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Transnational Family Networks of Migrants from Turkey in Europe*

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to investigate the issue of transnational family networks and informal social protection among Turkish migrants living in Germany. By sharing not only emotional and personal matters, but also goods, services, social activities and financial remittances, transnational family networks extend beyond the households of origin to members of the extended families in other countries. The investigation of the ties among transnational families reveals the relationships between migration and informal social protection strategies of migrants that are an integral part of their cross-border social practices. This article examines the protective strategies of Turkish migrants in Germany and their family members in Turkey and Europe. Drawing upon twenty qualitative interviews and ego-centric social network maps collected in Germany, this article illustrates how protective resources flow across borders.

Keywords: Informal Social Protection, Transnational Family Networks, Ego-Centric Network Analysis, Migrants from Turkey, Germany, Europe

Avrupa'daki Türkiyeli Göçmenlerin Ulusaşırı Aile Ağları

Özet: Bu makalenin temel amacı Almanya'da yaşayan Türkiyeli göçmenlerin ulusaşırı aile ağlarını ve bu göçmenler aralarındaki enformel sosyal korunmayı incelemektir. Ulusaşırı aile ağları sadece duygusal ve kişisel konuları paylaşmanın ötesinde aynı zamanda eşya, mal, hizmet, sosyal faaliyetler ve mali yardımlar ile de hem geldikleri ülkelerdeki hem de diğer ülkelerde bulunan geniş aile üyelerini kapsar. Ulusaşırı ailelerin ağlarının incelenmesi, göç ve göçmenlerin sınırlar ötesi toplumsal pratiklerinin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan enformel sosyal korunma stratejileri arasındaki ilişkileri ortaya koymaktadır. Bu makale, Almanya'daki Türk göçmenleri ve onların hem Türkiye hem de Avrupa'daki aile üyelerinin korunma stratejilerini incelemekte, Almanya'da yapılan yirmi nitel görüşme ve ego merkezli sosyal ağ haritasından yola çıkarak koruyucu kaynakların sınır ötesi akışını örneklen-dirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Enformel Sosyal Koruma, Ulusaşırı Aile Ağları, Ego Merkezli Ağ Analizi, Türkiye'den Gelen Göçmenler, Almanya, Avrupa

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Introduction

Süleyman¹ decided to migrate when his school has been sent an invitation letter for recruitment of skilled workers. In 1965 Süleyman went to Germany on a train leaving from Istanbul when he was only eighteen with dreams of a better future as many did in those years. He first arrived in a small city to work in a factory. Later as he learned the language he began to study mechanical engineering at a college. Then he moved to another city to study with better conditions and in the meantime has been receiving letters from his mother who was in search for a spouse. He got married with a girl from his neighborhood due to the approval of his mother. In 1967 they got engaged and in 1970 he went to Turkey for the wedding. Upon their return he dropped out of the college, began to work and they had two sons. He also helped his older brother to migrate to Germany. He is still sending regular financial remittances to his sister in Turkey. Moreover, he sent flight tickets to everyone in his family and friends to visit them and see Germany. He visits his family and friends in Turkey at least three times a year and he describes his relations and return visits as vital in his social life.

While he has been employed in several sectors including tourism, entertainment, trade, and construction, his wife Aylin has been a housewife raising her children and now taking care of her two grandchildren: one in Germany and the other in Turkey. Their younger son is married for the second time living in another smaller town with his family. His daughter from his first wife lives in Turkey however comes to visit him and her grandparents during school breaks. The older single son living with them helping in household tasks, taking care of them while working with his father.

Süleyman's family, like many other families is transnational. Transnational families are conceptualized as having separate living arrangements in two or more countries while pertaining close links with their countries of origin (Baldassar, 2007; Ho, 2002) and create 'a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood'' (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 3). Through sharing not only emotional and personal matters, but also goods, services, care, social activities and financial resources, family networks span beyond the household of origin to members of the broader extended family in other geographies. In other words, 'transnational families, nuclear or extended, are dispersed across international borders, comprising family members who spend time in one country or another, depending on a variety of factors such as work, education, legal requirements for residence permits, and care and support for other family members' (Bernardi, 2011: 788).

