

How Intergenerational Mobility Shapes Attitudes toward Work and Welfare

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Past experiences and expectations about the future shape how people think about work and welfare. Given the uncertainty many young people face when entering the labor market, we investigate whether 1) young people's experiences of social mobility and 2) their future mobility expectations impact their attitudes regarding the meaning of work and welfare. Drawing on the concepts of self-interest and deservingness, we examine how both the experiences and expectations of intergenerational social mobility influence the ways in which young adults view the so-called moral dimension of work and welfare. Results of logistic regression analyses of around 11,000 young adults in eleven countries suggest that the relationship between mobility and individuals' views on work and welfare varies depending on the dimension of mobility (economic and social origins, for example), with expected future mobility exerting a stronger effect on attitudes than past mobility experiences. We find that self-interest, not empathy with one's social origins, appears to be the primary driver of these attitudes.

Keywords: social mobility; welfare attitudes; mobility effects; self-interest; deservingness

Work and welfare attitudes have many antecedents, including the crucial role that one's economic position and social origin plays in shaping opinions and preferences. The experiences people have throughout their lifetimes, and particularly in their younger years, shape how they view the meaning of work. Today we face a situation in which intergenerational upward mobility (i.e., achieving a higher socioeconomic status than one's parents) is no longer a given for many young people: economic circumstances remain challenging after the economic crisis, and an increase in university graduates has led to fierce competition on

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the job market (Eurofound 2017). In light of this situation, characterized by both real and threatened downward mobility, we are interested in how the experiences and expectations of social mobility, both upward and downward, impact young people's attitudes toward work and welfare.

Our work here addresses the following research questions: 1) How does intergenerational social mobility (upward/downward) impact young people's attitudes regarding the meaning of work? 2) Do future mobility expectations matter for young people's normative attitudes regarding work and welfare? By adopting a differentiated approach to the study of social mobility and its consequences, we offer new insights into the formation of work and welfare attitudes. While there are broad literatures covering both how social position as well as the prospects of moving up or down the socioeconomic ladder impact redistributive preferences, we know much less about how social mobility can shape the so-called moral aspects of welfare states. These moral or normative dimensions go beyond pure redistributive preferences and rather tap into beliefs about deservingness (Mau 2003) and the normative conceptions of work. A multidimensional conceptualization of welfare state support enables us to consider sources of support beyond material self-interest, such as normative concerns and preferences (Roosma, Gelissen, and van Oorschot 2013; Sihvo and Uusitalo 1995; van Oorschot 2010). Such a conceptualization furthermore allows for the possibility that individuals may hold a differentiated set of views. By focusing on the so-called moral dimension of the work-welfare nexus, in particular the receipt of welfare benefits and the influence on work values, we investigate the effects of intergenerational mobility beyond preferences for redistribution. More specifically, we provide empirical insights into how both the lived experiences and future expectations of intergenerational mobility shape young adults' attitudes about welfare and employment. When citizens do not feel recipients of social support are deserving of assistance, they will be unlikely to extend support for the maintenance or expansion of such programs and policies. In other words, social solidarity, the willingness to share social risks, and beliefs about whom should benefit from collective resources can have far-reaching consequences for elections, social policies, and even democratic legitimacy (Rothstein 1998; van Oorschot 2013). Our measures of intergenerational social mobility focus on financial status and mobility expectations in terms of standard of living. In comparison to conventional measures like occupation or education, we consider these subjective measures to have important advantages for studying young adults in contemporary Europe. Given the economic situation at the time the survey was fielded, with youth unemployment rates at nearly 50 percent in some European countries and many still struggling in the aftermath of the economic crisis, focusing on these

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subjective dimensions of intergenerational mobility allows us to also include young adults who are currently not employed and would therefore be hard to classify in any analysis of occupational status mobility. Finally, we illuminate mobility effects in countries where formal education may no longer be associated with the returns it once promised, such as in Spain or Greece.

