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Falling Behind, Losing Trust: Intergenerational Social Mobility and Generalized Trust in Europe

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Abstract: Extensive research has examined how generalized trust is distributed across social positions, but less attention has been paid to how it is affected by movements and opportunities within the system of social stratification. This paucity of research is striking, considering that economic insecurity and the slowdown of occupational upgrading increasingly confront people with social descent and stagnating prospects of upward mobility. This article examines the implications of individual mobility experiences and regional mobility patterns for generalized trust by applying diagonal reference models and a partial identification bounding approach to educational and occupational mobility trajectories across 28 European countries. Results show that downward mobility is associated with lower generalized trust. However, this relationship is contingent on the dimension of mobility and varies between Eastern and Western Europe. Moreover, people residing in regions with high upward mobility exhibit greater trust, highlighting the importance of structural opportunities and indirect experiences of social mobility.

Keywords: Social Mobility, Generalized Trust, Intergenerational Mobility, Social Cohesion, Europe, Social Mobility Effects

Introduction

Generalized trust – the belief in the trustworthiness of other members of society – is central to the cohesion of modern societies and serves as the bedrock of economic prosperity. It is thus unsurprising that the search for its determinants has obtained wide currency in the social sciences (Putnam 2000; Dinesen 2013). One prolific strand of literature has shed light on how generalized trust is distributed across class positions (Kim et al. 2021; Hamamura 2011; Delhey and Newton 2003) and related to inequalities between classes (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009; Bjørnskov 2007; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Gallego 2016). In doing so, this research has focused on static indicators of stratification, whereas the movements between socioeconomic classes and the opportunities provided by class structure have received remarkably little attention.

This paucity of research is striking, considering the importance of the liberal ideal to distribute rewards according to merit and to provide opportunities for social advancement (Jackson and Grusky 2018). Thus, concerns about economic inequalities are often tamed by beliefs that hard work leads to success and that life chances are not unduly determined by social origins (Davidai 2018; Shariff, Wiwad, and Aknin 2016). However, as the growth of the managerial and professional salariat has slowed down, prospects of upward mobility increasingly stagnate (Bukodi, Paskov, and Nolan 2020; Chetty et al. 2017) and levels of social fluidity decline across European societies (Jackson and Evans 2017).

Despite increasing incomes and living standards, liberalized labor markets have left many workers in precarious employment relations (Emmenegger et al. 2012; Kalleberg 2009) and spawned a rising number of modernization "losers" (Hartmann, Kurz, and Lengfeld 2022). For those affected, class decline and a lack of structural opportunities may invite frustration (Newman 1999; Houle 2011) and undermine the belief that rewards are distributed according to merit. This erosion of systemic optimism and fairness, combined with economic grievances, may jeopardize the cultivation of generalized trust, as individuals become inherently more suspicious of the motives of unfamiliar others (Day and Fiske 2019; Uslaner 2002).

Here, I shed light on the implications of personal mobility experiences and regional mobility patterns for generalized trust. Drawing on experiential theories of trust (Ziller 2017; Dinesen 2013), I make the case that the belief in the trustworthiness of others is lastingly shaped by mobility experiences throughout educational and occupational careers. I account for the direct experience of one's own mobility trajectory and the indirect experience reflected by mobility patterns in one's region. The data on educational and occupational intergenerational mobility stems from a pooled dataset of the European Social Survey (2002-2010) covering 168 regions in 28 European countries.

The analytical strategy relies on diagonal reference models (DRMs) to disentangle the influences of class origins and destinations from the independent experiential effects of the mobility trajectory itself. To ensure the robustness against the estimation assumptions of DRMs, I complement the analysis with a partial identification approach using bounding analyses (Fosse and Pfeffer 2025). Because the experience of mobility likely varies across dimensions of social reproduction and macroeconomic contexts, I run models separately for occupational and educational mobility trajectories and for Eastern and Western Europe. To capture contextual influence, I incorporate regional rates of absolute and relative mobility into the DRMs, alongside country fixed effects and regional economic and demographic controls.

The findings demonstrate that individual downward mobility – net of origin and destination effects – is associated with lower generalized trust. However, this relationship is contingent upon the dimension of social mobility and varies between the Eastern and Western Europe. Specifically, occupational downward mobility is related to lower trust in Eastern Europe, whereas educational downward mobility results in lower trust in Western Europe. Furthermore, in the West, the experience of educational upward mobility implies greater trust, but trust is not associated to the experience of upward mobility in terms of occupation. The findings from the DRMs are largely robust to the bounding analyses, except for educational mobility in Eastern Europe, where the

presence of an independent mobility effect is highly sensitive to assumptions about origin and destination effects.

Also, mobility contexts matter. People residing in regions with higher rates of absolute mobility in terms of education or occupation show greater generalized trust. By contrast, equality of opportunity – reflected in a lower inheritance of class positions across generations – remains unrelated to generalized trust. Finally, no evidence for cross-level interaction effects is observed as individual mobility effects are not moderated by regional mobility indicators.

The article makes key contributions at the intersection of a rich literature on generalized trust on the one hand and research on social mobility effects on the other. First, it casts light on how trust relates to dynamic indicators of stratification, effectively complementing past research that has zoomed in on differences in positions (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Samson and Zaleskiewicz 2020) rather than differences in movements between positions. The paper's emphasis on change chimes with work on how trust is affected by life course events – such as job loss or income changes (Brandt, Wetherell, and Henry 2015; Laurence 2015). Consistent with these studies, the findings support the theoretical view that generalized trust remains malleable throughout adulthood and thus responsive to social policy (Freitag and Traunmüller 2009; Mewes et al. 2021).

Second, it extends a growing wave of research exploring the moral, political, and ideological implications of social mobility experiences (Gugushvili, Halikiopoulou, and Vlandas 2026; Jaime-Castillo and Marqués-Perales 2019; Kurer and van Staalduinen 2022; McNeil 2024; McNeil and Haberstroh 2023; Melli, De Graaf, and Evans 2025; Paskov, Präg, and Richards 2021; Tolsma, De Graaf, and Quillian 2009; Wilson et al. 2022). Here, my work shifts attention to generalized trust and moves beyond previous single-country studies (Daenekindt 2017; Li, Savage, and Warde 2008), offering a comprehensive account of the scope conditions for intergenerational mobility effects across macroeconomic contexts and dimensions of social reproduction. Methodologically, this study advances the literature by comparing estimates from a partial identification bounding approach against DRMs to assess the sensitivity of mobility effects to underlying estimation assumptions.

Moreover, this article analyzes two distinct yet intertwined dimensions of social mobility: education and occupation (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Shi and Gugushvili 2025). Although education is regarded as the key mediator between occupational origin and destination class (Müller and Breen 2020), overlaps are far from perfect and class mobility does not simply "echo" educational mobility (Lampard 2007). Disaggregating these strands of transmission holds particular value due to diverging rates of absolute mobility – with educational upgrading occurring alongside occupational stagnation in many regions (Bukodi, Paskov, and Nolan 2020; Pfeffer and Hertel 2015) – and their varying salience for social differentiation in Eastern and Western European contexts (Gerber and Hout 1998; Jackson and Evans 2017).

Theoretical Background

Generalized Trust

Trust corresponds to a belief in the trustworthiness of others under conditions of vulnerability and unknown outcomes (Robbins 2016; Glanville and Paxton 2007). As an important component of social capital, trust facilitates social support, enables collective action, and holds societies together (Granovetter 1985; Coleman 1990). People trust in particularized others whom they know personally, such as friends, colleagues, or neighbors (Glanville and Shi 2020). But they also trust generalized others based on person-independent expectations that people "will behave with good will, that they intend to honor their commitments and avoid harming others" (Glanville and Paxton 2007, p. 231).

Generalized trust is formed across multiple levels throughout the life course. The foundations for trust are shaped in the primary stages of socialization (Uslaner 2002). As children and adolescents internalize fundamental values and attitudes and establish a reference network, they develop a basic disposition to trust and cultivate stable beliefs about the trustworthiness of others.