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

Their story is an example of how processes of migration have greatly transformed the structure and distribution of protective resources of the family. While the two siblings live in the country of origin, his later formed family lives in Germany with one exception: his older granddaughter. Moreover, this story exemplifies reciprocal nature of resources between different members of the family. Protective resources such as care, information and financial help are exchanged among family members but the extent, direction and frequency differs from one member to another. Often the direction is from Germany to Turkey in terms of financial resources; however differences exist in different areas of protection. Investigating the ties among transnational families reveals the relationships between migration and social protection strategies of migrants that are embedded in their social practices across borders. Since focusing on individual migrants underestimates the complex roles of families to understand their informal social protection strategies a transnational family approach has been adopted. Therefore, the aim of this article is to explore informal protective practices of Turkish transnational family networks that reach beyond multiple state borders in Europe with a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with ego-centric social network analysis.

Social Protection in Transnational Family Networks: The Case of Migrants from Turkey

Social support as a network based notion has been studied extensively (see Song et al., 2011 for an overview). Nevertheless, those studies (Pinquart and Sörensen, 2000; Smith and Christakis, 2008, Uchino et al., 1996; Vaux, 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1990) mainly concerned about subjective well-being and health related issues including emotional dimensions. The term protection, on the other hand, treats supportive resources embedded in interpersonal networks and social policy regulations of the welfare state as interlinked phenomenon. There are four dimensions of social protection: '(1) access to formal protection, (2) portability of vested social security rights between host and origin countries, (3) labor market conditions for migrants in host countries and the recruitment process for migrants in the origin country, and (4) access to informal networks to support migrants and their family members' (Sabates-Wheeler, 2009: 4). Therefore, the term social protection opens up the opportunity to examine the mutual contingencies of formal and informal schemes on securing the livelihoods of migrants. For the purposes of this article the last component will be in focus.

In the last decade a plethora of studies concerning transnational families are conducted. They are interested in immigrant parents with children and extended family members left in the country of origin or distance motherhood

(Hondegneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004) which concentrate on emotional consequences and transformation of power relations between parents and grandparents. Remittances contributing to livelihood of families as well as contact with family members in the country of origin (Schans, 2009) and in other continents (Fog Olwig, 2003) are also further elaborated. Moreover, practices of transnational care is also studied along the dynamics of life-cycles, which may include emigration, marriage, starting work, childbirth, retirement, family reunification or return migration (Bailey and Boyle, 2004).

Turkey has been one of the major providers of labor migrants in Europe beginning with the official labor recruitment agreement with Germany in 1961, followed by other countries such as Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden (Abadan-Unat, 2011; Martin, 2012). 'According to the official records in Turkey, a total of nearly 800,000 workers went to Europe through the TES [Turkish Employment Service] between 1961 and 1974. Of these workers, 649,000 (81%) went to Germany, 56,000 (7%) to France, 37,000 (5%) to Austria, 25,000 (3%) to the Netherlands' (Icduygu, 2012: 14). In addition to labor migrants, there are family reunions, marriage migration and asylum seeking from Turkey in Europe (Icduygu et al., 2001). According to recent estimates, there are currently 4 million Turkish citizens living in Europe. Of these, 80% reside in Germany (Abadan-Unat, 2011: xxii). Their lives and activities have been of interest to many scholars. Although migrants from Turkey have been researched extensively, relatively little is known about their informal social protection practices. Generally in the literature concerning migrants from Turkey, social protection remains as an unexplored issue. Previous studies suggest that the transnational ties between these migrants and their extended families in Turkey are a major source for social protection. Financial remittances along with other types of protection including deferral of inheritance rights, finding of jobs, and housing for the newcomers, resolving family disputes, assistance for relatives aspiring to migrate, arrangements of marriages to facilitate migration are among the most utilized forms of protection across borders (Böcker, 1993; Gitmez and Wilpert, 1987; Razum et al., 2005; Senyurekli and Detzner, 2008).