Social Mobility and Normative Attitudes toward Work and Welfare

The extant literature on attitudes toward the welfare state has little to say about how social mobility shapes opinions regarding normative aspects of the welfare state and its beneficiaries. For our analysis, we formulate two sets of competing hypotheses based on two strands of literature—one that examines the effects of mobility on redistributive preferences and another that looks more specifically at welfare attitudes. Specifically, we focus on how self-interest and socialization experiences may mediate the relationship between social mobility and welfare attitudes.

The role of self-interest

The literature on welfare attitudes and redistributive preferences has grown rapidly over the last decade (Guillaud 2013; Jaeger 2005; Rehm 2009), with economic self-interest forming the basis of most studies. The origins of redistributive preferences are often traced back to income and material self-interest, with the rich seeking to minimize their tax burden and the poor hoping to benefit from redistribution. This explanation has found a great deal of traction within the political economy literature (Meltzer and Richard 1981; Romer 1975), though it is not without its critics. Accordingly, potential beneficiaries of redistribution, i.e., people with below-average incomes, are anticipated to favor redistributive measures (and therefore higher rates of income taxation), whereas those with higher incomes—the potential contributors and bearers of the burden of income taxation—will oppose redistribution. More generally, the association between material self-interest and redistributive preferences is expected to hold not only for current income, but also for other indicators of socioeconomic position, such as social class or educational level (Armingeon 2006).

Whereas the predictive power of an individual's socioeconomic position has been widely documented, it does not fully account for the role of one's past socioeconomic position, which might equally influence preferences and attitudes (Alesina and Giuliano 2009; Sihvo and Uusitalo 1995). To some extent, upward or downward mobility entails processes of re-socialization. Although the family setting is an important environment for the formation of opinions and values, as children mature and encounter new economic circumstances, they may adjust their preferences and ideas about work and welfare according to their new socioeconomic situation (Abramson and Books 1971; Lown 2015; Piketty 1995).

Intergenerational mobility may lead to a “self-serving perception of the role that ascribed and attained factors play in determining success or failure” (Gugushvili 2016b, 405). These so-called internal vs. external attributions of success, in turn, influence people’s perceptions of existing inequalities and the role of the state (Gugushvili 2016a; Piketty 1995). This self-serving bias in causal attribution is expected to lead those who experienced intergenerational upward mobility to be more likely to attribute their success to their own efforts, and, therefore, to be less supportive of the welfare state and people who rely on its benefits (Gaviria, Graham, and Braido 2007; Ravallion and Lokshin 2000). Similarly, people who experienced downward mobility may be more likely to attribute their situations to external sources, which may be associated with a greater welfare support and less negative views of people who receive support. As outlined in the section to follow, whether people see others as responsible for their failures shapes attitudes regarding deservingness and how they view social programs and their beneficiaries. These assumptions lead to the following hypotheses:

- H1a: Intergenerational downward mobility increases the likelihood of holding positive views of receiving social support.
- H1b: Intergenerational upward mobility decreases the likelihood of holding positive views of receiving social support.

In addition to past and current socioeconomic position, expectations about the future can also be expected to shape welfare state support. As illustrated by Benabou and Ok (2001) in their prospect of upward mobility hypothesis, expectations of upward mobility may lead rational actors to oppose redistribution, even if their current income would predict otherwise (Alesina and Giuliano 2009). This desire to insure against potential future losses has the potential to impact current welfare attitudes (Moene and Wallerstein 2001), as people with a stronger interest in social protection will be more likely to hold positive views of welfare programs and their recipients (van Oorschot 2010). Recent studies have found that the prospect of *downward* mobility, in particular, can drive support for redistributive measures (Buscha 2012; Lee 2016), suggesting a sensitivity to losses, which may in turn positively impact welfare support. Based on the discussion regarding the impact of experienced mobility and adding the consideration of expected mobility, we arrive at our next set of hypotheses:

- H2a: Expected upward mobility decreases the likelihood of holding positive views of receiving social support.
- H2b: Expected downward mobility increases the likelihood of holding positive views of receiving social support.

