bulgaria and Romania has been in place since 2014. Since then, 'migration from South-East Europe' has been heralded as either a security or an integration problem. Local practices of migration deterrence are flexibly combined with integration efforts of all kinds, without addressing, let alone

resolving, the unmistakably existing social problems. Through the analysis of the production of precarity, we illustrate the exclusions from the systems of social security, the regulatory and control deficits in labour and housing markets, and administrative practices of exclusion. Our fieldwork not only shows that migrants in Germany need reliable and multilingual advice, but primarily highlights the need for political action from legislation, civil society, and local administrations to disrupt the ongoing (re)production of precarity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Alberti, Gabriella (2017):** The government of migration through workfare in the UK. Towards a shrinking space of mobility and social rights? *Movements* 3 (1), 1–19.
- **Amt für Soziales und Wohnen (2020):** Wohnbericht 2019. Duisburg. Available at: https://www.duisburg.de/vv/produkte/pro_du/dez_iii/50/102010100000075567.php.media/123801/Wohnbericht_NEU_4.3_klein.pdf, accessed 21.04.2025.
- **Andersson, Ruben (2014):** Time and the migrant other: European border controls and the temporal economics of illegality. *American Anthropologist* 116 (4), 796–809.
- **Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes (ADS) (2020):** Rassistische Diskriminierung auf dem Wohnungsmarkt Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Umfrage. Berlin. Available at: https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/Umfragen/umfrage_rass_diskr_auf_dem_wohnungsmarkt.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4; accessed 02.05.2025.
- **Baisch, Benjamin; Müller, Dagmar; und Zollner, Corinna (2023):** Barrieren der Inanspruchnahme monetärer Leistungen für Familien. München: Deutsches Jugendinstitut. DOI: 10.36189/DJI202305
- **Birke, Peter (2022):** Grenzen aus Glas. Arbeit, Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration in Deutschland. Wien, Berlin: Mandelbaum Verlag.
- **Birke, Peter; Bluhm, Felix (2020):** Migrant Labour and Workers’ Struggles: The German Meatpacking Industry as Contested Terrain. *Global Labour Journal* 11 (1), 34–51. DOI: 10.15173/glj.v11i1.3875
- **Bogoeski, Vladimir (2022):** Continuities of exploitation: seasonal migrant workers in German agriculture during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Law and Society* 49 (4), 681–702. DOI: 10.1111/jols.12389
- **Borelli, Silvia (2022):** Subcontracting: exploitation by design. The Left in the European Parliament. Available at: <https://left.eu/issues/subcontracting-exploitation-by-design-tackling-the-business-model-for-social-dumping/>; accessed 02.05.2025.
- **Bourdieu, Pierre (1998):** Gegenfeuer. Wortmeldungen im Dienste des Widerstands gegen die neoliberale Invasion, Bd. 7. 2. Aufl. Konstanz: UVK Universitätsverl. Konstanz.
- **Brücker, Herbert; Hauptmann, Andreas und Valizadeh, Ezan (2014):** Zuwanderungsmonitor Rumänien und Bulgarien. Aktuelle Berichte November 2014. Nürnberg: Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung.
- **Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA). (2022):** Bekämpfung von bandenmäßigem Leistungsmissbrauch im spezifischen Zusammenhang mit der EU-Freizügigkeit. Arbeitshilfe. Nürnberg. Available at: <https://tacheles-sozialhilfe.de/aktuelles/archiv/neune-arbeitshilfe-bekaempfung-von-bandenmaessigem-leistungsmissbrauch-im-spezifischen-zusammenhang-mit-der-eu-freizuegigkeit.html>; accessed 02.05.25.
- **Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA). (2024a):** Migration und Arbeitsmarkt. Nürnberg.
- **Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA). (2024b):** Beschäftigte nach Staatsangehörigkeiten – Deutschland, Länder und Kreise (Quartalszahlen). Deutschland. Länder und Kreise. 31.12.2023. Nürnberg.
- **Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (BagFW). (2021):** Schwierigkeiten von EU-Bürgerinnen und EU-Bürgern in der Durchsetzung von Leistungsansprüchen. Berlin.
- **Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (BMAS). (2022):** Fachkräftestrategie der Bundesregierung. Berlin.
- **Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung e. V. (vhv) (2021):** Soziale Wohnungspolitik auf kommunaler Ebene. Berlin. Letzter Zugriff: 10.09.2024.
- **Burrell, Kathy; Schweyher, Mateus (2020):** Conditional citizens and hostile environments: Polish migrants in pre-Brexit Britain. *Geoforum. Journal of Physical, Human, and Regional Geosciences* 106: 193–201. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.08.014
- **Deneva, Neda (2024):** The Moral Economy of Welfare: Bulgarian Roma Migrants Reclaiming Social Citizenship through Fraud. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 38 (1): 357–376. DOI: 10.1177/08883254231203722