Migrants' transnational ties with their extended families in Turkey are referred as the major source with outstanding significance for social protection (Böcker 1993; Gestring et al. 2003, 2006; Gitmez and Wilpert 1987; Grütjen 2006; Kalaycioglu and Rittersberger-Tilic, 2000; Zielke-Nadkarni 2003), as well as friends, neighbors, *hemşeri* (people of same place/village origin) (World Bank 2003). The state have a marginal role in protecting the citizens from social risks in Turkey and only certain groups have access to welfare benefits, which is currently under reformation. However, the level of state penetration

is very low and social assistance scheme as a safety net is absent. Although municipalities and civil society organizations have been active in the Turkish welfare regime, the role of the state in protection traditionally has been provided through familial ties (Gestring et al., 2003; Grütjen, 2006). This safety net by families is at the center of lives of migrants from Turkey, even when women are extensively overworking with household tasks, job they are also responsible for nursing care of the chronically ill family member (Zielke-Nadkarni, 2003).

According to the study by Baykara-Krumme (2008), based on the German Ageing Survey, while migrants from Turkey residing in Germany between 40 to 85 years old, have a balanced exchange of financial protection with their children, they are net payers to their parents in Turkey. Adult migrants from Turkey are the least advantageous when compared to other migrant groups in Germany such as migrants from former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, since they give both financial and instrumental support to their children the most but receive such support forms from their parents the least often. The direction of financial flows from Germany to Turkey has been explained by the lower socio-economic status of migrants' parents in the home country. However, there is also evidence that those financial remittances have been complemented by flow of goods and information (Böcker, 1993; Faist, 1998). In addition, a large proportion of Turkish migrants in Germany take care of their grandchildren and a very few of them rely on their parents in Turkey for emotional support (Baykara-Krumme, 2008). Next section will identify the methods and methodology of this study while describing the sample.

Research Methods and Methodology

The empirical material on which this study is based was collected using a sociodemographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and ego-centric network analysis. The sampling was done based on the legal status of migrants rather than on their high degree of transnational involvement. The use of the latter, a dependent variable, is an often criticised flaw of transnational migration studies (see Portes 2001). A total of 20 interviews with an equal gender distribution were conducted in middle sized cities in Germany between 2011 and 2012 for a larger project.² The age of the interviewees ranged from 25 to 85. Most of them were married (12), some were single (4) and others were in a relationship (2), divorced (1) or widowed (1). 11 respondents had at least one child, 9 were unemployed (of these, 2 were university students), 3 were retired

² The name of this project is 'Transnationality and the Unequal Distribution of Informal Social Protection'. Funded by the German Research Foundation, it also collected data from migrants with Poland and Kazakhstan origins as well as data from various sources such as document analysis, expert interviews and matched interviews with respondents' significant others in the respective countries.

and 8 were working in sectors such as catering, construction, security, real estate and sales. All of the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the interviewer's and the interviewees' native language. The interviews covered migration stories and experiences as well as the cross-border activities of labour migrants and asylum seekers from Turkey. General information on social protection, familial interactions and values, friendships, general values and life goals was collected as well. Most significantly, the interviews explored the respondents' social relations and the people with whom they exchange protective resources. The qualitative data obtained through the interviews allow for a detailed examination not only of the respondents' ideas of migration, their ongoing relations with extended family members in different geographic locales, friends and other significant persons, but also of how these relations are formed and transformed by the migration processes. These data provide a rich source of information on the features of informal social protection and enable the researcher to compare cross-border relations as well as relations within Germany.

Ego-centric network analysis is used to examine migrants' social ties to identify the structure of their relations with respect to social protection. Ego-centric networks are "networks consisting of a single actor (ego) together with the actors they are connected to (alters) and all the links among those alters" (Everett and Borgatti, 2005: 31). A combination of network analysis and semi-structured interviews allows for an even better understanding of the dynamics of these relations (Bilecen 2012, 2013) .

The egos (i.e. the interviewees) were asked about their relationships to those on whom they can rely when they are in need of protection. While the name generator question was asked, the respondents were given a network chart with four concentric circles of importance so that comparable and quantifiable data could be collected (Antonucci, 1986). The concept of 'importance' was not pre-defined. Instead, the interviewees were asked to reflect upon the meaning of the term (Bernardi, 2011). Next, the respondents were asked about alter–alter relations and based on their answers structural analyses of networks were generated using the software VennMaker. This program displays the relations between actors as nodes and the protective resources shared between them as differently coloured arrows. The purpose of the program is to provide a simple and faster way to code, visualize and analyze social networks (Gamper et al., 2011). Once the network charts were completed, several questions about their *alteri* were asked concerning age, gender, citizenship, location, frequency of contact, duration of relationship, type of relation and other aspects to further investigate the relationships the respondents maintain. For the purposes of this article, only family relations were taken into account during analysis. The density of these networks is 1,

which means that every actor knows all the others, so information is shared and potential resources are exploited quickly, with the result that the information quickly becomes redundant. A high network density is associated with a high degree of social protection and solidarity in the form of steady and long-term relationships, stricter constraints and pressure to conform to the group rules and expectations (Burt, 1992; Fischer, 1982).