This basic disposition, however, remains open to environmental influences and life-course experiences (Mewes et al. 2021), making it susceptible to changes in socioeconomic status throughout adulthood. In particular, people revise their trust based on experiences with people in workplaces, educational institutions, and professional contexts. As people attain a certain educational level and pursue occupational careers, they constantly learn about the motivations of others and update their beliefs about the trustworthiness of the people around them.

Crucially, these experiences are deeply stratified by the social and economic conditions of class positions. People who are well off in terms of money, jobs, and education are more likely to make beneficial experiences and hence to nurture trust (Putnam 2000). Conversely, the worse off are more likely to be subjected to disrespect, causing them to become psychologically defensive and less trusting (Brandt, Wetherell, and Henry 2015). Higher classes are also equipped with more resources to safeguard against the risks of trust betrayal (Hamamura 2011), making them more inclined to trust strangers. In line, past work has consistently found a positive relationship between indicators of social class and generalized trust (Delhey and Newton 2003; Kim et al. 2021; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002).

Individual Mobility Trajectories

Generalized trust is driven not only by the material and social conditions of one's origin and destination classes but also by experiences of social mobility. By definition, mobile individuals already differ from their stable counterparts because they are attached to two different class environments. Thus, their trust is molded by a combination of early-life socialization in the origin class and current adult circumstances in the destination class. On top of that, trust is additionally affected by the act of moving between classes. The mobility experience itself carries independent psychological and social consequences, such as pride and status accumulation for upward mobility, or stigma and social dislocation for downward mobility (Gugushvili, Halikiopoulou, and Vlandas 2026). It is this independent experience of a change in socioeconomic class throughout the life course, net of the effects of origin and destination classes, that is at the core of this study.

Recent evidence on mobility effects suggests that downward and upward trajectories bring about fundamentally different experiences (Shi and Gugushvili 2025). For downward mobility, Newman's

"falling from grace"-hypothesis (1999) provides a central vantage point. Accordingly, the downwardly mobile consistently show lower well-being and impaired mental health (Kaiser and Trinh 2021; Präg, Fritsch, and Richards 2022), reduced civic and political participation (Kurer and Staalduinen 2022; Melli, De Graaf, and Evans 2025), and heightened resentment towards minority groups (Daenekindt, van der Waal, and de Koster 2018; Paskov, Präg, and Richards 2021).

Intergenerational class decline is specifically detrimental to generalized trust if it leads to social dislocation and withdrawal. The experience of downward mobility precipitates a loss of social status that disrupts an individual's sense of identity and self-worth. Consequently, downwardly mobile individuals likely experience status anxiety and shame when engaging with their advantaged origin networks. This perceived stigma can erode supporting networks and ultimately prevent the positive interactions essential for cultivating generalized trust from happening. Simultaneously, these individuals are less willing to adopt cultural elements of their destination class, as this would reconfirm their status decline. As they become isolated from their origin class and struggle to establish new ties in the destination class (Kessin 1971), this estrangement makes it difficult to interpret others' intentions and motivations, and diminishes their willingness to trust.

Another mechanism linking downward mobility to lower generalized trust is relative material decline. The downwardly mobile are more likely to experience unaccustomed hardship and insecurity (Kurer 2020), compared to their immobile counterparts. Inasmuch as social descent goes in hand with financial strain and economic grievances, efforts to maintain social relations and participate in social activities are further hampered. This lack of resources reduces chances for beneficial contact and weakens the belief in the trustworthiness of others.

Finally, downwardly mobile individuals may view the socioeconomic system itself as inherently unfair and attribute their status loss to a lack of societal opportunities (McNeil and Haberstroh 2023). This external blame attribution is strongly linked to a dissatisfaction with and a distrust in political institutions (Daenekindt, van der Waal, and de Koster 2018; Day and Fiske 2016; Gugushvili, Halikiopoulou, and Vlandas 2026), which, by extension, may also jeopardize the cultivation of generalized trust.

H1 (Downward Mobility): *The experience of downward mobility is associated with lower generalized trust, net of the effects of an individual's origin and destination classes.*

Conversely, upward trajectories are mainly connected with positive experiences and benevolent treatment, which foster favorable beliefs about trustworthiness (Goldthorpe 1980). According to the "rising from rags"-thesis, upward mobility confers an independent experiential boost to well-being and health that exceeds the advantages expected from the destination class (Shi and Gugushvili 2025, Gugushvili, Zhao, and Bukodi 2019). Thus, upwardly mobile individuals have often developed a stronger internal locus of control, higher self-confidence, and a stronger belief in systematic fairness. The resulting optimism fosters greater generalized trust in others (Uslaner 2002).

Furthermore, rather than feeling torn, the upwardly mobile often benefit from being embedded into social networks spanning multiple classes. This cross-class embeddedness allows them to sympathize with the material conditions and the social values of different classes (Paskov and

Weisstanner 2021). Indeed, to the extent that they are able to combine different class cultures, the upwardly mobile would develop into cultural omnivores (Lizardo 2006; Lindh, Andersson, and Volker 2021). As such, they can actually bridge class boundaries, rendering them more open and less hesitant to trust strangers across the social spectrum.

To be sure, Sorokin's classical "dissociative thesis" (1927) offers a conflicting prediction, claiming that mobility, irrespective of its direction, represents a disruptive and traumatic experience (Hadjar and Samuel 2015). Accordingly, social mobility implies tensions between the culture of the destination class and the habits, tastes, and schemes of perception internalized from the origin class (Friedman 2016). However, empirical evidence for adverse, dissociative effects in upward trajectories remains limited (Houle 2011; Shi and Gugushvili 2025), suggesting that experiential gains likely outweigh dissociative costs.

H2 (Upward Mobility): *The experience of upward mobility is associated with greater generalized trust, net of the effects of an individual's origin and destination classes.*

Heterogeneity of Mobility Effects

While fundamental mechanisms of upward and downward mobility apply broadly, the effects of individual mobility on trust likely vary according to the dimension of mobility (educational or occupation) and the macroeconomic context (Western or Eastern Europe).

Conceptually, educational and occupational mobility capture different dimensions of social reproduction. Educational attainment is widely regarded as a partially positional good and a proxy for cultural capital (Lampard 2007). Because educational institutions are central to the formation of civic norms and social networks, moving across educational classes disrupts the cultural environments and social networks that are fundamental to generalized trust (Chan and Turner 2017; Kraus and Daenekindt 2022; McNeil 2024). Conversely, while occupational differences likewise lend themselves to cultural distinctions, they tend to more strongly reflect the material dimension of class transmission.

Furthermore, these dimensions operate differently across macroeconomic contexts. East-West distinctions have been considered as paramount in previous studies on social mobility (Bukodi, Paskov, and Nolan 2020), mobility effects (Kaiser and Trinh 2021; McNeil 2024), and generalized trust (Bjørnskov 2007; Kanitsar 2022). Notwithstanding variation within these country blocs, social class divisions have been shaped by fundamentally distinct political and socioeconomic trajectories in these regions (Jackson and Evans 2017). During the transition to market-oriented systems, the Eastern countries experienced increasing social inequalities and widening income gaps between classes (Milanovic 1998). As a consequence, occupational classes have become more economically stratified than in the past, increasing the stakes of one's occupational class position and mobility.

Compared to Western Europe, the East also features low levels of economic development and modest welfare states, implying greater economic insecurity and further accentuating the significance of occupational class. The lower fluidity within the occupational class structure arising with the transition to a market society (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2022; Jackson and Evans 2017), may also imply that in Eastern Europe, movements to a destination class different from one's

origin are more exceptional, potentially making them more consequential for trust. In line, past research has demonstrated stronger effects of occupational mobility on political attitudes (Gugushvili 2016) and life satisfaction (Kaiser and Trinh 2021) than in Western Europe.