- **Deutscher Städtetag (2013):** Positionspapier des Deutschen Städtetages zu den Fragen der Zuwanderung aus Rumänien und Bulgarien. Berlin.
- **Entwicklungsgesellschaft Duisburg mbH (EG DU) (2020)** Integriertes Stadtteilentwicklungskonzept. Duisburg Stark im Norden Alt-Hamborn und Marxloh. Duisburg.
- **Entwicklungsgesellschaft Duisburg mbH (EG DU) (2021):** Integriertes Stadtteilentwicklungskonzept. Duisburg Hochfeld. Duisburg.
- **Fauser, Margit (2024):** Mapping the internal border through the city: an introduction. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47 (12): 2477–2498. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2024.2344693
- **Falkenhain, Mariella; Raab, Miriam (2022):** Die Westbalkanregelung als Blaupause? Erwerbsmigration fair gestalten und langfristig denken. IAB-Forum. Letzter Zugriff: 10.09.2024.
- **Fuchs, Johann; Söhnlein, Doris und Weber, Brigitte (2021):** Demografische Entwicklung lässt das Arbeitskräfteangebot stark schrumpfen. IAB-Kurzbericht 25/2021.
- **Gago, Angie (2023):** All of the same type? The use of fears of ‘welfare tourism’ to limit the access of EU migrants to social benefits in the UK and Germany. In: Marco Pomati, Andy Jolly und James Rees (Hg): *Social policy review* 33, Analysis and debate in social policy, 2021. Bristol: Policy Press, 203–222. DOI: 10.46692/9781447359739.012
- **Gambino, Elena (2017):** The “Grand Ghetto”: migrant labour and militant research in Southern Italy. In *The borders of “Europe”*, Hrsg. Nicolas De Genova, 255–283. Durham & London: Duke University Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv11smr05.14
- **Geiges, Lars; Neef, Tobias; Kopp, Julia und Mueller-Stahl, Robert (2017):** Lokale Konflikte um Zuwanderung aus Südosteuropa. ‘Roma’ zwischen Anerkennung und Ausgrenzung, Bd. 13. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. DOI: 10.14361/9783839438848
- **Glassman, Ulrich; Voelzkow, Helmuth (2004):** Restructuring Duisburg: a new local production system substitutes an old steel plant. In: Colin Crouch, Patrick le Gal, Carlo Trigilia und Helmut Voelzkow (Hg): *Changing Governance of Local Economies: Responses of European Local Production Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 139–159.
- **Hirsch, Joachim (1996):** Der nationale Wettbewerbsstaat. Staat, Demokratie und Politik im globalen Kapitalismus. 2. Aufl. Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv.
- **Hüttenhoff, Frederic (2023):** Harte Arbeit. Bauarbeiter aus Mittel- und Osteuropa und das Werkvertragssystem in Deutschland. Frankfurt am Main: Institut für nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung in Europa (PECO-Institut e. V.).
- **IT-NRW (2024): Ausländische Bevölkerung (2022 und 2023):** Kreisebene. Düsseldorf. Available at: https://www.it.nrw/system/files/media/document/file/126_24.pdf; accessed: 02.05.25.
- **Kalleberg, Arne L. (2011):** Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s–2000s. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, American Sociological Association Rose Series in Sociology. DOI: 10.1177/0950017013480403
- **Künkel, Jenny (2018):** Die städtische Produktion von ‘Armutsmigration’. *PROKLA. Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialwissenschaft* 48 (191): 283–298. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32387/prokla.v48i191.85>
- **Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen (2013):** Drs. 16/2299. Abschlussbericht der Enquetekommission ‘Wohnungswirtschaftlicher Wandel und neue Finanzinvestoren auf den Wohnungsmärkten in NRW’ (Enquetekommission I). Available at: <https://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/dokumentenarchiv/Dokument/MMD16-2299.pdf>; accessed: 09.06.2025.
- **Loschert, Franziska; Kolb, Holger und Schork, Franziska (2023):** Prekäre Beschäftigung – Prekäre Teilhabe. Ausländische Arbeitskräfte im deutschen Niedriglohnsektor. SVR Studie 2023-1. Berlin.
- **Manolova, Polina (2021):** Inclusion through irregularisation? Exploring the politics and realities of internal bordering in managing post-crisis labour migration in the EU. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48 (15), 3687–3704. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1926945
- **Manolova, Polina (2024):** Leiharbeitsketten, Ausbeutungsketten, Solidaritätsketten. In: Anna Irma Hilfrich (Hg.): *Europa-Lokal: Prekarisierung in Duisburg*. Duisburg: KUKSTDU, 52–57.