Socialization experiences and the role of deservingness

While self-interest appears to be an important driver of welfare attitudes, it is arguably not the only one, particularly when taking seriously the

multidimensionality of welfare support (see also the contribution in this volume by Gallie on the dimensions of work values). For example, why might someone at the top of the socioeconomic ladder nevertheless hold favorable attitudes toward welfare programs and their recipients? To answer this question, it is necessary to look for answers beyond pure material self-interest (Mau 2003; Sabbagh and Vanhuysse 2006). We therefore develop a counter hypothesis, which focuses on the concept of deservingness. Whom one considers to be deserving of public support has been shown to crucially shape attitudes of welfare support for specific groups.

But what influences our evaluations of deservingness? Of the various deservingness criteria outlined by van Oorschot (2000), he finds control and identity to be the most important drivers of deservingness attitudes (Cook 1979; Will 1993). Regarding control, people tend to be supportive of benefits for individuals or groups that are perceived to be victims of circumstance. For example, both the elderly and the sick are commonly viewed as deserving groups, as both old age and poor health are regarded as life stages or situations beyond one's own control (Jensen and Petersen 2017; Petersen 2012; van Oorschot 2000, 2006). The unemployed, on the other hand, are seen as largely responsible for their own fate; in other words, unlike the elderly or the sick, they could have prevented their situation of need (Hobbins 2016). This negative image of unemployed individuals has been found to span both time and space, even in countries with generous, universalistic welfare systems such as Sweden (Furåker and Blomsterberg 2003; van Oorschot 2006). Studies have found that, compared with other groups of welfare recipients, "the unemployed are seen as having less 'character', less self-responsibility, less perseverance, and less trustworthiness" (van Oorschot 2006, 25–26).

Identity also matters, for when people identify with recipients and do not think of them in an *us vs. them* constellation, they are more likely to consider them to be deserving of social assistance (van Oorschot 2000). Danckert (2017), moreover, finds that having unemployed friends or family can weaken in-group and out-group distinctions and thereby combat negative images of the unemployed. These findings echo Rueda's (2018) finding that altruism can be identified as a reason why the well-off would support redistributive efforts: altruism is particularly relevant in cases where the recipients of benefits are seen to be similar to those financing them.

Returning to the question of why someone whose socioeconomic position would otherwise predict more conservative attitudes toward the welfare state and its recipients, the experience of social mobility, along with ideas of deservingness, can help to provide an answer. While from a rational choice perspective both the lived experience of upward intergenerational mobility and the prospects of it would predict critical assessments of the normative functions of the welfare state, we should not neglect the formative experiences of growing up less well-off: "[P]ersonal experiences with the frustrations of economic hardship or poverty ... provide a first-hand understanding of the challenges of being poor and shape beliefs regarding personal responsibility for circumstance" (Lown 2015, 6). These socialization experiences may positively shape how upwardly mobile people view

welfare recipients, even those who do not work, in terms of their deservingness. For one, upwardly mobile individuals, because of their experiences growing up with less, may identify more with the less well-off. Moreover, having been socialized in an economically deprived environment, upwardly mobile people may also be less likely to attribute blame to benefit recipients, including the unemployed, for their situation. Decades-long scholarship has furthermore documented the pivotal role of childhood and adolescent socialization experiences for political attitudes well into adulthood (Campbell et al. 1960; Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991; Sears 1975; see also Kalleberg and Marsden, this volume).