Conversely, the salience of education for social stratification follows a different pattern. Eastern European countries – despite notable heterogeneity – tend to have lower educational expenditures (Schuck and Steiber 2018) and educational systems that more strongly reproduce status differences across generations (Jackson and Evans 2017; Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke 2012). Because Eastern countries are only gradually catching up with the Western countries in terms of economic returns to education (Wincenciak, Grotkowska, and Gajderowicz 2022), educational mobility tends to carry less weight as a marker of social and material success compared to the West.

Because occupational stratification is more consequential in the post-transition East, the effects of occupational trajectories on generalized trust are expected to be particularly pronounced in Eastern Europe. Conversely, because education serves as stronger indicator of cultural capital in established Western societies, the experience of educational mobility is expected to exert a stronger influence on trust in Western Europe.

Regional Mobility Patterns

Next to the own mobility experience, the structural mobility in someone's social environment may also affect trust. Specifically, subnational regions provide meaningful contextual units for studying the association between mobility patterns and trust. Regions embed a large share of interpersonal interactions with friends and acquaintances as well as in professional and educational settings, which are important for trust experiences. Such interactions typically extend beyond smaller neighborhoods or districts but rarely span the entire country (Kanitsar 2022; Ziller 2015).

The structural opportunities for mobility are captured by the extent to which children exceed or fall below the social positions of their progenitors (absolute mobility). Thus, stagnating absolute mobility – that is, a lack of upward mobility or even a decline in class positions – correlates with relative deprivation and diminished social capital (Güell et al. 2018). In "left-behind" regions, people will be more likely to observe failures to reproduce parental status among peers and in their social network. These indirect experiences of social mobility shape subjective views about the prospects of moving up or down. Beliefs about high upward mobility, in turn, are crucial when it comes to system justification (Day and Fiske 2016) and judgments of economic fairness (Heiserman, Simpson, and Willer 2020), which ultimately translate into beliefs in trustworthiness.

Diminishing prospects of upward mobility also step up status competition, as less people succeed in climbing the social ladder. Fears of losing out in status competition lead to stress and accentuate "self-serving individualism" at the cost of cooperative strategies relying on trust and reciprocity (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Along these lines, previous research has demonstrated that collective loss fuels social conflicts and hostilities (Paskov, Präg, and Richards 2021), which ultimately erodes trust even among those who feel no personal resentment. Eventually, as the probability of interacting with people whose social aspirations remain unfulfilled increases, their distrust might diffuse and trickle through to fellow citizens, creating a vicious circle.

H3 (Absolute Mobility: Main Effect): *The higher the rate of absolute upward mobility in a region, the higher is the generalized trust of its inhabitants.*

The fairness of the opportunity structure is reflected in the strength of the association between the positions of parents and their offspring (relative mobility). If there is a rigid transmission of social positions across generations, a society is said to be less fluid and social advantages are reproduced across generations through restricted access to advantaged schools, privileged neighborhoods, or occupational networks (Grusky, Hall, and Markus 2019). By contrast, a weak association between class positions of children and parents indicates higher equality of opportunity as individuals from different classes have similar chances to reach a certain educational and occupational level.

A strong continuity in social standing reinforces class boundaries and the social distance between socioeconomic groups. Less social mixing reduces the likelihood for contact across the social spectrum and, hence, offers fewer opportunities to establish generalized trust. Even if interactions across social classes take place, the lower probability of future interactions reduces incentives to behave trustworthy. Thus, class divisions are expected to exacerbate frustration and discontent among the poor and fuel suspicion and distrust among the rich. Once equality of opportunity stagnates, people might react with withdrawal and view the economic and social system as increasingly unjust and illegitimate (Day and Fiske 2016; Wegener 1991).

H4 (Relative Mobility: Main Effect): *The higher the association between origin and destination class in a region, the lower is the generalized trust of its inhabitants.*

Interactions Between Individual and Regional Mobility

The consequences of individual mobility may also be moderated by regional mobility. Inasmuch as people evaluate their own occupational and educational outcomes in comparison to others (Festinger 1954), their experiences of status anxiety, social isolation, material deprivation, or cultural estrangement may be contingent on their reference group.

For individual downward mobility, a regional context of high upward mobility likely exacerbates the negative experiential effects on trust. As moving up the social ladder becomes more common, the downwardly mobile are more likely to witness their own social network disperse and the number of peers who share their experiences decline, eventually deteriorating their chances to establish trust in close interactions. Besides, a general trend of upward mobility might exacerbate feelings of status anxiety and shame among those who "fall behind" and further discourage cooperative actions.

Conversely, for individual upward mobility, residing in a region with high upward mobility should amplify positive experiential effects on trust. If the upwardly mobile are sufficiently numerous, a greater influx of newcomers can help the upwardly mobile to forge new ties within the destination class and to preserve old ties from the origin class that have experienced a similar upward trajectory (Dhoore, Daenekindt, and Roose 2019). Similarly, elevated levels of upward mobility are more likely to dissolve the boundaries of upper-class lifestyles and might even further the diffusion of novel – more eclectic – cultural norms.

H5 (Absolute Mobility: Moderation Effect): *The higher the rate of absolute upward mobility in a region, the more pronounced is the association between the experience of (upward and downward) mobility and generalized trust.*

Similarly, the degree of social fluidity can influence whether people develop trust as a result of their own mobility trajectories. If the link between origin and destination classes is weak – signifying high social fluidity –, the upwardly mobile will encounter a more diverse set of interaction partners from different origin classes, fostering their trust toward fellow members of society. In such fluid contexts, one may anticipate reduced cultural demarcation and social networks that span classes, diminishing barriers to cultural adaptation for the mobile. Moreover, within fluid environments, individuals are more likely to view their own mobility as a signal of relative performance (Kaiser and Trinh 2021) and to attribute positive outcomes to a fair, cooperative society, increasing the positive experiential effects of their trajectories. Conversely, downwardly mobile individuals are more likely to locate the reasons for their social descent within their locus of control rather than in structural unfairness, further increasing social isolation and breeding distrust.

H6 (Relative Mobility: Moderation Effect): *The lower the association between origin and destination class in a region, the more pronounced is the association between the experience of (upward and downward) mobility and generalized trust.*

Methods

Data and Variables

The study draws on pooled data from five waves (2002-2010) of the European Social Survey (ESS). Together with the supplementary ESS-DEVO data set (Ganzeboom 2013), the ESS provides consistent classifications of occupational and educational origin and destination classes for a large number of respondents across Europe. Furthermore, the ESS includes detailed information on the region of residence according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) classification scheme, allowing researchers to divide territories into smaller units than countries. Here, I grouped respondents at the lowest level of aggregation for which the dataset provided consistent regional codes across waves, while simultaneously keeping an eye on reaching a sufficiently large sample size per region (see Supplementary Table S1).

I included only respondents who have reached occupational and educational maturity and were between the age of 30 and 65 at the time of the interview. I dropped first- and second-generation immigrants from the sample, as their origin classes cannot be easily compared with the class system in the destination country. Overall, the dataset comprises 103.938 individuals nested in 168 regions and 28 countries (see Supplementary Table S1).[1]

Generalized Trust: The dependent variable is measured by answers on a scale from 0 to 10 to the question: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?".

Occupational Class Origin and Destination: The occupational class position of respondents and their parents (when respondents were 14 years old) were classified according to the European Socio-

economic Classification (ESeC) (Rose and Harrison 2010). The ESeC offers a categorical approach to occupational classes based on employment relations (distinguishing between employers/self-employed and employees as well as between large and small employers and employees with and without supervisory responsibilities) and occupations (using the three-digit ISCO-88 classification system).[2] The condensed five-class version of the ESeC distinguishes (1) high salariat, (2) low salariat, (3) middle class, (4) low grade workers, and (5) non-skilled workers.[3] The dominance approach was used to derive a single occupational class origin variable for each respondent (Erikson 1984).