In the last step, an 18-item questionnaire on social protection was filled in interactively when the respondents simultaneously evaluated their protective relations from a subjective perspective. Four areas of social protection were covered in this step: (1) exchange of information (on employment, education, health, legal status, legal matters); (2) care relations (help with household chores, moving house, emergency support, child care, elderly care, health care); (3) financial protection (amount and frequency of money transfers), and (4) social activities (such as having meals or coffee together, going to the cinema, museums and cafés, playing sports together, having common hobbies). The questions relating to these areas were repeated four times to measure both the perceived and the actual level of protection as well as the direction of protection (i.e. whether these forms of protection were provided or received). The next section analyses actual cross-border protection relations of the respondents in both directions.

Analysis: What Kind of Protection is Exchanged Between Whom?

Bivariate results indicate that social activities are the most exchanged type of social protection both within Germany and across borders, with equal incoming and outgoing rates due to the fact that the respondents perceive social activities such as having meals, coffee or tea and doing sports as something that is done together. The level of cross-border social activity is also very high compared to the other types of protection, which is remarkable considering the physical distance. Nevertheless, cross-border social activities include not only return visits or visiting each other, talking to each other and having tea or meals together, but also Skype conversations, instant messaging using smartphones and contact via Facebook (for the younger generation) as well as phone calls (mostly for the older generation).

Another migrant interviewed for the study was Ali. He was born in Germany and grew up in Turkey. Later he re-migrated to Germany, where he now lives with his wife and his three year-old daughter. This is what he said during the interview:

My in-laws live in Berlin. On average we see each other once a month and we call each other on a regular basis. When they miss their granddaughter or when we need someone to help us take care of her they just come by train to spend some time with us and stay at our home. [...] We go to

playgrounds together and things like that. [...] My parents and my sister, on the other hand, live in Turkey [...] all in different cities. With my sister [who is in her early twenties], I exchange text messages or we connect via Facebook and we talk about the news and social events in our lives, but when we want to talk to our parents we use the phone or we go to Turkey to visit them and to go on holidays³.

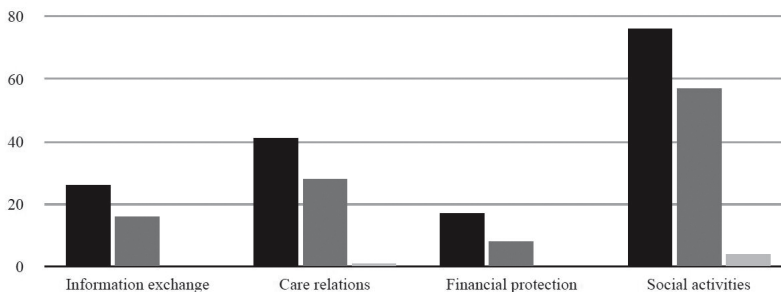
Berrin, a recently married second-generation migrant, has a similar story to tell about her parents and parents-in-law, who live in different states, about their social activities in Germany and about her younger brother in Turkey:

Since we got married [in 2010] I have been living here [in Bremen] with my husband and we regularly go to have dinner or Sunday breakfast with my parents-in-law when all the family members who live here get together, whereas my parents live in Duisburg, so I can't go to see them as often as the other side of my current family. I talk to them on the phone regularly and my brother studies in Turkey. He comes here regularly [...] we play football together. [...] We are on Facebook and now almost everyone has [smartphones].

