



## Article

# The Affective Dimension of Social Protection: A Case Study of Migrant-Led Organizations and Associations in Germany

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**Abstract:** This article follows the recent ‘affective turn’ in social sciences and migration scholarship by analyzing the role of emotions in the handling of social risks by people with different migration biographies. The study is based on large-scale research with migrant organizations in Germany, which are important, though often neglected, sources of social protection, identity development, and community building. Interviews and egocentric network diagrams with people using services in various organizations demonstrate the impact of emotions on social protection practices. Contrasting these practices among adult movers, the German-born, and the 1.5 generation with different migration biographies, we shed light on the processual, material, and relational nature and the emotional dimensions of dealing with social risks. In doing so, this work aims to engage in discussions on emotions in migration and settlement processes and to increase the understanding of their impact on social protection.

**Keywords:** migration; migrant organizations; social protection; emotions; affect



**Citation:** Bargłowski, Karolina, and Lisa Bonfert. 2022. The Affective Dimension of Social Protection: A Case Study of Migrant-Led Organizations and Associations in Germany. *Social Sciences* 11: 505. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11110505>

Academic Editor: Nigel Parton

Received: 16 September 2022

Accepted: 31 October 2022

Published: 3 November 2022

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## 1. Introduction

Social security systems and individual strategies to cope with social risks face various challenges due to increasingly complex mobility patterns. Previous studies have established a comprehensive understanding of protective elements as “social protection assemblages” (Bilecen and Bargłowski 2015) negotiated by social actors within and across borders (Amelina et al. 2020; Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018; Lafleur and Romero 2018; Saksela-Bergholm 2019). Following recent “affective turns” in the social sciences (Wetherell 2013; Greco and Stenner 2013), in migration scholarship (Benson 2016; Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021) and social policy analysis (Jupp 2022), this article emphasizes the emotional dimension of social protection in the context of different migration biographies. It draws on a study with migrant organizations (MOs), some of which critically engage with the notion of ‘the migrant’, in social protection assemblages of people with different migration biographies. Specifically, our goal is to engage in debates about emotions in processes of migration and settling and to broaden our understanding of the role of emotions—or affect<sup>1</sup>—in social protection practices.

Emotions have a long tradition in the social sciences and sociology. Bericat (2016, p. 492) argues that “understanding the complex nature of human emotions is absolutely necessary for the adequate development of sociology”. Migration scholars are increasingly exploring the role of emotions in shaping migration trajectories, local incorporation, and transnational spaces. This perspective is an important addition to the literature, as research on migration has long been dominated by economic concepts and a focus on rationality. Alternatively, incorporating the study of emotions considers that “our actions are guided not just by what we think but also by how we feel and our bodily response to feelings” (Gorton 2007, p. 345). Notions of belonging (Antonsich 2010;

Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021), homemaking (Boccagni 2014), embedding (Ryan 2018), and anchoring (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2016) are conceptual advances that contribute to an enriched understanding of migration processes.

Following these debates, this article aims to provide new insights on the relevance of emotions for the ways people secure their social protection in migration processes. Much of the literature on social protection has focused on policy concepts, which are primarily concerned with “policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout the life cycle” (ILO International Labour Organization 2021, p. 226) within national borders. In this way, social protection is often perceived as a top-down intervention directed at ‘welfare targets’, whose social risks require mitigation through state interference. However, research has shown that individuals actively pursue protective strategies that extend far beyond national support schemes, especially in the face of a variety of barriers that hinder the use of formal protection (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2006, p. 1152). Social protection thus occurs “from below” (Godin 2020), across borders and from a variety of sources with different degrees of formality (Amelina et al. 2020; Dankyi et al. 2017). In addition to this transnational perspective, the social policy literature has also increasingly considered the role of emotions in social protection practices (Jupp 2022). Here, the affective dimension of making choices around issues of social protection has been shown to play an important role (Baxter and Glendinning 2013, p. 448; Wise and Velayutham 2017, p. 116). In the specific context of migration biographies, we consider these ways of “doing social protection” with shifting assemblages of various protective resources to be inherently linked to “doing belonging” and the emotions at play at the crossroads of these processes (Hernández-Plaza et al. 2006, pp. 261–62). In this way, we also seek to engage in recent debates about conceptual alternatives to “integration” by emphasizing the sociological processes of place-attachment (see Amelina 2022; Bargłowski and Bonfert 2022a).

According to Antonsich (2010, p. 645), belonging develops from an interplay between both personal sensations of being “at home” and prevalent politics of belonging. As migration biographies and changing social networks evoke evolving connotations of belonging, they represent a key factor that determines the ways people on the move organize their social protection (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018, p. 7). In this context, MOs have become important actors, though often neglected, in the field of social protection. Together with other civil society organizations (Mayblin and James 2019), they fill the gaps between welfare services and the deviating needs of migrant populations and offer sustainable social services (Aşkın et al. 2018, p. 43; Bargłowski and Bonfert 2022b; D’Angelo 2015, pp. 88–89; Halm et al. 2020). Although they do not necessarily perceive themselves as social service providers, the increasing levels of professionalization evident in a wide range of MOs have brought about numerous activities and services directly or indirectly contributing to the social protection of their target groups (Hoesch and Harbig 2019, p. 104; SVR 2020, p. 22ff.). Furthermore, they provide conditions for people with migration biographies to maintain relationships and activities that link them with their (or their families’) places of origin, thus also influencing experiences of belonging in mobile contexts (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018, p. 4). However, how this multifunctionality of MOs affects social protection practices is largely unexplored. Considering that emotions, and especially emotional attachments, play a considerable role in this regard, this article argues that MOs offer unique sources of social protection by evoking a feeling of belonging.