Educational Class Origin and Destination: Own and parental educational attainment is assessed by drawing on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Accordingly, I distinguish five main educational levels: (1) tertiary education (ISCED 5-6), (2) post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4), (3) upper secondary education (ISCED 3), (4) lower secondary education (ISCED 2), and (5) less than lower secondary (ISCED 0-1). Again, the higher level of educational attainment in the parental generation was taken as educational origin.

Individual Mobility Trajectories: I analyze two properties of mobility: mobility direction and mobility steps. *Mobility direction* is a categorical variable distinguishing between the downwardly mobile (a lower destination than origin class), the immobile (the same destination and origin class), and the upwardly mobile (a higher destination than origin class). Because this directional classification may mask important heterogeneity regarding the magnitude of mobility, the partial identification strategy (see below) accounts for the number of *mobility steps* moved within the class scheme between origin and destination.

Regional Mobility Patterns: Regional mobility effects are studied using indicators of absolute and relative mobility. Absolute mobility represents a region's opportunity structure and shows how many individuals exceed the social position of their parents. Relative mobility captures "social fluidity" and indicates the strength of the association of origin and destination positions. For absolute mobility, *net upward mobility* rates are calculated taking the difference between the proportion of individuals moving up compared to the parental generation and the proportion of individuals moving down. For relative mobility, I derive *global log odds ratios* (Cox, Jackson, and Lu 2009). Conceptually, odds ratios give the chance that someone from an origin class A is found in destination class A rather than B relative to the chance that someone from an origin class B is found in destination class A rather than B. To compute global log odds ratios, I split the 5 x 5 mobility tables at the row and column variables at each dividing line between categories to get 16 2 x 2 tables (Bukodi, Paskov, and Nolan 2020, p. 22). From these tables, I calculated the average of the logarithms of the 16 odds ratios. To calculate the regional mobility indicators, I used data at the lowest possible level of aggregation (see above) and pooled respondents – men and women – across all available waves to ensure a sufficiently high sample size within each geographic unit.

Control variables: Individual controls comprise a set of variables associated with generalized trust: gender, age, household size, and residence in rural or urban areas. Control variables at the regional level include the logarithm of regional GDP per capita, population size, and the population density (provided by the ESS; data source: Eurostat). Because official Gini coefficients were unavailable

for the specific set of regions used, I calculated them using the categorical household income variable in the ESS via the ineqdecgini package in Stata (Jenkins 2019).[4] Supplementary Table S2 reports descriptive statistics for all variables.

Country groups: To analyze individual mobility trajectories, countries are sorted into Eastern and Western Europe. Countries within these groups share historical roots and have followed broadly similar political and economic trajectories, even if important variations exist within each group in terms of welfare state support, economic development, or educational systems. Supplementary Figure S1 breaks down the findings for Continental, Liberal, Southern, and Northern country groups within the broader Western European category.[5]

Analytical Strategy

To estimate the effects of individual mobility on generalized trust, I employ diagonal reference models (DRMs) (Sobel 1981), together with a partial identification approach using bounding analyses (Fosse and Winship 2019; Fosse and Pfeffer 2025). The two approaches address a fundamental challenge of mobility research: disentangling the independent influences of class positions (origin and destination) from the experiential effects of the mobility trajectory itself. As mobility is by definition the distance between origin and destination, conventional regression techniques, aimed at modelling simultaneously the effects of origin, destination, and mobility, face the problem of perfect collinearity. Conversely, omitting any of the three terms leads to confounding, as the remaining parameters are combinations of a direct effect and an indirect effect running via the omitted variable (Schuck and Steiber 2018).

Diagonal Reference Models: DRMs overcome this problem by modelling the expected outcome of a mobile individual as a weighted average of the mean outcomes of the immobile individuals in the respective classes of origin and destination. Consequently, the relevant reference groups for identifying mobility effects are the immobile (stable) members of these classes. The baseline DRM estimates a weight parameter p indicating the relative importance of origin and destination effects. In doing so, the models constrain destination effects to positive linear transformations of the origin effects and assume that relative differences between class positions are the same for origin and destination classes, but allow the absolute size of the steps to differ.

This baseline DRM assumes that mobile individuals are a compositional mix of their origin and destination positions. To capture the independent effect of mobility experience net of origin and destination class, I add specific mobility parameters into the model. Formally, the model is written as:

$$Y_{ijk} = p\mu_i + (1-p)\mu_j + \gamma M_k + \beta X_k + \epsilon_{ijk}, \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ijk} captures the trust score of an individual k in destination class j with a parent of class background i. $\mu_{\square}$ and $\mu_{\square}$ correspond to the estimated mean trust scores of the immobile core members of a social class, and the weight parameter p is bound to the interval $[0,1]$. The estimated means of the immobile serve as reference points for the mobile respondents, where trust is modelled as a weighted sum of the trust of the immobile in k's origin group and in k's destination

group. Besides a vector of covariates X, the models include mobility term M, which captures the effects of mobility itself. Specifically, a non-zero mobility effect indicates that the trust levels of mobile individuals deviate systematically from the weighted average of their origin and destination classes.

To account for the hierarchical structure of the pooled data, I apply region-clustered standard errors to control for correlation of individual-level errors within regions, and I include region- and year-specific fixed effects to control for unobserved factors of regions and survey waves.

While this approach resolves the collinearity between origin, destination, and mobility effects by using weight parameters, point estimates remain sensitive to underlying assumptions. In the case of DRMs, these assumptions are argued to implicitly force linear effects of mobility toward zero (Fosse and Pfeffer 2025). Therefore, I additionally adopt a partial identification approach drawing on weaker assumptions to generate plausible bounds for the true mobility effect (Fosse and Winship 2019).

Partial Identification Approach: The bounding approach argues that applying theoretically informed constraints on the independent effects of origin and destination limits the range of values that the mobility parameter can take and allows for the derivation of insightful bounds for the mobility effect, essentially favoring partial identification over point identification.

Specifically, I draw on a monotonic origin-destination effects assumption, constraining the non-linear components of the origin and destination effects to be monotonically non-decreasing. This aligns with extensive stratification research demonstrating that higher classes show greater, or at least equal, levels of generalized trust (see above). Crucially, while perfect collinearity prevents point identification of the overall linear trend, the non-linear categorical deviations from this trend remain uniquely identified. Mechanically, I identify the maximum positive deviation between adjacent categories in the unconstrained non-linear origin and destination estimates, and use this value to bound the unidentified linear trend parameter to flatten that increase. Supplementary Materials B provide further technical details and a robustness check using relative effect-size constraints on the linear effects, which allows for more variation in the relative importance of origin and destination effects.

Regional Mobility Effect: To estimate regional mobility effects, I expand the diagonal reference models in (1) to include regional mobility indicators $RegMob_{\square}$. Furthermore, to address potential unobserved confounding at the macro level, I introduce country fixed effects. By controlling for time-invariant, unobserved heterogeneity at the national level, this specification isolates the effects of within-country, between-region differences in contextual mobility. However, endogeneity concerns remain, as regions with higher upward mobility rates may disproportionately attract ambitious individuals, while regions with downward mobility may lose them through out-migration.