Scholars such as Piketty (1995) argue that, even though a child grew up in an economically disadvantaged environment, he or she will update his or her economic and political attitudes in accordance with his or her destination status. There is, however, reason to believe that formative childhood and adolescent socializing experiences will continue to shape attitudes about work and welfare well into adulthood: the experience of having grown up poor may affect how upwardly mobile people think about social policies and the users of these benefits. These experiences “should serve as a counterweight to the conservative effects of upward mobility” (Lown 2015, 9). People who experienced upward intergenerational mobility have (per definition) experienced being in a lower socioeconomic status. People whose families struggled financially while they were growing up may, despite having eventually succeeded in climbing the social ladder, have feelings of empathy for or identification with lower status groups and a sense of need for a strong welfare state (Danckert 2017). Such an argument could be applied to upwardly mobile young adults, wherein the children may identify with their parents’ social milieu, the one in which they also grew up. Accordingly, in light of the self-interest hypotheses, we formulate a modified and competing hypothesis on the effects of social mobility on normative attitudes toward work and welfare:

H3: Upward intergenerational mobility, both experienced and expected, increases the likelihood of holding positive views of receiving social support.

Data and Methods

Data and sample

We draw on survey data from the CUPESSE (Cultural Pathways to Economic Self-Sufficiency and Entrepreneurship) project. The CUPESSE survey is a multidisciplinary, cross-sectional, mixed-mode survey of young adults and their parents fielded in 2016 (Tosun et al. 2018). After excluding those who indicated that they are primarily in education and listwise deletion of cases with missing values on one of our explanatory or control variables, the analytical sample comprises 10,923 young Europeans aged 18 to 35 from eleven European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom).¹

Measures

Our dependent variables are based on respondents' responses to the following two statements: "*It's humiliating to receive money without having to work.*" and "*If welfare benefits are too high, there is no incentive to find work.*" These two statements are part of a battery of items on work values and were selected precisely because they tap the moral dimension of the work-welfare nexus. Answer categories range from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (4), and were recoded into binary outcome variables differentiating "agreement" (0) from "disagreement" (1) for the purpose of the multivariate analyses.

Our central explanatory variable is intergenerational mobility, operationalized along two key dimensions: financial mobility and expected mobility. Unlike earlier studies of the effects of mobility, we use subjective indicators of intergenerational mobility rather than relying on formal indicators such as education or occupational status. Given the high unemployment levels in some countries at the time the survey was fielded, we felt it important to also include unemployed young people. Moreover, financial status may currently be a more insightful marker of social position in countries where formal education is no longer associated with the returns it once promised.

Intergenerational financial mobility is based on respondents' assessments of their current financial situation as compared with their family's situation when growing up.² More specifically, we measure financial mobility as the positive (upward mobility), negative (downward mobility), or nondeviation (stability) of the respondent's current situation from one's family's situation when he or she was 14. This measurement is derived from the more general concept of economic self-sufficiency (Gowdy and Pearlmutter 1993) and taps into the degree of one's perceived financial deprivation. Despite the relatively vague reference to "*being able to afford extras*" in the survey question, we consider this measure a more favorable indicator of one's financial situation than alternative measurements such as earnings and income (that are oftentimes biased due to social desirability and recall problems if surveyed retrospectively).

Expected intergenerational mobility is calculated based on responses to the question: "*Thinking about how your standard of living will be like in the future, how does it compare to how your parents are doing today?*" Responses were recoded into three categories, indicating upward, downward, or stable expectations about the future. Standard of living is a commonly used dimension of social mobility that is closely tied to the well-being and welfare of individuals (DiPrete 2002).

We control for gender, age, first or second generation migration history, main economic activity, own and parental educational attainment, Left-Right political attitudes, religiosity, previous unemployment experience, and whether the respondent is dependent on income from unemployment or other social benefits.³ All models furthermore include country-fixed effects to account for variation that can be traced back to differences across the eleven countries in the sample. A full description of all variables can be found in the online appendix.

Analytical approach

In a first step, we look at the distributions of intergenerational financial and expected mobility separately for all countries. We then use the pooled country sample and estimate logistic regression models with two different work-welfare support items as outcome variables.⁴ For both outcomes, we first estimate separate models that include either financial or expected mobility before both effects are eventually included simultaneously in a third model.