## 2. Social Protection, Emotions, Belonging, and Migrant Organizations

Recent studies show that approaches to managing social risks in the context of migration are strongly subject to the accessibility of protective resources (Faist et al. 2015, p. 200; Levitt et al. 2017, p. 4; Sabates-Wheeler and Feldman 2011). This literature identified a complex combination of legal and structural barriers (Eurofound 2015, p. 26), as well as public and personal reservations about the merits of welfare benefits to obstruct migrants’ access to formal welfare mechanisms (Osipovic 2015, p. 731; Schweyher et al. 2019; van Oorschot et al. 2017). In the face of exclusionary discourses determining who “deserves to

belong” (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021), dominant “rationales of belonging” (Carmel and Sojka 2021) importantly determine the “barriers that prevent some migrant groups from contributing and fully participating in the host society” (Osipovic 2015, p. 744). However, research continues to lack an understanding of how belonging experiences among people with migration biographies in the context of public and political discourses affect compilations of social risk-averting strategies. In particular, the role of emotions connected to belongingness as a driving force of social protection practices has not been fully understood in migrant social protection. Emotions are mainly covered in the literature on care, which highlights emotional relationships between families and negotiations on commitments and expectations within international families (see, e.g., Baldassar 2008). This literature helps us to understand the emotional and cultural practices of keeping families together at distance, as well as the way migration affects family life. We extend this approach to incorporate other forms of social protection and care. Instead, care can be approached as one type of “informal social protection” (Amelina and Bause 2020, p. 418) in addition to others, including support practices in the areas of work, education, health, and housing (Bilecen and Bargłowski 2015), which are also shaped by emotions. Considering that “emotions arise when a person is confronted with a real or virtual situation relevant to her well-being”, we explore the emotions involved in social protection practices (Rauschmayer 2005, p. 187). Therefore, perceiving social protection in the context of migration as one of various “affective dilemmas” that evokes a variety of feelings and subsequent actions in reaction to specific needs (Cvetkovich 1992, p. 2), we aim to illustrate the affective dimension of organizing social protection in connection with processes of renegotiating belongingness.

Various studies on the ways people with migration biographies assemble social protection resources have specifically emphasized the role of social networks within and across borders (MacAuslan and Sabates-Wheeler 2011, p. 71; Bilecen 2020; Saksela-Bergholm 2019). In response to exclusionary institutional logics of belonging (Carmel and Sojka 2021, p. 663), social networks appear to provide not only alternative sources of belonging that promote experiences of “being at home” (Antonsich 2010, p. 647; Bilecen 2015, p. 9; Boccagni 2014, pp. 223, 232). Additionally, they represent alternative channels for organizing social protection (Boccagni 2014, pp. 175, 182; Dankyi et al. 2017, p. 86ff.; Palash and Baby-Collin 2018, pp. 2, 5). In this way, they indicate an affective dimension of social protection, which promotes feelings of inclusion and belongingness as key factors for welfare decision making. According to Wise and Velayutham (2017, p. 127), emotions “create a state of readiness in bodies, and an augmentation or diminution in the capacity to act”. In the context of social protection, this suggests that emotions are an important prerequisite for the choices people make about welfare (Baxter and Glendinning 2013). In their study of welfare choices among disabled people in England, Baxter and Glendinning (2013, p. 447) identified “the impact of making choices on emotions and the subsequent impact of those emotions on decision making”. To make adequate choices, they thus advocate for greater support (Baxter and Glendinning 2013, p. 448). In this vein, we argue that migrant organizations play an important role in the ways people with migration biographies organize social protection. Specifically, we will show that MOs not only provide opportunities for the development of emotional attachment<sup>2</sup>. They also offer various forms of support that resonate with the individual needs of their target groups, thus initiating people’s ‘capacity to act’ (Wise and Velayutham 2017, p. 127) in an emotionally secure atmosphere of “home” (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021).

Previous research has already hinted at the capacity of organizations founded and run by people with migration biographies, commonly referred to as migrant organizations (MOs), to provide potential sources of belonging, as they strengthen political participation and enable religious practices (Amelina and Faist 2008; Fauser 2016; Levitt 2004). In a study on transnational religious organizations, Levitt (2004) identified this type of MO as an important gateway to engaging with both places of origin and settlement, as they enable people to establish “powerful, well-established networks where they can express interests, gain skills, and make claims with respect to their home and host country” (p. 2).

This suggests that MOs represent important places for people with migration biographies to build a sense of belonging based on transnational social networks. However, the impact of these organizations on the social protection strategies of migrant populations remains largely unexplored. Meanwhile, increasing levels of professionalization and partnerships with government institutions have broadened the spectrum of activities and services provided by a variety of MOs (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018). As a result, they have increasingly begun to play their role in filling the gaps between national welfare services and diversifying societies (Aşkın et al. 2018, p. 43; Halm et al. 2020; Hoesch and Harbig 2019; SVR 2020, p. 22ff.). In the German context, recent studies have shown that a variety of migrant organizations and associations already contribute to the social protection of their target groups (Halm et al. 2020; SVR 2020). Especially since the rise of an “activating” welfare state paradigm, in which social protection has increasingly become an individual responsibility (Klammer et al. 2017), MOs play an important role in helping newcomers understand the welfare system and gain the skills and self-esteem needed to successfully interact with the institutional environment (Bargłowski and Bonfert 2022b). However, due to the large variety of MOs that offer a variety of activities and services for different target groups, little is known about the varying ways in which they influence experiences of belonging and approaches to managing social risks (Halm et al. 2020).

Against this backdrop, this article contrasts the role of MOs in different migration biographies and the varying attachments and belongings that evolve throughout people’s lives. In the realm of transnational migration research, various scholars have compared transnational behaviors and discovered differences but also similarities in a range of political and private cross-border activities (Klok et al. 2020; Maxwell 2010). For example, Safi (2017) showed that differences depend largely on the transnational practice in question, strengthening “the now widely accepted hypothesis of the coexistence of assimilation and transnationalism in the lives of immigrants and their descendants” (p. 883). This article investigates the role of MOs in these simultaneous engagements for three types of migration biographies: those of people who grew up outside Germany before moving, those of people who were born and raised in Germany, and those of people who moved as children. Contrasting how MOs contribute to social protection practices among these different groups, we will show how varying experiences of belonging and related emotions impact approaches to managing social risks.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The findings presented in this paper are the result of a collaborative research project between the Universities of Bochum, Duisburg-Essen, and Dortmund in the Ruhr area in Germany (see Bonfert et al. 2022). This qualitative study aimed to explore the role of migrant organizations in social protection practices among people with migration biographies in the Ruhr area in Germany. The interdisciplinary research team conducted 18 expert interviews with actors in the welfare state, document analysis, and interviews with 34 members and 15 representatives of MOs between October 2020 and November 2021.