Finally, to study the cross-level relationship between personal mobility trajectories and regional mobility patterns, I interact the newly introduced contextual variables with individual mobility parameters:

$$Y_{ijkr} = p\mu_i + (1-p)\mu_j + \gamma M_k + \delta RegMob_r + \lambda M_k RegMob_r + \beta X_k + \eta Z_r + \epsilon_{ijkr}, \quad (2)$$

where Y_{ijkr} captures the trust score of individual k residing in region r. The model introduces $RegMob_r$ to capture the mobility rate of region r, with main effect δ and cross-level interaction with individual mobility M_k, with interaction effect λ. The vector Z_r contains region-level controls. Because cross-level interaction effects in standard DRMs calculate a single set of origin and destination effects for all regions, I additionally report findings from random effects meta-regressions (Kunst, Kuhn, and van de Werfhorst 2023) in Supplementary Materials C.[6]

Results

Individual Mobility and Generalized Trust

Table 1 shows how trust differs according to mobility direction in terms of occupation and education for Western and Eastern Europe. Across all model specifications, the table demonstrates a strongly negative gradient across origin and destination classes. All pairwise comparisons between adjacent classes reveal significant differences, confirming that generalized trust is indeed strongly stratified across current class and class background (Hamamura 2011; Navarro-Carrillo, Valor-Segura, and Moya 2018). Moreover, the weight parameter p ranges from 0.17 to 0.29 in the models without mobility effects and from 0.30 to 0.35 in the models including mobility effects, indicating that the destination class is a stronger predictor of generalized trust than the origin class. This finding squares with recent evidence from diagonal reference models on life satisfaction and redistribution (Jaime-Castillo and Marqués-Perales 2019; Kaiser and Trinh 2021) and substantiates that trust evolves continuously even after leaving the social environment in which one grew up.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Turning to the main hypotheses, model (1.2) shows the effect of mobility direction for occupation in Western Europe. The effects of downward (<0.01) and upward (0.02) occupational mobility are substantively negligible and lack statistical significance, suggesting that occupational mobility experience does not meaningfully alter trust above and beyond the net effects of origin and destination class positions. For educational mobility in model (1.4), however, the experience of downward mobility reduces the trust score by 0.17 points ($p<0.001$), whereas the estimate for upward mobility is 0.10 points ($p=0.004$). To put this into perspective, the average difference in trust for a one-step difference in educational class is 0.10 for origin and 0.20 for destination.[7]

For Eastern Europe, model (1.6) is informative about the occupational mobility effect. Here, the experience of occupational downward mobility is associated with a 0.11-points lower trust score ($p=0.041$) net of the main effects of origin and destination. Again, the coefficient is substantively meaningful as the average difference between two adjacent classes, inferred from (1.6), is 0.08 points for origin and 0.18 points for destination. By contrast, the experience of occupational upward mobility does not significantly change trust on top of the net effects of origin and destination. For education in model (1.8), mobility effects are smaller in magnitude than in Western Europe and fall short of conventional levels of statistical significance.[8]

Figure 1 shows the estimated bounds for the effects of mobility on generalized trust under the assumption of monotonically non-decreasing relationships between destination and origin class positions and generalized trust. For occupational mobility in panels (a) and (b), the estimates from the DRM are consistent with the identified bounds. That is, in Western Europe the bounding interval overlaps with the zero line, indicating no experiential effect of mobility on top of origin and destination effects. In Eastern Europe, however, the bounding interval for downward mobility falls entirely below the zero line while the bounds for upward mobility cross the zero line, confirming that experiencing downward occupational mobility is negatively associated with generalized trust.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Turning to educational mobility in Western Europe, panel (c), the bounds for downward mobility consistently stay close to but below zero in line with the negative mobility effect in the DRMs. By contrast, the bounds for the upward mobility effect encompass zero, specifically for large mobility movements of 3 or 4 steps. This is reconcilable with the DRM estimates insofar as most mobile people have experienced small changes, for which the bounds are above the zero line, adding up to a meaningful effect of upward mobility in the DRMs. The partial identification analysis, however, adds important nuance to this trend, suggesting a non-linear relationship as the trend reverses for long-range movements.

Panel (d) shows bounds in line with a strong and linear effect of educational mobility in Eastern Europe, a discrepancy with the outcomes of the DRM. It is crucial to note, however, that this discrepancy is sensitive to the constraints applied. In Supplementary Materials B, I adopt more conservative bounds, specifically relative effect-size constraints, that impose a closed interval on origin and destination parameters. The resulting bounding intervals widen and encompass the null point estimates of the DRM specification. Ultimately, the presence of an independent mobility effect for educational mobility in Eastern Europe is contingent on how strictly one assumes origin and destination classes dictate trust, with more conservative constraints restricting the remaining variance that can be attributed to the mobility parameter, and leading to a larger likelihood of encompassing the zero line.

Taken together, the findings yield partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Experiencing downward mobility is associated with lower trust, even after controlling for the compositional effects of origin and destination. However, this association is highly contingent on the dimension of mobility, the macroeconomic context, and to some degree the underlying estimation assumptions. Overall, educational mobility is more consequential for trust in Western Europe, whereas occupational (downward) mobility matters more for generalized trust in Eastern Europe.

Regional Mobility and Generalized Trust

Figure 2 illustrates aggregate mobility patterns and their associations with generalized trust at the regional level across Europe. Panel (a) shows that the majority of regions have experienced greater occupational upward than downward mobility. Nevertheless, in approximately 30 percent of the regions more respondents find themselves at a lower rather than a higher occupational position compared to the parental generation. Turning to panel (c), almost all the regions have experienced

educational upgrading. In less than 2 percent of the regions, more inhabitants are below rather than above their educational origin class. Nevertheless, educational net upward mobility still differs considerably across regions.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The models in Table 2 identify the relationship of regional mobility patterns and generalized trust, while accounting for country fixed effects and regional controls. Jointly with panels (b) and (d) in Figure 2, models (2.1) and (2.3) indicate that regions with higher upward mobility also exhibit higher levels of trust. In particular, increases of two standard deviations in occupational or educational net upward mobility lead to 0.13- or 0.40-point increases in trust. Importantly, the findings are highly robust to a) using the NDI as an alternative measure of absolute mobility, b) calculating mobility rates using three-class schemes, c) changing the threshold to include regions with sparsely populated mobility tables, and d) using a three-item trust index as alternative outcome variable (Supplementary Figure S2).

[Insert Table 2 here]

By contrast, measures of relative mobility at the regional level, included in models (2.2) and (2.4), have a considerably smaller effect on trust, lacking statistical significance. This null finding holds when using alternative indicators of relative mobility and 3 x 3 mobility tables in Supplementary Figure S3. In conflict with Hypothesis 4, but not unlike related work on other sociopolitical outcome variables (Paskov, Präg, and Richards 2021), social fluidity remains statistically unrelated to generalized trust.

Finally, Table 3 demonstrates no evidence for interaction effects between individual mobility and regional mobility patterns. These null findings are confirmed by random effects meta-regressions in Supplementary Materials C, which show little to no cross-regional heterogeneity in the individual mobility effects.

[Insert Table 3 here]

In a nutshell, there is strong evidence for Hypothesis 3, as absolute upward mobility of a region crucially matters for generalized trust. Contradicting Hypothesis 4, the degree of inheritance in the system of class reproduction plays no role for generalized trust. Also, there is no evidence for Hypotheses 5 and 6 as regional mobility does not moderates the impact of the individual mobility experience on generalized trust.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the face of marked economic and social disparities, it is crucial to understand how movements and opportunities in the social hierarchy affect the moral resource of generalized trust. This paper examines the implications of individual mobility experiences and regional mobility patterns for generalized trust using a comparative dataset covering 168 regions located in 28 Eastern and Western European countries.

I find evidence that individual downward mobility relates to lower trust, for occupational mobility in Eastern Europe and for educational mobility in Western Europe. This finding links to established literature on the independent consequences of social mobility for related outcomes, such as health, well-being, or political attitudes (Fosse and Pfeffer 2025, Shi and Gugushvili 2025), by demonstrating that downward trajectories indeed matter and can decrease trust by more than the difference between two adjacent origin classes.

Yet, the consequences of mobility experiences are contingent on the interplay between mobility dimension and macroeconomic context. Educational mobility matters in Western Europe exclusively, whereas occupational mobility is consequential only in Eastern Europe. One potential reason for this disparity lies in the varying importance of education and occupation for social differentiation in the two parts of Europe. Specifically, in the advanced knowledge economies of Western Europe, educational expansion has afforded abundant opportunities for status improvement (Kogan, Gebel, and Noelke 2012). This has transformed education into a primary axis of stratification and created a divide in trust between those losing, maintaining, and gaining educational status.