Results

Looking at the distributions of intergenerational mobility across countries in Table 1, several between-country differences, but also differences between different dimensions of social mobility, are striking. Beginning with intergenerational financial mobility, the group of immobiles, i.e., those whose financial status is similar to their parents', constitutes the largest group in all countries except Greece and Turkey. Young Greeks report extraordinarily high rates of financial downward mobility (63 percent), which is not surprising given Greece's exceptionally poor economic situation at the time of the survey. Turkish youths show by far the lowest rates of financial downward mobility (16 percent). Beyond these two outliers, downward mobility is generally more common than upward mobility. Only in the Czech Republic, Italy, and Spain are upward mobility shares slightly higher than or equal to the shares of downward mobile.

Regarding young Europeans' expectations about their future standard of living compared with their parents' standard of living today, we find that most young Europeans are rather optimistic when looking toward the future. Most young Europeans expect to be able to maintain or even exceed their parents' current standard of living. However, this does not apply to the Southern European countries Greece, Italy, and Spain, where the fear of future downward mobility is rather widespread: more than one in four young people expect that they will be unable to maintain their parents' current standard of living for themselves.

Turning to the multivariate analyses, we first describe the logistic regression results for the outcome "*If welfare benefits are too high, there is no incentive to work*" and then move on to results for the second outcome "*It's humiliating to receive money without having to work.*" (see models 1–6 in Table 2). Both outcomes are phrased in such a way that disagreement indicates positive views of receiving social support and agreement indicates negative views of receiving social support. Given that disagreement is coded as 1, and agreement is coded as 0, positive coefficients represent positive views and negative coefficients represent negative views of receiving social support.

Model 1 estimates effects of intergenerational financial mobility on the moral dimension of the work-welfare nexus (outcome 1: "*If welfare benefits are too high, there is no incentive to work*"). In line with the first two hypotheses (H1a and H1b), we find that financially downward mobile people are more likely, and financially upward mobiles are less likely, to hold positive views of receiving social

TABLE 1
Intergenerational Mobility across Countries

	Financial mobility			Expected mobility		
	upward	stable	downward	upward	stable	downward
Austria	0.23	0.41	0.36	0.39	0.50	0.11
Czech Republic	0.32	0.38	0.30	0.48	0.43	0.10
Denmark	0.27	0.40	0.33	0.41	0.50	0.10
Germany	0.24	0.41	0.35	0.41	0.44	0.15
Greece	0.10	0.27	0.63	0.32	0.34	0.34
Hungary	0.25	0.47	0.27	0.45	0.49	0.05
Italy	0.31	0.38	0.31	0.33	0.38	0.30
Spain	0.30	0.41	0.30	0.38	0.36	0.26
Switzerland	0.25	0.49	0.26	0.42	0.46	0.12
Turkey	0.42	0.42	0.16	0.61	0.32	0.07
United Kingdom	0.24	0.41	0.35	0.41	0.40	0.19

NOTE: Poststratification weights used in calculations.

support than the immobiles. The latter effect is, however, not statistically significant. The findings thus support the assumption that those who succeeded in climbing the social ladder tend to attribute their success to their own effort and therefore show less support for the welfare state. Those who failed to maintain parental status presumably attribute this failure externally, and therefore show stronger support for the welfare state.

Model 2, also focusing on outcome 1, includes effects for mobility expectations, but not past mobility experience, and shows statistically significant negative effects for upward mobility expectations and statistically significant positive effects for downward mobility expectations. These findings are in line with the self-interest argument underlying the second set of hypotheses (H2a and H2b), claiming that fears of downward mobility, i.e., being a potential future beneficiary of welfare benefits, makes people more inclined to hold positive views of receiving welfare benefits. Likewise, expecting to become a potential contributor in the future apparently makes people less supportive of the welfare state.