We contacted MOs based on publicly accessible information on congregations, associations, and interest groups founded and run by migrants, as well as information provided by gatekeepers who occupy relevant municipal roles and know the landscape of local migrant organizations. Intending to cover a broad spectrum of organizations in terms of size, target groups, and activities, we established contact with 25 migrant-led associations, congregations, and interest groups ranging from small women’s groups to professionalized organizations with a variety of social services. The MO representatives provided invaluable support in identifying and contacting people who use the services they provide. Furthermore, they offered their support with translations. For this article, we used a set of 21 interviews and two group discussions with 34 members of 17 MOs. The interviews, which ranged from 40 min to 2 h, aimed to collect information on individual approaches to managing social risks and the role ascribed to MOs in these approaches. During these interviews, we also collected egocentric network charts in which research participants were



invited to record any institutions, organizations, groups, and individuals they considered very important, rather important, or less important for organizing social protection matters. The sample comprised 17 women and 17 men between the ages of 13 and 68, with varying occupations, educational background, legal status, migration histories and places of origin. They had spent between two years and their entire lives in Germany. All MOs, individual research participants and participants, and subsequent organizations and persons referred to during the interviews received pseudonyms, which are also used in this article.

The interviews were coded and analyzed following a grounded theory approach using MAXQDA. At this stage, all organizations and individuals were anonymized. After an initial open-coding process, axial coding allowed us to identify recurring themes in the context of social protection and MO. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of small sequences served to explore specific aspects repeatedly addressed in various interviews, including the role of emotions and belongingness in social protection-related decision-making (Amelina 2010). Moreover, egocentric network charts were analyzed using Vennmaker. The process of coding and analyzing the data presented in this study was conducted jointly by a team of five researchers and further benefited from discussions with the wider project team, who conducted expert interviews and interviews with MO representatives.

#### 4. Results

The results show that migrant organizations are important sources of social welfare and protection for various people with different migration biographies. Their importance comes primarily from their multifunctionality and flexibility in responding to the different and changing needs of their target groups for the management of social risks and migration challenges. MOs enable people involved with them to establish and maintain meaningful relationships in and between spaces, which has a profound impact on their approaches to social protection, especially by enacting emotional attachment. In the context of solidarity and mutual support, MOs allow people to act as both beneficiaries and providers of network-based support. In this way, they promote feelings of inclusion, belonging and security in the context of community and solidarity, support, appreciation, and self-efficacy. Based on our finding that the ways MOs influence processes of ‘doing belonging’ and ‘doing social protection’ vary for participants with different migration biographies, the following sections will contrast three groups: adult mover, German-born, and ‘1.5 generation’.

##### 4.1. Adult Movers

‘Adult movers’ refers to the 19 interviewees in our sample who were born outside of Germany and relocated to Germany after their teenage years. The affective dimension of social protection among these respondents was particularly evident in their challenges in the process of relocating and finding a sense of security and belonging during migration and settlement. Depending on their legal status and migration trajectories, most of these respondents struggled with language difficulties and the complexities of the German bureaucracy and labor market. Their stories of settlement were full of ambivalent feelings of fear and uncertainty in the context of hoping for a better life in the future, while also struggling with alienation and estrangement. As Benson (2016, p. 488) notes, migration is “emotionally moving” with the “capacity to reinvigorate connection and attachment”. Here, MOs provide important spaces that promote opportunities for local incorporation by addressing the need for inclusion, stability, and security. The findings show that migrant organizations represent a key element of social networks that offers access to support within and beyond the MO. Furthermore, they play a variety of roles in the field of social protection because they provide a very responsive contribution to strategies to avoid social risks for these participants. The important role of MO for adult movers is particularly evident among people with uncertain legal status during relocation, which stresses the unfulfilled need for stability that promotes feelings of insecurity and powerlessness.

Orhan, 52, migrated from Turkey in 1996 at the age of 25 to seek asylum in Germany. His memories of the first years of his stay in Germany are full of feelings of uncertainty,

loss of autonomy, and helplessness in dealing with bureaucratic procedures, as well as powerlessness in managing social risks independently. Being formally protected by the welfare state deepened his experience of dependency and further emphasizes the striving for independence that usually accompanies migration (Bargłowski 2019, 2021). His account expresses alienation from accustomed surroundings and the difficult process of relocating and dispossession, which are typical experiences during migration (Benson 2016).

*Without work, without language, without social contact, no activities, and just having to wait, what will happen, will [the asylum application] be rejected? Will I be sent back to Turkey or can I stay here? And these thoughts, this insecurity . . . yes, insecurity . . . Yes, of course, I received social security, but I was not used to expecting anything from others. I would say that this was not good for me. (Orhan, 52 years old, from Turkey)*

This longing for independence was a recurring experience shared by most of the respondents who migrated as adults. As gaining financial independence was considered a personal issue, dependence on unemployment benefits was described as a particularly stigmatizing experience associated with feelings of unease and sometimes embarrassment. In search of strategies for securing financial independence and security that resonate with needs for independence and self-efficacy, private networks and MOs provide alternatives or gateways to relevant sources of social protection. As Orhan described, his pursuit of independence led him to the Dersim community, where he found an important support network and a place of identification.

