

Social mobility and intergenerational transmission of status in the European Union.

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With the various economic and social crises that the world is currently going through, terms that years ago began to be put on the table, but that did not have the repercussions they have now, have become more popular. Meritocracy and equal opportunities are two of them. The theory of equal opportunities promulgates that the opportunities that a person will have in life do not only depend on the effort of that individual (meritocracy), but that there are a series of factors or circumstances that also have an influence, and over which the individual has no control whatsoever. These circumstances include the family into which one is born, the gender, the race or the country of birth.

The intergenerational transmission of status is the extent to which the status of parents is transmitted to children, i.e., the extent to which being born into a particular family will determine the opportunities you will have in life, and therefore the status you will have.

In recent years, the literature on social mobility and intergenerational transmission of status has become more extensive, and these issues have become increasingly important and have been considered as one of the possible triggers of inequality of opportunity. The literature mainly focuses on studies of the degree of social mobility in countries such as the USA or in EU countries, mostly in a generalised way.

This study aims to be more specific and answer the following question: Is there an intergenerational transmission of status in the European Union? And if so, in what areas or fields is this transmission greatest?

We hypothesise that there is indeed intergenerational transmission of status, and that it will be greater in Eastern European countries as well as in Mediterranean countries, as compared to central or northern countries. For the calculation of the level of transmission, the EU-SILC database has been used, subtracting the necessary information in three main domains: education, occupation, and income. This is because the calculation of the transmission and therefore of social mobility is not going to be done in general terms, but in three different domains or levels: education, type of occupation and level of income.

The methodology used in this study goes through two stages. The first stage uses the methodology of transition matrices to calculate the levels of intergenerational transmission of status, and the second stage uses the estimation of ordered logit models to study the possible variables or factors that can determine whether an individual presents one level of mobility or another, categorised into three levels: upward, zero or downward.

The analysis is carried out for each of the 27 EU countries individually, studying on the one hand the degree of mobility with respect to fathers, and on the other hand, the degree of mobility with respect to mothers. It is also analysed separately according to whether the children are male or female, to see if there is any significant gender-related difference.

The results show that the highest levels of mobility are found in education, followed by occupation and finally, wages. Mobility with respect to fathers and mothers is quite similar and does not show significant differences. In countries such as Spain, Portugal, or Greece, more than 50% of the sample is upwardly mobile in education relative to their parents, while mobility in occupation relative to fathers is predominantly zero. Other countries such as Estonia or Latvia stand out for a high percentage of zero mobility in education, and even a significant percentage of the sample shows downward mobility.

As for the factors that may influence the probability of an individual experiencing one type of mobility or another, in general terms a negative effect of gender (being female) and a positive effect of the economic status of the parent on mobility are observed, as well as a significance of the country of birth as a function of the country of study.