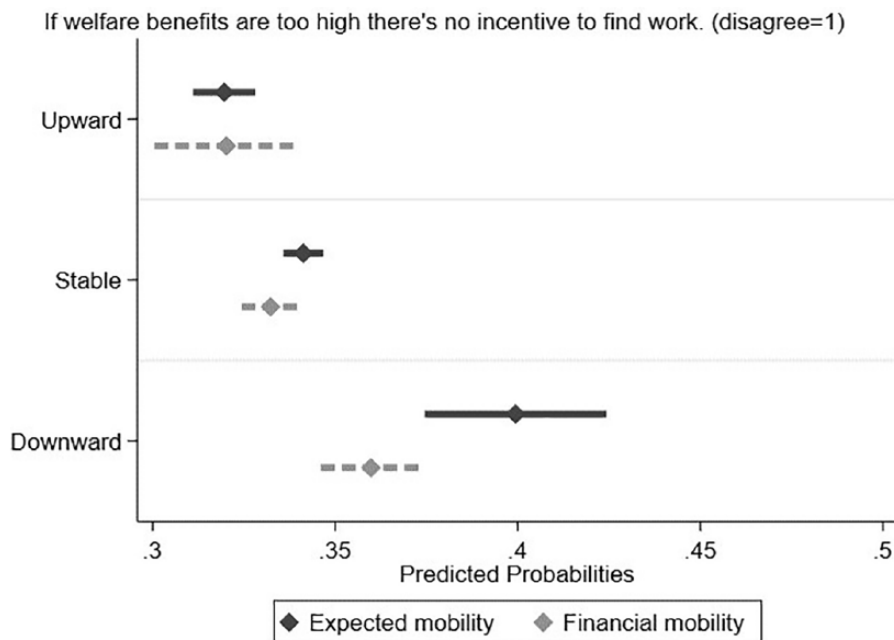
Predicted probabilities for both financial and expected mobility are illustrated in Figure 1. As the figure shows, the likelihood of disagreeing with the statement is lower for both expected and experienced upward mobility as compared with the immobile group. Likewise, people who expect or who have experienced downward mobility are more likely to disagree with the statement than the immobile group. The darker lines, representing the effects of expected mobility, illustrate the more pronounced effects of mobility expectations, as none of the confidence intervals (95 percent) overlap, whereas, while we see a clear distinction between the group of downwardly mobiles vs. stable and upwardly mobile, the effects of immobility and upward mobility on this work-welfare attitude are

TABLE 2
Social mobility and work-welfare attitudes, logistic regression

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se
<p><i>If welfare benefits are too high, there is no incentive to find work.</i> (disagree=1; agree=0)</p> <p><i>It's humiliating to receive money without having to work.</i> (disagree=1; agree=0)</p>												
Financial mobility, Ref.: stability												
upward mobility	-0.06	0.05	-0.04	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.04	0.08*	0.04	0.08*	0.04
downward mobility	0.16**	0.05	0.13*	0.05	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.05	0.05	-0.05	0.05
Mobility expectation, Ref.: stability												
upward mobility			-0.13***	0.03	-0.11***	0.03	-0.08*	0.03	-0.10**	0.03	-0.10**	0.03
downward mobility			0.32***	0.08	0.30***	0.08	0.11	0.06	0.12	0.07	0.12	0.07
Constant	-0.33	0.17	-0.27	0.17	-0.31	0.17	0.38*	0.17	0.41**	0.16	0.41*	0.16
N	10923		10923		10923		10923		10923		10923	
Pseudo R ²	0.098		0.100		0.101		0.046		0.047		0.047	

NOTE: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Models 1 to 6 display logit coefficients. Control variables and country-fixed effects included, but not shown (see online appendix Table A3 for full models).