*When I want to meet people and make friends, when I want to learn something, I need to go there [to the Dersim community], because our people are there and when you are there you can meet people and exchange ideas. We support each other and the children will get to know each other. And this further opens other doors. (Orhan, 52 years old, from Turkey)*

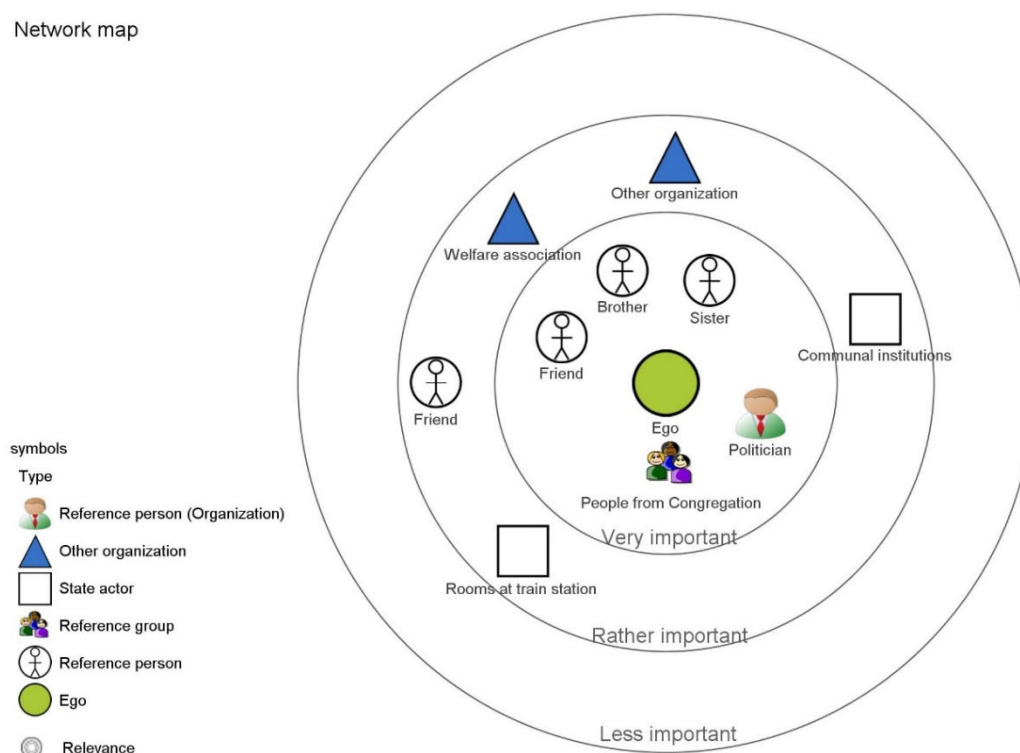
Reflecting his needs for community, inclusion and connectedness, opportunities for informal gatherings and knowledge exchange in the context of the Dersim community were an important source of support for Orhan. Within the MO, he especially benefited from the language courses, which allowed him to properly learn his native language and engage with the customs and traditions of the Dersim community. This way of promoting personal development and individuality transforms the MO into a distinct space of belonging and trust, which importantly contributes to its role as a source of support. Furthermore, the private setting of the MO “like a small family” is also a key source of information that facilitates access to other sources of social protection.

*Yes, we are like a small family. And when you face any challenges, for example, these three families that have heavily handicapped children, they immediately exchange information. Which doctor do you go to, is he good or bad? And what do you do, what path did you take? And they share these difficult issues with each other. Or someone works in a factory and knows that they are looking for new employees. For example, in the banking sector. Then he will ask if someone is looking for employment or if he already knows who is looking for a job. Then he immediately calls them and says ‘Are you still looking for a job?’ Or, when I came here, I asked: ‘I don’t have a doctor here, which would you recommend?’ Where should I go? Is it good or not?’ and so on, based on these recommendations. Or, if parents have problems at school, for example, they come to me: ‘Yes, our child has this and that, what would you recommend?’ And you could always call and ask, in any situation, whether you have a disabled child, whether you look for a job if you have problems filling out a form, or families who have problems with an institution and need a translator; no matter what, we always know who can do what, who could help where. You offer to help yourself or others and ask them to accompany them to an agency or complete a form. That is how it usually works. (Orhan, 52 years old, from Turkey)*

Orhan describes here the multiple ways in which he found the MO to provide opportunities to manage a variety of possible social risks, including employment, health, and

education, in a context that has become like a family for him. As a result, MOs promote feelings of safety, confidence, and resourcefulness and allow people to seek solutions that are compatible with their needs and preferences. This way of offering places for local incorporation emphasizes the affective element of social protection of MOs in a space like “home” (Antonsich 2010, p. 646; Wise and Velayutham 2017, p. 125). The network character offers a possible alternative to formal welfare schemes based on opportunities to exchange knowledge and information informally with other MO members. In addition, people also benefit from each other’s networks that extend beyond the MO. Furthermore, the familiarity of other members with structures and institutions helps newcomers to familiarize themselves with these settings, and thus eases their access to formal protective resources. These various means of contributing to the social protection of target groups are important because MOs can raise a “feeling of belonging” (Antonsich 2010; see also, Barglowski and Bonfert 2022b). Orhan’s egocentric network chart reinforces this importance ascribed to a personal network to manage social risks, including people in the congregation (see Figure 1 below).

Network map



**Figure 1.** Orhan’s egocentric network chart.

This network chart illustrates the importance ascribed to individual reference persons as key actors in social protection practices. Meanwhile, the fact that Orhan ascribed less importance to the welfare support provided by welfare associations, communal institutions, and other organizations demonstrates the preference for social protection resources that resonate with his needs for community, security, and belonging.

While Orhan’s example illuminates the ways MOs provide spaces to deal with feelings of helplessness and uncertainty in the context of migration-related inequalities in general, Suleika’s story shows how experiences of this kind are further complicated by intersectional inequalities. Suleika emigrated to Germany from Syria in 2015, together with her family. She referred to the ways that gender and health have impacted her relocation to an unknown place. In this context, Kurdo e.V., an association founded by Kurdish refugees to support other refugees with Kurdish origins in the process of settling in, became not only an important element of her support network, but also a source of belonging.