The second most utilized type of social protection is care relations. Care relations are various types of activities including child care, health care, elderly care, assistance with household chores and emergency support.⁴ The level of both given and received care relations is higher among family members in Germany compared to those residing in Turkey. When these protective activities are examined more closely, it becomes obvious that the respondents both receive and provide the most help with household chores and in cases of non-serious illness. A closer look at the social network chart shows that these types of care are usually provided by either the spouse or the parents and are usually received by the children or the spouse. The case of Sema clearly illustrates this:

I wouldn't bother my sisters in Turkey if I just had the flu. [...] My mother is here, too. She would probably make some soup for me. [...] They [her sisters] would only come if I needed an operation or something major like that.

Figure 1: Protective resources received from family members (N = 185)

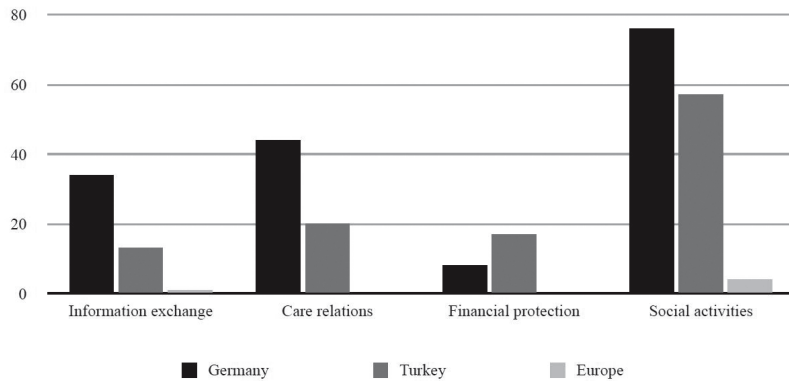


³ All the interviews are conducted in Turkish and translated by the author.

⁴ See Figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix for a detailed operationalization of social protection and the analysis.

With regard to family members in Germany, Figures 1 and 2 show that the respondents provide slightly more care to their family members in Germany than they receive, whereas they receive more care from the family members in Turkey than they provide. Occasional child care and help with household chores are the most received types of care from family members in Turkey. While filling in the protection questionnaire the respondents reflected upon their relations. Household chores, as operationalised in this investigation, were considered as being related to the households they have in both places, meaning either that the respondents were visited by their parents who then helped them with household chores in Germany (cooking, grocery shopping, tidying up, decorating their homes), or that their parents or siblings were taking care of house-related work in Turkey such as managing their property while they were away. Similarly, when respondents visit their family members in Turkey, they help them with household chores as well. With regard to household chores, it was found that the respondents provide slightly more help than they receive because they are able to visit more often. Moreover, occasional child care, as operationalised here, is interpreted as grandparents or siblings taking care of their children when they see each other (which requires physical presence).

Third, information exchange occurs with various family members in various geographical locales. It includes the exchange of information on employment, health, legal status, legal matters and education. As with care relations, information exchange occurs more frequently among family members who live in Germany and the respondents provide more information than they receive. Similarly, as with the care relations, they receive more information from the family members living in Turkey than they provide. Most of the information respondents receive is information on employment and the information they provide to their family members in Germany is related to legal matters. This can be explained by the fact that one of the respondents is studying for a law degree and another has a law degree but does not practise law. Moreover, almost half of the sample were unemployed or looking for work, so to seeking information about employment seems to be a crucial issue for them. Again, the type of information most received from family members in Turkey is information on legal matters. This may be due to the fact that some of the respondents try to find such information because they are interested in investing in Turkey. Furthermore, the three asylum seekers among the respondents are also interested in legal matters in Turkey although they do not go there to visit people. They also provide their relatives in other European countries such as Sweden and France with information about German rules and regulations.

Figure 2. Protective resources provided to family members (N = 185)

The analysis of financial protection shows interesting results as well. Respondents receive more actual money transfers from Germany and send more to Turkey, a finding that is consistent with those of previous studies such as Böcker (1993) and Schans (2009). However, what has not been shown before is that they also receive financial assistance from their family members in Turkey, although less than they provide. For instance, a closer look at the social network chart and the transcribed interviews shows that when Aylin was in Turkey and needed money but did not have access to her bank account she received more than €500 from her sister. When she returned to Germany she sent the money back to her sister. However, most of the financial assistance received from Turkey is provided on an irregular basis – that is, only when it is needed. Also, with the one exception of Aylin, amounts sent never exceed €500. Moreover, financial assistance for family and friends in Turkey is usually provided on an irregular basis, with the exception of those whose siblings are still being educated in Turkey. Some respondents send money regularly, such as in the form of a monthly payment for educational purposes. Financial assistance among family members in Germany is provided on an irregular basis and the amounts provided usually do not exceed €500. Only two respondents – Berrin and Bora, who recently got married – received financial assistance from their parents; Berrin because she is currently unemployed and Bora because he works part-time.