Conversely, income gaps between occupational classes have widened following the post-socialist economic transition in Eastern Europe (Milanovic 1998). Lower levels of economic development and less generous welfare states further increase the salience of occupation for material security and social stratification, particularly affecting the trust of those who experience economic vulnerability by falling below their occupational class background. The present analysis of pooled cross-national samples affords insights into these broader processes driving occupational and educational cleavages across Europe, and should be viewed in tandem with country-specific studies. Thus, there is ample room for future comparative research to explore how and why mobility matters for trust in countries with different educational systems, labor market regimes, or welfare policies.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the stratification literature by comparing DRMs with a partial identification bounding approach (Fosse and Pfeffer 2025). While the bounding intervals largely align with the DRM point estimates across most specifications, a notable divergence regarding educational mobility in Eastern Europe provides a critical caveat. This discrepancy illustrates that applying different constraints can lead to fundamentally different conclusions about the experiential effects of mobility. Future research should therefore aim to identify mobility effects by relying on multiple identification strategies and assessing the sensitivity of findings to estimation assumptions.

Beyond personal mobility, also regional patterns of mobility are associated with generalized trust. People living in regions with higher upward mobility in terms of education and occupation show more trust. Crucially, this result holds net of GDP per capita and income inequality, suggesting that the distribution of life chances across the class structure matters over and above the level of economic development (Chetty et al. 2017). Accordingly, collective patterns of socioeconomic decline may jeopardize the fabric of modern capitalist societies (Jackson and Grusky 2018). Adverse mobility contexts foster a perceived lack of opportunity and inferior chances of social

advancement. Inasmuch as bleak prospects spur blame and resentments, they dissipate generalized trust. This finding emphasizes the need for research and social policy to address social descent not merely as an individual misfortune but as a structural problem.

By contrast, the absence of a significant cross-level interaction suggests individuals do not anchor their own personal trajectories against regional trends. Even if the significant main effects demonstrates that people internalize the broader experiences of their regional environment, the psychological costs of individual downward mobility operate independently of these relative comparisons (Newman 1999).

It is crucial to situate these findings within the distinction between statistical and causal identification (Breen and Ermisch 2024). DRMs and partial bounding address the problem of statistical identification by resolving the linear dependency between origin, destination, and mobility. However, they identify only partial associations with the mobility experience itself that do not necessarily imply a within-person causal relationships. By contrast, regarding mobility in a counterfactual framework – whereby destination acts as a treatment with heterogeneous effects across social origins, and mobility is understood as the entire move from origin to destination – could offer a complementary, more comprehensive and causal perspective on how generalized trust is shaped by mobility trajectories.

A limitation stems from the focus on long-term changes across generations, which disregards how acculturation plays out in the short run. As it may take time for people to adapt to cultural norms and establish new social networks, looking at recent changes in class position might yield more support for the "dissociative thesis". Finally, the study has examined generalized trust, as measured by the renowned "standard" trust question (Uslaner 2015), but did not account for trust towards particularized others or specific groups (Glanville and Shi, 2020), nor did it examine behavioral trust, as measured by the trust game (Wilson et al. 2018). It is an important avenue for future research to assess if declines in generalized trust are compensated by increased trust in other spheres and to what extent these attitudinal measures translate into behavioral trust.

To be sure, the results crucially advance our understanding of the nexus between economic inequalities and generalized trust. Trust researchers have long studied its distribution across the class structure, while effectively disregarding dynamic aspects of stratification and social mobility. Here, I highlight the adverse ramifications of "falling behind" at the individual and the collective level. Deciphering the independent effects of mobility on trust, above and beyond the net effects of class positions, proves crucial especially in times of rising economic insecurity (Kevins 2019), stagnating economic prospects (Kalleberg 2009), and looming threats of downward mobility for the "declining middle" (Gidron and Hall 2017, Kurer 2020). To this end, efforts to understand and sustain the moral resource of trust will help tackle main threats to social cohesion linked to polarization, populism, or welfare chauvinism.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the revision of this paper the author used Gemini in order to refine the language, improve readability, and copy-edit the manuscript. The author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the published article.

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Endnotes

[1] The effective sample size reduces by 4.7 percent for education and 8.0 percent for occupation due to missing values for either origin or destination class.

[2] Respondents who were unemployed at the time of the interview were sorted to an occupational class based on information about their last job. Respondents who have never been in employment were excluded from the analysis.

[3] In contrast to the standard nine-class version, the five-class scheme allows for hierarchical ordering of occupational classes. It does so by summarizing the intermediate categories into a middle class – consisting of the petit bourgeoisie, the self-employed, and higher-grade white- and blue-collar workers – and by combining lower technical occupations with lower sales, service and clerical occupations (Rose and Harrison 2010). Nevertheless, not all occupational classes are equidistant, implying that our measures of occupational upward and downward mobility capture broad directional movements rather than strictly uniform changes in class.

[4] Specifically, I first calculated wave-specific Gini coefficients for each region. To account for wave-specific shocks and capture stable differences between regions, I then mean-centered these regional coefficients at their respective wave grand means, and finally averaged the mean-centered coefficients across available waves for each region. At the country level, this approach yields a proxy that correlates strongly with the Gini coefficients provided by the ESS ($r=0.53$).

[5] Eastern European countries encompass Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Western European countries comprise Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

[6] All analyses apply the post-stratification weights (provided by the ESS) based on age, gender, education, and region at the individual level. The code to replicate the analysis is available at https://osf.io/y6b42/?view_only=9e81b1ce69fa4fb0a2df65805a7956fe.

[7] The effect is computed by taking the distance between the coefficients of the highest and the lowest classes, divided through the number of steps (4) and multiplied by p or (1-p), respectively.

[8] Supplementary Figure S1 shows that the direction of these effects remains largely consistent across smaller country clusters in Western Europe, but with notably greater statistical uncertainty around the estimates. Supplementary Table S4 shows the robustness of findings to analyzing mobility three-class instead of five-class schemes for education and occupation. Finally, Supplementary Table S5 shows that while the overall pattern remains consistent when using a three-item index for generalized trust, the effect sizes are slightly smaller, resulting in reduced statistical significance.

Tables

Table 1: Origin, Destination, and Mobility Effects

	Western Europe				Eastern Europe			
	Occupation		Education		Occupation		Education	
	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 1.3	Model 1.4	Model 1.5	Model 1.6	Model 1.7	Model 1.8
Origin and Destination Effects								
Class I	0.596***	0.595***	0.648***	0.674***	0.568***	0.573***	0.693***	0.717***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.061)	(0.062)	(0.066)	(0.056)
Class II	0.450***	0.450***	0.249***	0.250***	0.358***	0.370***	0.194*	0.147
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.053)	(0.058)	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.083)	(0.133)
Class III	-0.075***	-0.073***	0.027	0.023	-0.091*	-0.104*	-0.054	-0.052
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.061)	(0.060)
Class IV	-0.355***	-0.356***	-0.366***	-0.378***	-0.355***	-0.372***	-0.387***	-0.415***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.078)	(0.080)
Class V	-0.616***	-0.616***	-0.558***	-0.569***	-0.480***	-0.467***	-0.446***	-0.397*
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.134)	(0.155)
Parameter (p)	0.297***	0.312***	0.173***	0.334***	0.212***	0.301*	0.237***	0.346
	(0.021)	(0.041)	(0.023)	(0.043)	(0.051)	(0.079)	(0.056)	(0.178)
Mobility Effects (Ref.: Immobile)								
Downward Mobility		0.004		-0.174***		-0.109*		-0.057
		(0.027)		(0.037)		(0.053)		(0.104)
Upward Mobility		0.023		0.098**		-0.006		0.069
		(0.031)		(0.033)		(0.053)		(0.109)
Regional Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	303,228.196	303,231.390	308,803.322	308,775.971	123,547.098	123,545.494	128,221.864	128,224.112
BIC	303,384.165	303,405.708	308,959.608	308,950.644	123,686.651	123,701.465	128,362.013	128,380.749
Log-Likelihood	-151,597.098	-151,596.695	-154,384.661	-154,368.986	-61,756.549	-61,753.747	-64,093.932	-64,093.056
Regions	118	118	118	118	50	50	50	50
Countries	18	18	18	18	10	10	10	10
Observations	71,301	71,301	72,643	72,643	27,146	27,146	28,116	28,116