*I am from Syria. I came with my family to Germany in 2015. As you know, there has been a war for ten years and many problems. And because of my health problems, we wanted to go to Germany. And we also have relatives in Germany. And we could move to Germany without any problems because they wanted to support us at the beginning. But when we arrived, we had to apply for asylum at the agency. And that . . . Of course, at first, language was a big problem for us. In the first city where we stayed, our children could go to school after one week. That was in the fall of 2015. Two of my children went to the preparation class, the youngest went to daycare. And my husband participated in an integration course for three months. And due to my health, I was unable to join these courses, which was a problem for me. And the city, a citizen in particular, she helped me. And so many people helped us learn the language. A professor and a woman always came to us and we often talked about many things. We lived there for ten months, and then we moved. And I was still motivated to learn the language. So my little boy went to another daycare facility. And then he went to the first grade and there was a cafe in the parent language. And this café was held every week, and I went there every week to learn the language. And through this café I met a Turkish woman. And she was active in International Women. And she also invited me there. [ . . . ] And I met a woman who also came here, to Kurdo e.V. (Suleika, 43 years old, from Syria)*

Childcare is a burning issue for many migrant women and a distinct experience throughout their migration trajectories (Barglowski and Pustulka 2018). Suleika's account emphasizes the importance of establishing networks with other women, not necessarily from the same country of origin, but who share similar experiences of relocating and raising children in an unfamiliar context (Ryan 2007). Evoking feelings of security and trust, Kurdo e.V. provided a space of belonging that replaced her previous neighborhood as a source of community support. Suleika's account also emphasizes the need to be oriented in an unfamiliar environment, further highlighting the role of emotional security in managing social risks. Her case demonstrates that relocation can be especially complicated for women, who often bear the greatest burden of local family integration and require specific support in finding orientation and security. The multifunctional nature of MOs comes to the fore here in that these organizations not only connect people and provide surrogate communities, but also enable access to various forms of cultural and economic capital. Like Orhan, Suleika found that the MO enhanced her ability to familiarize herself with her new environment, while also providing opportunities for continuous engagement with Syria. Therefore, she and her children participated in Kurdish language and dance courses to stay connected to their cultural roots. In addition to fostering social networks and thus relational elements of belongingness, Kurdo e.V. also offered access to cultural knowledge in the destination context (Antonsich 2010, p. 648). These feelings of belonging eventually allowed her to make choices about social protection that fit her personal preferences and the need to "find the right path" (Suleika). Representing a place of orientation and alternative modes of belonging in the context of emotional attachment beyond the common notion of place-belongingness in this way (Antonsich 2010), MOs illuminate an affective dimension of social protection. In response to hesitant interactions with unfamiliar welfare structures that evoke feelings of uncertainty, dependence, and powerlessness, MOs' abilities to evoke positive feelings of inclusion and belonging allow them to contribute to social risk-averting strategies in multiple ways. In addition to mutual trust, they promote the notion of "home" (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021) beyond any specific place and provide various services that facilitate access to other resources, including language skills and knowledge relevant to managing social risks in the destination context. Consequently, MOs provide highly responsive contributions to 'doing social protection' in the context of 'doing belonging' of adult movers.

#### 4.2. The German-Born

*However, I must say that young people who now go to university do not need the community as much as they used to. Most of them are quite comfortable. They make*



*use of opportunities provided by the system to receive information. That was different in previous generations, but in my opinion, this has changed. (Levent, 41, born in Germany, parents migrated from Turkey)*

The narratives of adult movers above demonstrate how MOs play an important role in the way people who engage with them use their activities and services to ‘do social protection’ as they ‘do belonging’ in the context of positive emotions that evoke their “capacity to act” (Wise and Velayutham 2017). The eight German-born participants in our sample explained how both practices were related to their family histories of migration. On the one hand, opportunities to engage with the traditions and customs of their parents in the context of their MO facilitated invaluable opportunities to develop an identity that incorporated their family history beyond the domestic space. In this way, the MOs in which these respondents participated mainly addressed the affective role of maintaining ties to countries of emigration and of creating family belonging in the context of migration. However, while they did not consider MO to affect their own social protection, their motivation to engage with MOs was strongly driven by the desire to share their knowledge and experience to benefit from other people’s social protection practices. Since collective memory in migrant families is often shaped by emotionally difficult experiences of relocating and settling, our findings demonstrate that family histories of this kind can inform the willingness of the German-born to participate in an organization that supports newcomers during their difficult period of settlement. Therefore, shared family memories can invoke feelings of insecurity and powerlessness for the next generation, indicating the continuity of the effects of migration over generations. Levent’s parents left Turkey in the 1960s and migrated to Germany in the context of contemporary guest worker agreements. During the interview, he particularly contrasted the experience of his parents with his own and considered those born in Germany to be “very fit” when it comes to accessing and using institutional settings and support. From his point of view, this was particularly so because they were better acquainted with the system and therefore adopted cultural factors, as well as legal and stay-related factors, that promoted place-belongingness to Germany (Antonsich 2010, p. 648). From his point of view, people who recently moved benefit from MOs, particularly as they “function like a bridge, by bringing people in need to applicable services. A little consultation, a little active support, a little bit here and there, anything from just a few sentences over the phone to filling in entire documents” (Levent). However, he did not assign this protective role to his Alevite congregation for people born in Germany. For him, MOs were important because they provided an opportunity to develop the transnational ties of the second generation through close connections with their parents’ home country.

*The Alevite congregations accomplished a lot in the sense that these children and adolescents can carry their identities in Germany with self-confidence, as the new normal, with naturalness. In Turkey, for example, I still pay attention to this, although I am a grown man now. I will not discuss this question. This sometimes leads to difficult situations, and I prefer to avoid them. But this is the most important aspect, in my opinion: self-esteem as Alevites, self-confidence. And a natural and easy self-understanding not based on unnaturalness or hiding your background or your cultural heritage, without having to identify with it too much, but that you can simply say, yes, my parents have Alevite roots, and that’s nothing special. I mean nothing special in the sense that I don’t have to hide it; I don’t have to talk about it in silence, but with self-confidence. (Levent, 41, parents migrated from Turkey)*

This account speaks to the essential role of opportunities in the immigration country for migrant children to develop self-confidence and transnational belonging as parts of a distinct “second generation” identity (Louie 2006). Consequently, Levent believes that his MO has an important influence on transnational modes of belonging and that identification with “cultural heritage” is an essential part of it. According to Antonsich’s (2010) concept of place-belonging, MOs thus play a key role in the ability of these people to maintain

cultural knowledge about places of origin, as well as “memories of their ancestors’ as part of autobiographical factors of belonging” (p. 647). At the same time, this engagement with his MO allowed him to contribute his knowledge to people who moved to Germany more recently and to support them with their challenges. As his engagement with his Alevite congregation resonated with needs for self-development and support, it evoked subsequent feelings of self-confidence and esteem that, for him, turned the MO into an important space for ‘doing social protection’ in the context of ‘doing belonging’.