Finally, the respondents who live in Europe are either siblings of first-generation immigrants or cousins of second-generation immigrants. It is acknowledged that they play a significant role in protecting the respondents' li-

velelihoods, but actually the level of protective activity is rather low, with the exception of social activities. The respondents exchange emails and phone calls with those of their family members who are scattered across Europe and they perceive this as social activity and attach a certain importance to such exchanges. Moreover, one of the respondents stated that when she was seriously ill she received assistance through regular phone calls which allowed her to talk about the illness and exchange ideas.

Concluding Remarks

This article has investigated the informal social protection practices that migrants from Turkey use within their transnational family networks. Four areas of protection have been identified: information exchange, care relations, financial protection and social activities. It has been shown that the types of protection used differ depending on the nature of the relation. Moreover, complementary to the research on transnational families and informal transnational protection, this paper has illustrated the direction and volume of different types of protection.

The family is of paramount significance in the lives of migrants from Turkey, regardless of where it is located. As the analysis has shown, the family network offers a range of protective resources. Future research would benefit from focusing on the formal aspects of social protection such as welfare state regulations, on the ways they are used by migrants across borders and on whether or not as well as the ways in which they play a role in securing the livelihoods of migrants.

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Appendix

Figure 3. Received protective resources from family members in detail (N=185)

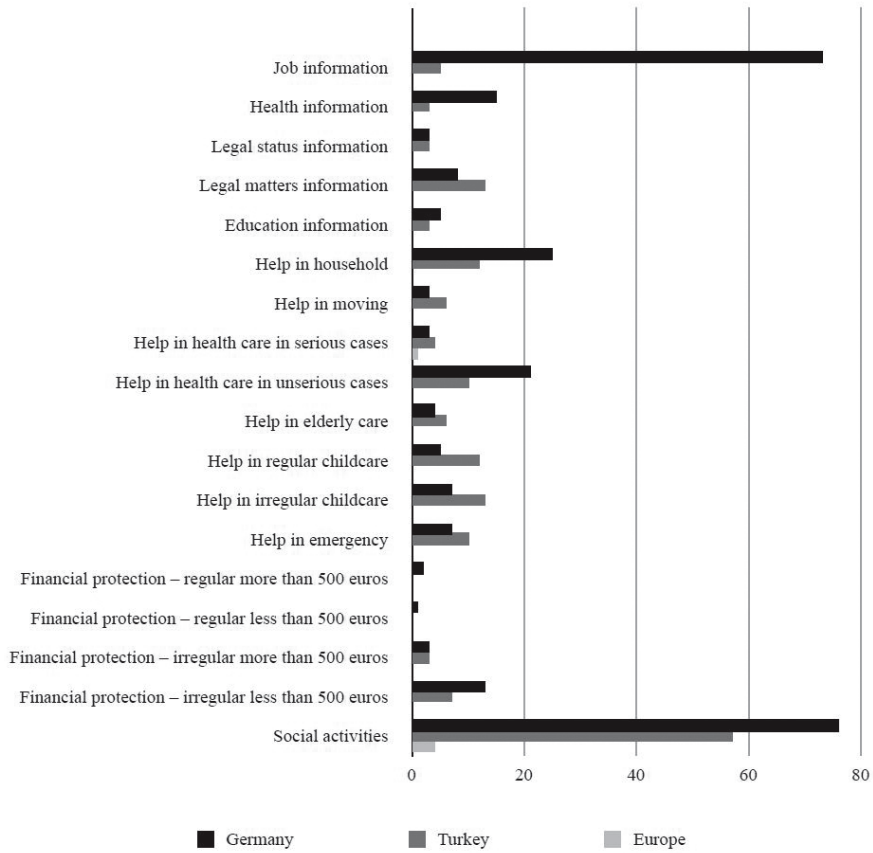


Figure 4. Given protective resources to family members in detail (N=185)