Notes: Diagonal reference models with region clustered standard errors in parentheses. Dep. Var.: Generalized Trust. Data Source: ESS pooled waves 1-5. Not reported: Constant, Gender, Age, Household Size, Domicile, Region, Wave. Full output reported in Supplementary Table S3. Occupational Classes: High Salariat, Low Salariat, Middle Class, Low Grade Workers, Non-Skilled Workers. Educational Classes: Tertiary (ISCED 5-6), Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary (ISCED 4), Upper Secondary (ISCED 3), Lower Secondary (ISCED 2), Less Than Lower Secondary (ISCED 0-1). Parameter (p) denotes the estimated diagonal weight for the origin class, with its p-value indicating significant difference from 0.5. Statistical significance: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Effects of Regional Mobility on Generalized Trust

	Occupation		Education	
	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3	Model 2.4
Origin and Destination Effects				
Class I	0.575***	0.573***	0.679***	0.677***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Class II	0.436***	0.435***	0.264***	0.264***
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Class III	-0.093***	-0.094***	-0.010	-0.007
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Class IV	-0.357***	-0.355***	-0.394***	-0.390***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Class V	-0.561***	-0.559***	-0.539***	-0.544***
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Parameter (p)	0.313***	0.312***	0.315***	0.312***
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.046)
Regional Mobility Effects				
Absolute Mobility (Net Upward Mobility)	0.730**		1.261***	
	(0.359)		(0.411)	
Relative Mobility (Global LogOdds)		0.041		-0.169
		(0.309)		(0.291)
Regional Control Variables				
Reg. GDP p.c. log	0.167*	0.203**	0.260***	0.240***
	(0.089)	(0.092)	(0.100)	(0.092)
Reg. Population Density (rescaled)	-0.192	-0.241	-0.217	-0.337
	(0.200)	(0.184)	(0.198)	(0.218)
Reg. Population Size (rescaled)	0.622	0.855	0.736	1.471**
	(0.588)	(0.617)	(0.602)	(0.643)
Reg. Inequality (Gini)	-2.520*	-2.919**	-3.129**	-2.631**
	(1.357)	(1.273)	(1.370)	(1.310)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	387,842.035	387,859.049	399,451.390	399,512.943
BIC	388,283.469	388,300.483	399,903.575	399,965.128
Log-Likelihood	-193,874.017	-193,882.525	-199,677.695	-199,708.471
Regions	139	139	142	142
Countries	26	26	26	26
Observations	88,629	88,629	91,175	91,175

Notes: Diagonal reference models with region clustered standard errors in parentheses. Dep. Var.: Generalized Trust. Data Source: ESS pooled waves 1-5. Not reported: Constant, Individual Mobility, Gender, Age, Household Size, Domicile, Region, Wave. Full output reported in Supplementary Table S3. Occupational Classes: High Salariat, Low Salariat, Middle Class, Low Grade Workers, Non-Skilled Workers. Educational Classes: Tertiary (ISCED 5-6), Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary (ISCED 4), Upper Secondary (ISCED 3), Lower Secondary (ISCED 2), Less Than Lower Secondary (ISCED 0-1). Parameter (p) denotes the estimated diagonal weight for the origin class, with its p-value indicating significant difference from 0.5. Statistical significance: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3: Interaction Effects of Individual Mobility and Regional Mobility

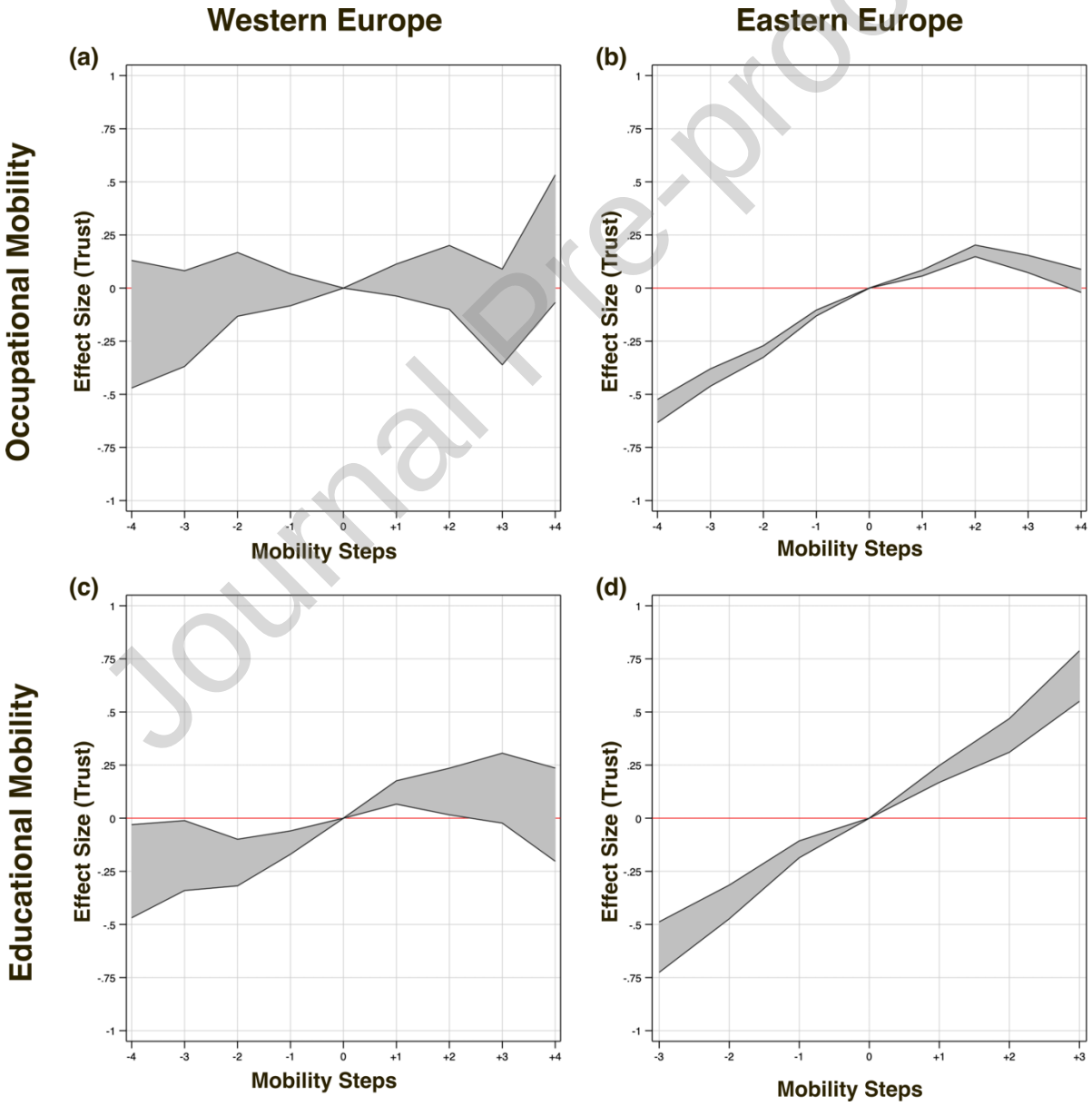
	Occupation		Education	
	Model 3.1	Model 3.2	Model 3.3	Model 3.4
Origin and Destination Effects				
Class I	0.575***	0.574***	0.679***	0.679***
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Class II	0.436***	0.434***	0.266***	0.264***
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Class III	-0.093***	-0.094***	-0.015	-0.003
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Class IV	-0.357***	-0.356***	-0.395***	-0.385***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.038)	(0.037)
Class V	-0.561***	-0.558***	-0.535***	-0.555***
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.042)	(0.041)
Parameter (p)	0.313***	0.308***	0.315***	0.317***
	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.047)
Individual Mobility Effects (Ref.: Immobile)				
Downward Mobility	-0.037	0.149	-0.192**	-0.140
	(0.032)	(0.198)	(0.066)	(0.337)
Upward Mobility	0.013	-0.086	0.043	0.417*
	(0.032)	(0.229)	(0.056)	(0.184)
Regional Mobility Effects				
Absolute Mobility (Net Upward Mobility)	0.742*		1.196***	
	(0.405)		(0.421)	
Relative Mobility (Global LogOdds)		-0.113		-0.059
		(0.326)		(0.303)
Interaction Effects				
Downward Mobility x Absolute Mobility	-0.071		0.217	
	(0.325)		(0.185)	
Upward Mobility x Absolute Mobility	-0.168		0.091	
	(0.285)		(0.111)	
Downward Mobility x Relative Mobility		-0.180		0.014
		(0.188)		(0.276)
Upward Mobility x Relative Mobility		0.086		-0.263+
		(0.214)		(0.145)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	387,845.422	387,860.954	399,455.177	399,511.399
BIC	388,305.640	388,321.172	399,935.625	399,982.426
Log-Likelihood	-193,873.711	-193,881.477	-199,676.589	-199,705.700
Regions	139	139	142	142
Countries	26	26	26	26
Observations	88,629	88,629	91,175	91,175