- **Marchart, Oliver (2013):** Die Prekarisierungsgesellschaft. Prekäre Proteste: Politik und Ökonomie im Zeichen der Prekarisierung, Band 8. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. DOI: 10.14361/transcript.9783839421925
- **Massey, Doreen (1994):** Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production. New York: Routledge.
- **Morris, Lydia (2003):** Managing migration. Civic stratification and migrants' rights. London, New York: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203447499>
- **Ministerium für Heimat, Kommunales, Bau und Gleichstellung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (MHKBD). (2019):** Modellvorhaben Problemimmobilien. Kommunale Strategien zum Umgang mit stark vernachlässigten Wohngebäuden. Düsseldorf.
- **Neuhauser, Johanna, und Peter Birke (2023):** 'Migration und Prekarität in der Pandemie: Empirische Studien aus Deutschland und Österreich'. Arbeit 32 (1), 3–26. DOI: 10.1515/arbeits-2023-0002
- **Neuburger, Tobias; Hinrichs, Christian (2022):** Die institutionelle Produktion von 'Armutszuwanderern': Kommunalen Antiziganismus und die Neuerfindung des Jobcenters als wohlfahrtsstaatliche Grenzsicherungsbehörde. In: Schröder, Christiane; Supik, Linda; Natarajan, Radhika; Peeck-Ho, Catharina; Sielert, Deborah und Kleinschmidt, Malte (Hrsg.): Gender, Race and Inclusive Citizenship. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 195–226. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-658-36391-8_8
- **Neuburger, Tobias; Hinrichs, Christian (2023):** Mechanismen des institutionellen Antiziganismus: Kommunale Praktiken und EU-Binnenmigration am Beispiel einer westdeutschen Großstadt. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-658-41646-1
- **NRW Bank (2023):** Regionalwirtschaftliche Profile Nordrhein-Westfalen 2023. Ausgewählte Indikatoren Ruhrgebiet (RVR). Düsseldorf.
- **Peck, Jamie (1996):** Work-Place: The Social Regulation of Labor Markets. New York: Guilford Press.
- **Polizei Duisburg (2024):** Marxloh: Gemeinsam mit Netzwerkpartnern geht die Polizei Duisburg konsequent gegen organisierten Sozialleistungsmissbrauch vor – Innenminister Reul dabei: Available at: <https://duisburg.polizei.nrw/presse/marxloh-gemeinsam-mit-netzwerkpartnern-geht-die-polizei-duisburg-konsequent-gegen-organisierten-sozialleistungsmissbrauch-vor-innenminister-reul-dabei>; accessed: 02.05.2025.
- **Rat der Stadt Duisburg (2022):** Niederschrift der Sitzung am 31.03.2022. Duisburg: Ratsinformationssystem.
- **Ratzmann, Nora (2022):** "We treat everyone the same". Formal and informal expressions of institutional discrimination against Intra-EU migrant citizens in German job centres, DeZIM Research Notes 13. Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM). Available at: <https://www.dezim-institut.de/publikationen/publikation-detail/we-treat-everyone-the-same/>.
- **Ratzmann, Nora; Sahraoui, Nina (2021):** Conceptualising the Role of Deservingness in Migrants' Access to Social Services. Social Policy and Society 20 (3), 440–451. DOI: 10.1017/S1474746421000117
- **Rigo, Enrica; Dines, Nick (2014):** Oltre la Clandestinità, lo Sfruttamento Umanitario del Lavoro nelle Campagne del Mezzogiorno. Available at: <https://www.coordinamentomigranti.org/2014/11/04/oltre-la-clandestinita-lo-sfruttamento-umanitario-del-lavoro-nelle-campagne-del-mezzogiorno/>; accessed: 02.05.2025,
- **Rogaly, Ben (2020):** Stories from a migrant city: Manchester. Manchester University Press. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2021.1837903
- **Schlee, Thorsten; Wiese, Lena (2024):** Wohnungsräumung statt Problemlösung: Wie Kommunen mit Zuwanderung aus Südosteuropa umgehen. DeZIMinutes 15, Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM). Available at: <https://www.dezim-institut.de/publikationen/publikation-detail/wohnungsräumung-statt-problemlösung/>.
- **Senat Bremen (2014):** Bericht, Konzept und Maßnahmen zur Aufnahme und Integration von EU-Bürgerinnen und -Bürgern aus Bulgarien und Rumänien. Bremen.
- **Stadt Dortmund (2022):** Dortmunder Sachstandsbericht: Zuwanderung aus Südosteuropa. Dortmund.
- **Standing, Guy (2011):** The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class. London: Bloomsbury Academic. DOI: 10.5040/9781849664554