FIGURE 1
Predicted Probability Plot



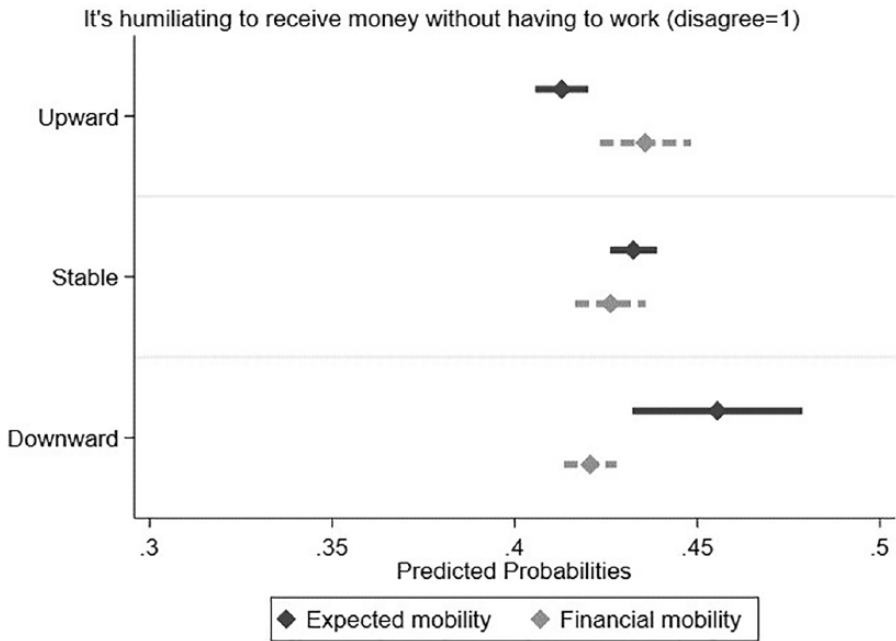
NOTE: Predicted probabilities correspond to model 1 for financial mobility and to model 2 for expected mobility (Table 2). Lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

not clearly distinguishable, as shown by the somewhat overlapping confidence intervals of the lighter lines.

Controlling for other status position factors such as receiving benefits oneself or being currently unemployed, mobility effects for financial and expected mobility also hold when included simultaneously in model 3. Again, the mobility effects support the self-interest argument underlying hypotheses H1 and H2, while we find no support for the competing arguments regarding deservingness. The fact that both mobility effects remain stable when included simultaneously also speaks in favor of distinct mechanisms that influence the young people’s attitudes.

Models 4 to 6 are similar to models 1 to 3, but focus on our second outcome “*It’s humiliating to receive money without having to work.*” Model 4, which includes financial mobility, but not expected mobility, does not show statistically significant mobility effects. Though speculative, the signs of the mobility coefficients may, however, suggest a mechanism beyond self-interest, as captured by H3. We do however find statistically significant effects for upward mobility expectations in model 5, again suggesting that self-interest rather than identification with one’s social origin is determining welfare support attitudes. When included simultaneously, these results hold, i.e., controlling for the effects of financial upward mobility expectations are significantly related to negative views of receiving social support.

FIGURE 2
Predicted Probability Plot



NOTE: Predicted probabilities correspond to model 4 for financial mobility and to model 5 for expected mobility (Table 2). Lines represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 2 plots the predicted probabilities of the two types of mobility for models 4 and 5, respectively. For financial mobility we can see a different pattern of agreement across mobility groups compared with Figure 1, though mobility effects are not statistically significant in this case (see also model 4 in Table 2): downwardly mobile people express a lower likelihood of disagreeing that it is humiliating to receive money without having to work compared with both stable and upwardly mobile respondents. For expected mobility, mobility effects show a pattern similar to outcome 1, with upward mobility expectations decreasing the likelihood of disagreeing that it is humiliating to receive money without having to work. Visible by the nonoverlapping confidence intervals with the remaining mobility effects, this effect is statistically significant.

Overall, our results support the assumption, *ceteris paribus*, that self-interest is a decisive driver of welfare state support, both in terms of experienced mobility and future mobility expectations. In that regard, intergenerational mobility apparently does not differ from the well-established social status effects per se. The empathy or identification with one's former social origin group is thus less influential than hypothesized earlier.