The history of Ufuk’s family is similar to that of Levent and many other participants in our study. His desire to support other people who recently moved is also strongly linked to his family history of migration. His account also shows that MOs play an essential role in identity development, self-esteem, and social protection of immigrants. He volunteered at Gemeinsam Dortmund e.V., an association that was originally founded by a religious community that sought to support fellow believers and their children who were new to Germany. Meanwhile, they offered a variety of services in the fields of refugee and youth support, helping people with migration biographies independent of their place of origin. They provided translations and explanations of forms and documentation, and a variety of practical support. Additionally, they accompanied people to state institutions, filling a major hole in the institutional infrastructure. In addition, they provided educational activities and activities to help people learn German, discuss health and environmental issues, and find work. Ufuk also emphasized the relevance of social gatherings, including crafting and baking with children and summer festivals for members to meet, chat, and simultaneously access potentially relevant information and knowledge about issues of education, health, or employment. Ufuk stressed that he particularly enjoyed providing this kind of help to people who were new to Germany and who he perceived to require this kind of assistance that his father never had.

*Maybe we also reduce the barriers to visit the authorities, for refugees or migrants who did not feel like going to the foreign registration office 20 years ago when they could not speak the language. My father now also volunteers and is far beyond me. But 20 or 25 years ago, the barrier was much lower when you accompanied someone. When you said: Come on, I will take you with me. You can talk and if something happens, I am there. (Ufuk, 31, parents migrated from Turkey)*

This statement demonstrates Ufuk’s perspective on his MO as a key source of moral and practical support for newcomers to overcome barriers to accessing formal social protection. Although he, like Levent, did not consider these supporting functions of the MO to play a role for himself, Ufuk also pointed out the relevance of Gemeinsam Dortmund e.V. for his belongingness and identity formation, as it offered opportunities to share his religious opinions and worldview with people who think like him. Consequently, it provided a space where Ufuk felt understood, safe, and ‘at home’ based on shared experiences of inclusion and belonging (Antonsich 2010, p. 647):

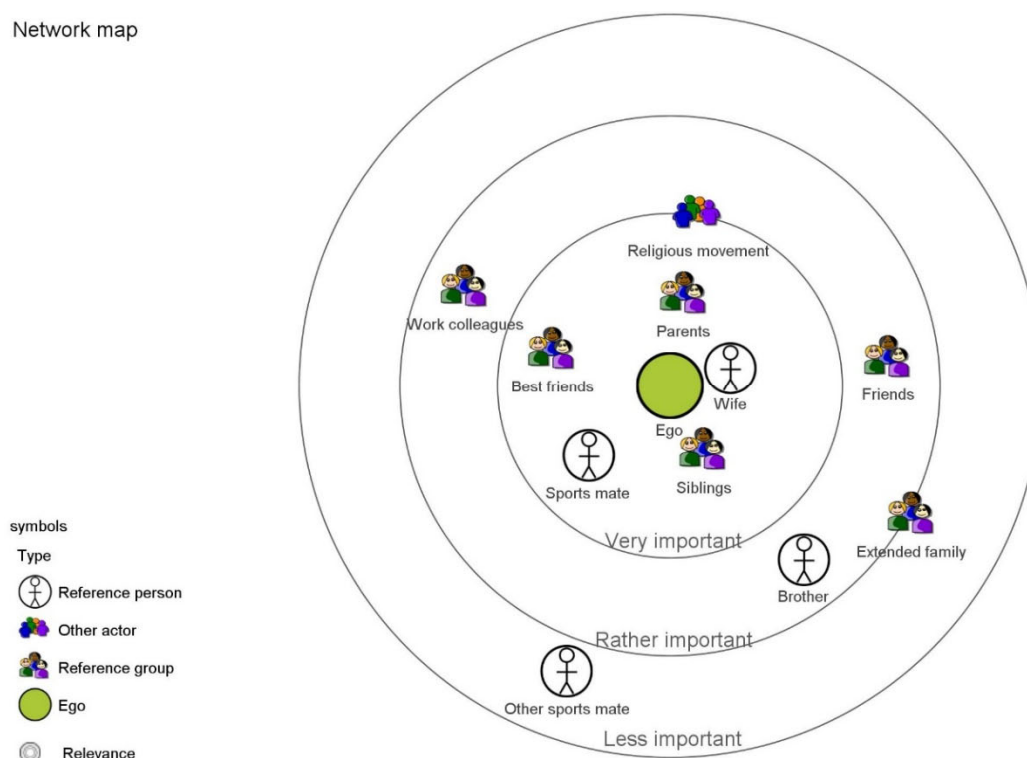
*I am very happy with the perspective on life and the world that we share here. This is cosmopolitanism. That is why I am keen to support Gemeinsam Dortmund e.V. because I identify with it. I cannot identify with anything if I am excluded because I do not have a beard. Things like that. Here, all are welcome. (Ufuk, 31, parents from Turkey)*

This statement shows how the experiences of belonging immediately affected Ufuk’s decision to join Gemeinsam Dortmund e.V., and thus indicates the ways emotions provide the basis for individuals to make choices that resonate with their personal preferences (Baxter and Glendinning 2013; Boccagni 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2017). Based on this, he was happy to share his knowledge and skills as a teacher to support newcomers in their approaches to ‘doing belonging’ and ‘doing social protection’.

Consequently, for both adult movers and those born in Germany to families with migration experiences, MOs are an important component of personal networks and thus significantly affect the processes of ‘doing belonging’ in the context of community support. However, among German-born participants, a more widely developed embedding in

the destination context and higher levels of acquaintance with other factors of belonging (Antonsich 2010, p. 648) established throughout their entire life appear to decrease the perception of the MO as a “protective resource” for themselves. This is also evident, for example, in Ufuk’s egocentric network chart, which only includes close personal contacts based on family ties and mutual interests as relevant networks for issues related to social protection (see Figure 2 below). In addition to knowledge of cultural factors, important aspects promoting place-belongingness among the German-born include a secure legal status, length of residence, and embedding in the labor market as an economic factor (ibid.). Together, these aspects contribute to feelings of inclusion and belonging as key drivers of social protection practices. At the same time, MOs allow for maintaining transnational social networks and attachment to family biographies and memories. These opportunities to consolidate transnational modes of belonging also make the MO a subtle but important part of social protection assemblages among people who were born in the destination country of their parents.