- **Ulceluse, Magdalena; Bender, Christian (2022):** Two-tier EU citizenship: Disposable Eastern European workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Organization* 29 (3), 449-459. DOI: 10.1177/13505084211061229
- **Walraff, Günter (1985):** Ganz unten: Mit einer Dokumentation der Folgen. Köln: Kiwi Paperback.
- **Wiese, Lena (2024):** 'Taskforce Schrottimmoblie' und die Mär von der Aufwertung. In: Anna Irma Hilfrich (Hg.): *Europa-Lokal: Prekarisierung in Duisburg*. Duisburg: KUKSTDU, 21–31.
- **Xiang, Biao; Lindquist, Johan (2014):** Migration Infrastructure. *International Migration Review* 48 (1), 122–148. DOI: 10.1111/imre.12141

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Polina Manolova

Dr. Polina Manolova has been working at the Institute of Sociology, University of Duisburg-Essen since June 2024 and has been part of the Research Training Group “Cross-Border Labour Markets: Transnational Market Makers, Infrastructures, Institutions” (RTG 2951). She is a sociologist and ethnographer interested in urban migration, border regimes, labour exploitation of migrants with a focus on subcontracting and forms of migrant resistance and mobilisation. Before joining the University of Duisburg-Essen she worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Tübingen, where she investigated technologies of urban governance of racialised migrant groups in segregated neighbourhoods in Germany. She is involved in migrant support and solidarity initiatives in Duisburg-Marxloh.

Dr. Thorsten Schlee

Dr. Thorsten Schlee is Fellow in the Working Group “Transnational Social Protection in Migration Societies” at the German Institute for Interdisciplinary Social Policy (DIFIS) and is working as postdoc at the Institute for Work, Skills and Training at the University of Duisburg-Essen. After studying political science and history, he worked, researched and taught as a pedagogical assistant with young adults in the transition from school to work, as a research assistant at the University of Duisburg-Essen, at the Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences and at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences. In projects on the local organisation of refugee migration, the role of migrant organisations in the production of social security, job centres and immigration authorities, he investigates the effects of political programmes in local arrangements.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project ‘Discrimination Beyond the Categories’ (2023–2024) was funded by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency under the theme of ‘anti-Slavic racism’. It was conducted by the Institute for Work and Qualification (IAQ) at the University of Duisburg-Essen, led by researchers Polina Manolova, Thorsten Schlee, and Lena Wiese, in cooperation with two grassroots associations—*Stolipinovo in Europa* and *Solidarische Gesellschaft der Vielen*—in the Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld.

Further information about the project can be found at: <https://www.uni-due.de/iaq/projekte/djeka.php>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency for their generous support and commitment to addressing racism. Our deepest gratitude also goes to all our interlocutors from the Bulgarian and Romanian communities in Duisburg, whose trust, time, and shared experiences were essential to this research.

IMPRINT

© Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung DeZIM e.V., 2025
All rights reserved.

Manolova, Polina and Schlee, Thorsten (2025):

Multiple Precarisation: The Living Situation of Eastern European Migrants in Urban Social Spaces. Using the example of the two Duisburg districts of Marxloh and Hochfeld. DeZIM Working Papers 6, Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (DeZIM).

DeZIM Working Papers reflect the views of the author(s).

Published by



Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung DeZIM e.V.

German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM Institute)
Mauerstraße 76
10117 Berlin

+49 (0)30 200 754 130

presse@dezim-institut.de

www.dezim-institut.de

Written by

Dr. Polina Manolova and Dr. Thorsten Schlee

Editing by

Dr. Marcel Berlinghoff and Dr. Alexandra Graevskaia

Proofreading by

Marie Kaiser and Eleni Pavlidou

Layout

DeZIM Institute

ISBN

978-3-911716-18-5

The German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) conducts research on integration and migration, consensus and conflict, social participation and racism. It consists of the DeZIM Institute and the DeZIM Research Community. The DeZIM Institute is based in Berlin-Mitte. In the DeZIM research community, the DeZIM Institute joins forces with seven other institutions conducting research on migration and integration in Germany. The DeZIM Institute is funded by the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ).

Funded by



Bundesministerium
für Bildung, Familie, Senioren,
Frauen und Jugend