Discussion and Conclusion

We explore the impact of different types of intergenerational mobility—financial mobility and expected future mobility—on attitudes toward work and welfare. We drew on different strands of literature that remain contested in terms of the definitive effects an upward or downward shift in socioeconomic status and the role of factors beyond material self-interest for work-welfare attitudes. Using a unique cross-national dataset, we examined how different dimensions of intergenerational mobility shape attitudes about the work-welfare nexus, finding that self-interest, not empathy with one's social origin, appears to be the driver of these attitudes, both in terms of experienced mobility and future mobility expectations. While these findings align with the seminal study of Benabou and Ok (2001), not only is the prospect of *upward* mobility shown to be a significant driver of work-welfare attitudes, but *downward* mobility also matters: Those who anticipate being worse off than their parents are less likely to hold negative views of welfare recipients than people who expect to do about the same or better. These results indicate that subjective perceptions may play a relatively larger role than the objective shifts along the income distribution compared with one's parents (Bjornskov et al. 2013). This finding becomes all the more relevant when considering the very real prospects of downward mobility many young people face.

The findings regarding financial mobility generally indicate the presence of self-interest at work—that is, those who experienced upward mobility are more likely to agree with the statements “*If welfare benefits are too high, then there is no incentive to work*” and “*It's humiliating to receive money without having to work.*” Our expectations in terms of empathy or identification with one's status group of origin, however, do not appear to find empirical traction. Rueda (2018) uses the concept of altruism to explain why material self-interest may not always explain preferences for redistribution, arguing that, when people identify with the less well off, in-group solidarity increases, so too does support for the welfare state. Investigating whether young people identify more with their status of origin or destination may help to elucidate our findings. Moreover, data sources that would allow the research to zoom in on the dimensions of the deservingness concept could also shed light on the mechanisms behind the relationships.

Though the present study has made inroads into further disentangling the relationships between intergenerational mobility and work-welfare attitudes, further work remains. First, and as we hinted in this article, there are certainly important country differences to be considered. For example, young people in Southern Europe faced a far more dire situation during and in the wake of the economic crisis that began to unfold in late 2007. Second, the risks of downward mobility are not equally distributed across countries nor individuals, as underscored by Moene and Wallerstein (2001). Consequently, young people in certain countries or occupational groups may simply hold different expectations about the future due to these unequally distributed risks. Therefore, future research is tasked with delving into these important country differences to provide a more complete picture of the varieties of intergenerational mobility and work-welfare attitudes.

Finally, we may be witnessing a shift in work and welfare attitudes reflecting the evolving nature of social and labor market policies. Many countries, as well as the European Union, have adopted social and labor market policies that place a greater emphasis on individual responsibility. Unemployment and training schemes, particularly those aimed at young people, are increasingly embodying concepts such as employability and responsabilization (Crisp and Powell 2017), which stress the role and even duty of the individual to make him or herself attractive to employers and to end the dependency on state support. There are also important differences between the countries in terms of welfare systems—including how benefits are allotted and administered—which also shape how the beneficiaries themselves are perceived. The findings from the current study perhaps imply that in countries with a higher incidence of downward mobility public support for unemployment programs will be higher. At the same time, this begs the question of who will fund such programs, as downward mobility is also most prevalent in countries that struggle the most economically.

Notes

1. Respondents who indicated that their current primary activity is education or training were excluded from the analyses. Since they are still in the school-to-work transition, they constitute a very distinct group and may be quite difficult to compare to young people who are, for example, in full-time employment.

2. The financial situation is captured by the question “We (I) could (can) afford extras for ourselves (myself) (such as trips, hobbies, etc.).”

3. Though political orientation is predictive of redistributive preferences (Jaeger 2008), its effect on the so-called moral dimensions of work and welfare is less clear. The inclusion of this variable could arguably be considered a particularly stringent test of the effects of mobility on work-welfare attitudes.

4. Robustness tests using ordered logit models (not shown) and linear regression models (see online appendix Table A4) revealed that mobility effects do not change substantively.

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