Notes: Diagonal reference models with region clustered standard errors in parentheses. Dep. Var.: Generalized Trust. Data Source: ESS pooled waves 1-5. Post-stratification weights applied. Not reported: Constant, Regional Control Variables (Reg. GDP p.c. log, Reg. Population Density, Reg. Population Size, Reg. Inequality (Gini)), Gender, Age, Household Size, Domicile, Region, Wave. Full output reported in Supplementary Table S3. Occupational Classes: High Salariat, Low Salariat, Middle Class, Low Grade Workers, Non-Skilled Workers. Educational Classes: Tertiary (ISCED 5-6), Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary (ISCED 4), Upper Secondary (ISCED 3),

Lower Secondary (ISCED 2), Less Than Lower Secondary (ISCED 0-1). Parameter (p) denotes the estimated diagonal weight for the origin class, with its p-value indicating significant difference from 0.5. Statistical significance: + p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Figures

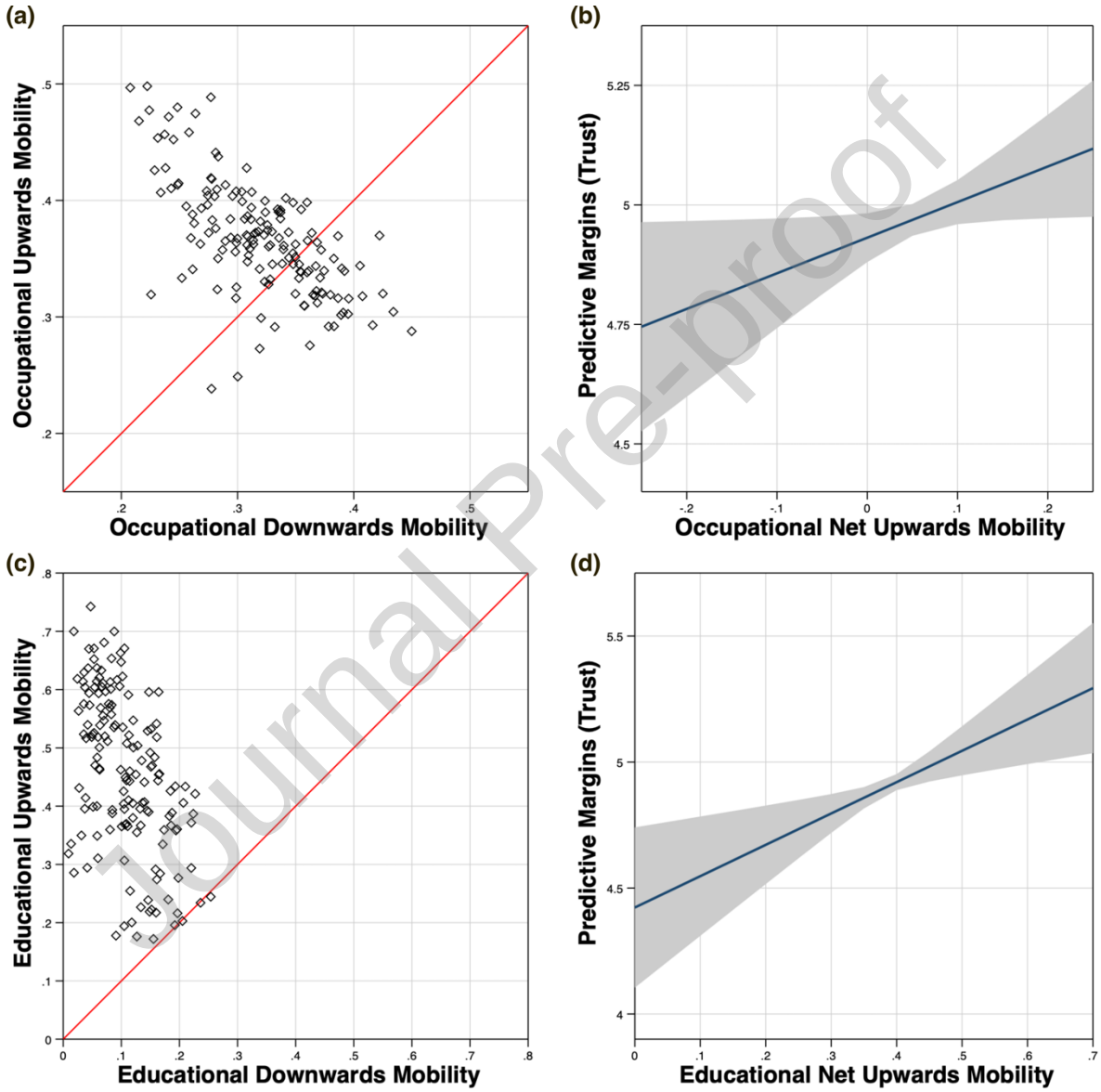
Figure 1: Partial Identification of Individual Mobility Effects



Notes: Panels (a)-(d) show the estimated bounds for the effect of individual mobility on generalized trust. Partial identification is achieved by imposing a monotonicity constraint on the non-linear components of the origin and destination effects, assuming a non-decreasing relationship between class position and trust (Fosse and Pfeffer 2025).

Bounds are derived using the APC-bounding framework via the Stata packages apcest and apcbound (Yastrebov 2025). Data Source: ESS pooled waves 1-5. Post-stratification weights applied. Panel (d) uses a collapsed four-category educational mobility scheme due to significant non-linearities detected in the five-category specification for this subsample.

Figure 2: Upwards and Downwards Mobility Across Regions and the Association with Generalized Trust



Notes: Panel (a): Scatterplot showing regional rates of occupational upward and downward mobility for 152 regions with mobility tables containing more than 150 observations. Panel (b): Predictive margins from a linear model of generalized trust by occupational net upwards mobility (defined as upwards minus downwards mobility), specified identically to Model (2.1). Panel (c): Scatterplot showing regional rates of educational upward and downward mobility for 155 regions with mobility tables containing more than 150 observations. Panel (d): Predictive margins from a linear model of generalized trust by educational net upwards mobility (defined as upwards minus downwards mobility), specified identically to Model (2.3). (a)-(d): Data Source: ESS pooled waves 1-5. Post-stratification weights applied. Grey areas correspond to the 95% confidence intervals.

Declarations of Interest: none

Data Availability Statement: Data from the European Social Survey is freely available at the ESS data portal (https://ess-search.nsd.no/). The ESS-DEVO dataset is available at: http://www.harryganzeboom.nl/ESS-DEVO/index.htm [13.01.2025]. The anonymized Stata Do-File to replicate the analysis was uploaded to an online repository (https://osf.io/y6b42/?view_only=9e81b1ce69fa4fb0a2df65805a7956fe).

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