Network map



**Figure 2.** Ufuk’s egocentric network chart.

#### 4.3. 1.5. Generation: Transnational Teens

Having contrasted different experiences among adult movers and people who were born in Germany with those of families with migration experiences, we now turn to the perspective of people who moved with their families as children or young adults. These ‘transnational teens’ are also known as the ‘1.5 generation’, characterized by simultaneous attachments to countries of origin and settlement, with often complicated experiences of place belonging (Dolberg and Amit 2022). As they familiarize themselves with their new environment in the crucial stages of growing up, our findings show that subsequent tendencies for expanding place-belongingness with Germany come with confidence and knowledge regarding the welfare system. At the same time, having grown up outside their countries of immigration, these ‘transnational teens’ are also continuously involved in navigating different spaces and cultural expectations. The role of MOs for the 1.5 generation is strongly shaped by experiences of migration and growing up and concomitantly the search for protection and belonging.

Najim came to Germany in 2017, when he was 13 years old. His migration history is fueled by ambivalent and changing emotions of fear, insecurity, hope and nostalgia for his childhood days in Syria before the war. He and his family left Syria when he was nine years old and spent about four years in Turkey before receiving asylum in Germany. The stage in which he and his mother arrived in Germany was a particularly emotionally intense time. He felt alienated, isolated, and challenged by language barriers and complex bureaucratic structures. However, this situation changed when he started school. He received various types of support, particularly from teachers, quickly learned German and made friends. As a result, he gained confidence and familiarity with his new environment. Despite his difficult childhood, Najim expressed a high level of resilience and determination to achieve his goals. During this process of settling in, he utilized services and support offered by Lomingo e.V. in various ways, including tutoring for school and music courses as preparation for a future university degree in music. Lomingo e.V. is an association that was founded in 2015 to provide support to refugees, regardless of their religion, citizenship status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Meanwhile, it organizes various projects with which it seeks to encourage its target group to explore and expand their strengths and find their way in an unfamiliar environment. For Najim, his engagement with Lomingo e.V. essentially contributed to his abilities to establish a social network but also to finish his high school diploma and prepare for university. Furthermore, targeted events provided opportunities for Najim to discuss some challenges and questions in the context of settling in, including issues of sexuality and racism. Evoking emotions of security, confidence, esteem, and self-efficacy, the MO supported him in achieving his goals and gaining independence.

*I don't worry about financial security or things like that here in Germany, because there is always a chance to work. If I were living in Turkey or Syria now, this would probably be very different because then I would not trust that I could use music to build a career. Well, here the chances are also moderate that music makes for a sufficient income. But I also think that if it is really bad that I cannot finance myself, then I would always have the option to look for a job in some way. Even if it is not a job, there is Jobcentre and offers like that, where you do not immediately starve when you do not have money. That is why I feel safe in this life, I simply feel safe here. There is nothing that makes me feel insecure. I have a good high school diploma, and others go to work after 10th grade and go on with their lives, so I am not afraid. (Najim, 17, from Syria)*

Achievement of independence is an important emotional goal of migration and an integral aspect of 'feeling at home'. For Najim, the ways Lomingo e.V. contributed to his 'doing belonging' significantly contributed to his growing familiarity with the social security system and thus his approaches to 'doing social protection'. As he entered the German system as a high school student, he was able to get to know this system from the inside and felt confident in navigating through the various options provided by this system. Along the way, he used services offered by Lomingo e.V. to establish the network and knowledge necessary for developing a sense of security and belonging to this system.

The seven 1.5-generation participants in our research showed different modes of settlement. They benefited from different functions related to social protection of MOs, such as first-generation adult movers. In addition, they also shared similar experiences of migration and settling with the German-born group. Anthea's father had migrated from Greece during the guest worker agreement, and his family followed him to Germany when she was 13 years old. She specifically emphasized the differing needs concerning varying migration biographies, especially regarding orientation, familiarity, and belongingness, and the various roles that MOs can play in response. She had spent 40 years of her life in Germany and reflected critically on constructions of belongingness and the impact of MOs on social protection and belonging among different groups of people.

*Because the church, not as a religious institution, but as social contact, has a lot to offer older people who have far fewer opportunities because they are not so mobile anymore,*



*fewer opportunities because they are not socialized in the same way as the following generations. Most of them do not even speak good German. And, based on their intellectual skills, they also have different opportunities. So, this generation is often the guest worker generation who came to Germany; ideally, the second generation, but rather the first generation. Yes, and most of them were illiterates and came from villages and would have had a hard time in Greece, and even harder here. They managed to find their way here, which I find very remarkable, but the older they get and the fewer their contacts, naturally, the natural fluctuation (laughing), the more important these institutions are for these people. And I think that the Greek associations had a peak sometime during the 1980s. They were very active, even if almost all associations were politically motivated. (Anthea, 53 years, from Greece)*

Anthea stressed the role of social networks that people can establish and maintain in the context of MOs, especially for older people who arrived as adults and often lacked German language skills and social networks for support. In this way, she suggested that MOs are particularly important for adult movers who turn to social networks as sources of belonging in the context of trust and confidence as key emotions that contribute to social protection. Personally, Anthea did not consider GriBo e.V. to play an important role for her belongingness or in her approaches to managing social risks. However, she described challenges in constructing her belongingness between strong identification with Greece and familiarity with Germany. Anthea had entered the German educational system as a teenager, and unlike many first-generation migrants, she expressed familiarity and self-confidence in using social services offered by institutions in Germany. She studied law, became a lawyer, and now has two teenagers who attend school. However, due to their continuous ties connecting them with Greece, she identified a lack of place belonging for both her and her children.

*If someone asks, 'Where are you from?' 'I am from Greece'. First, you cannot say so simply, 'I am from Greece'. Because: Yes, my children speak, they speak Greek well, but their Greek is not nearly as good as their German, English, Spanish, or whatever. And I also only know Greece from holidays. And we are still lucky to have family, close family members living in Greece. My siblings live in Greece, so our contact is very close. And this makes this question a bit easier. Because my children found their answer to this question: Home is where you have people who love me! And in Greece some people love them (laughing). That's their family. And here, it's their friends. That is something different. Friends are diverse, but the family is unambiguous and only Greek. So, we try to differentiate in this way because it is not easy to answer this question. And when we are in Greece and someone asks 'Where are you from?' Then it gets complicated. Then you cannot, you do not feel German, but you are not Greek either. (Anthea, 53 years, from Greece)*

Toward the end of this reflection, Anthea reiterated that she lacked place-belongingness with both Germany and Greece, making it very difficult for her to define a sense of belonging. Although Najim was still at the beginning of settling in and utilized services provided by Lomingo e.V. as one way to enhance this destination-oriented process, Anthea drew on GriBo e.V. mainly as one possibility to maintain ties with her place of origin. For her, this form of transnational engagement had become an important element of her identity and belongingness over the years she spent in Germany. Therefore, 1.5 generation participants in this study demonstrated the transition from newcomers seeking orientation and independence to strongly embedded and confident people. MOs played a significant role in shaping these processes, illustrating the affective dimension of social protection for these participants.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Emotions have been shown to play an important role in migration and settlement (Benson 2016; Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021). This article has emphasized that

emotions also shape welfare and social risk-aversion strategies throughout migration trajectories. This argument has been to some extent evident in the large body of literature that has focused on the role of social networks and community bonds for social protection in the context of migration (Bilecen 2020; Dankyi et al. 2017; Faist et al. 2015; Faist 2017; Lafleur and Romero 2018). Drawing on research with migrant organizations, this article has shown the multifunctionality of MOs in shaping approaches to ‘doing social protection’ by evoking various emotions that demonstrate a link between social protection practices and the processes of ‘doing belonging’. Specifically, it has illustrated the various ways MOs contribute to experiences of belonging and assemblages of social protection in direct response to the various needs and challenges across varying migration biographies. Adult movers were primarily involved in finding orientation in the destination context, with various barriers to accessing formal sources of social protection accompanied by feelings of insecurity and powerlessness, but also hope. Including people with migration biographies in the welfare system can increase a sense of hopelessness because it is contrary to their efforts to gain independence and self-efficacy. In this case, MOs are important places that facilitate transnational belonging (Dahinden 2012) and a sense of security, familiarity and confidence based on similar experiences and mutual acceptance and support. As they provide access to social networks and knowledge of destination contexts, MOs ultimately contribute to developing familiarity and belongingness (Antonsich 2010, p. 646ff.; Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021). Therefore, they promote a sense of security and inclusion and provide a special environment for decision making in the field of social protection (Baxter and Glendinning 2013; Wise and Velayutham 2017). People born in Germany to families with migration experiences are usually much more familiar with the institutions of the immigration country and have established wider social networks and thus usually rely less on MOs as sources of social protection. However, for them, MOs provide unique places to establish and maintain emotional bonds with the emigration country of their parents. This is often an important means of family belonging and driving transnational modes of belonging as essential complements to their local incorporation. Although people born in the countries of destination of their parents have no migration experience of their own, migration-related emotions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and powerlessness in search of independence and self-efficacy are integral parts of the collective memory of migrant families and thus affect the next generation. In this context, the ‘1.5 generation’ pointed to how different modes of belonging developed during migration biographies of people and especially their duration of stay in the destination context, and how they were linked to social protection practices. In addition to uncovering changing modes of belonging and how they evolve in the context of participating in MOs, we found that the affective dimension of social protection enacted by MOs allows them to respond appropriately to individual needs and challenges. Consequently, approaches to ‘doing belonging’ are significantly with approaches to ‘doing social protection’, which MOs manage to address in multiple ways. The achievement of independence and associated emotions of self-confidence, security, and esteem are an important emotional objective of migration and an integral aspect of ‘feeling at home’. Therefore, MOs are essential places that support autonomy and a sense of independence, which can also mean offering social services outside of the institutions of immigration countries. In Germany, as in many other countries of immigration, MOs are important sources of social protection, well-being, identity development, and community building for people with migration biographies. Consequently, they should be regarded as essential components of the institutional framework, policies, and concepts of integration in countries of immigration. Like in other countries, there is a dearth of data on civil society organizations involved in supporting people in the processes of relocating and settling (for the UK, see Mayblin and James 2019). In this sense, our study aims to contribute to raising awareness of the importance of migrant organizations as civil society actors that fulfill important societal tasks, which are largely neglected because of the dynamic and often informal character of this field (see also Mayblin and James 2019).

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, K.B. and L.B.; Data curation, L.B.; Formal analysis, L.B. and K.B.; Funding acquisition, K.B.; Investigation, L.B.; Methodology, K.B.; Project administration, K.B.; Software, L.B.; Supervision K.B.; Validation, K.B.; Visualization, L.B.; Writing—original draft, K.B. and L.B.; Writing—review & editing, K.B. and L.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the Mercator Research Center Ruhr (MERCUR) (Grant number Pr-2019-0049). The APC was funded by the Technical University Dortmund.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The research study entitled “Migrant organizations and the co-production of social protection” underlying this article includes human research participants. The study was prospectively approved by the legal office of the Technical University of Dortmund. Ethical approval was not mandatory for this study.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** To protect the privacy of our research participants, research data are not shared.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Although some authors decidedly distinguish between emotion and affect as different aspects of human feelings, in this article we follow scholarship that suggests using them interchangeably (Gorton 2007). Therefore, the “affective” dimension of social protection refers to the emotions at play in the context of managing social risks.
- <sup>2</sup> Especially used in the literature on marketing and branding, emotional attachment here refers to “how one becomes emotionally ‘wired’” in the “emotional environment” of the MO, i.e., the ways people develop emotional bonds through their engagement with their MOs (Donley 1993, p. 5).

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