

The variations in the access to social benefits across non-working adults: A detailed analysis on the differences between natives and migrants in six European countries¹

Erhan Özdemir

Gent University Department of Sociology, Belgium

The main purpose of this study is to examine the variations in the coverage of the access to social benefits in cash for the non-employed individuals within active working age groups between the native-born individuals and the immigrants in Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and United Kingdom. Besides, exploring the differentiation in the amount of the social benefits receipts between the natives and the foreign-born individuals is the second objective of the study. In sum, the analyses of this study attempt to investigate the inequality in the generosity of the welfare state implementations across natives and the immigrant groups in these six selected European countries with different welfare state characteristics. With this regard, the study examines the differences between the native population and EU-born individuals, and the ones with non-EU origins separately.

The research question of the study is *“Is migration background among the main socio-demographic factors, which influence the differentiation in the social benefits receipts and the social benefits dependency in Western European countries?”* In this respect, the first hypothesis of the study is *“The immigrants, who were unemployed or inactive other than retired and studying in the selected Western European countries, are less likely to access social benefits relative to their native-born counterparts.”* (H1). With this regard, the second hypothesis to be tested in the study is *“Even if they have access to those social transfers in cash, the amount of receipts for the non-working immigrants is less than the transfers paid to the non-working native-born individuals.”* (H2).

The target population of the analysis is the individuals in 25-59 age group, who were not in education and who had spent at least one month in unemployment or inactivity other than retirement or studying in the reference income year. The methodological arguments for the selection of this target group are discussed in the study. The data source of the study is the EU-SILC cross-sectional data sets between years 2005 and 2016. The reason is that, the EU-SILC is the most comprehensive and comparable data source for income and living conditions including very detailed data on income by employment, social transfers and other income sources. Furthermore, the 12-month economic activity history of the individuals during the reference income year is one of the most important assets of the EU-SILC data. Therefore, the analysis of the study refers to 2004-2015 reference income period. The study involves literature review, descriptive analysis of the selected labour market and socio-demographic background characteristics of the individuals, and multivariate analyses. Two multivariate analysis methods are used in the study. To explore the effects of the socio-economic factors determining the status of receiving social benefits (where receiving selected social benefits during the reference income year is the dependent variable) multilevel mixed effects logistic regression technique is implemented (where the reference income year are the units for the random effects). Multilevel mixed effects linear regressions is the second multivariate analysis technique (in which again reference income years are in the random effects equation) to examine the differentiation in the amount of social benefits receipts of the non-working people; the dependent variable of this set of analyses is the average monthly benefits receipts per month spent in non-work during the reference income year. Multilevel regression models are used in order to control the random effects of the years with different macro-economic features during the selected period. In both of these sets of multivariate analysis, a relatively big set of independent variables is used, which covers main socio-demographic characteristic, migration background, previous labour market

¹ This study is one of the chapters of the ongoing PhD. Study titled “Socio-Economic Disparities in the Integration Process of Immigrants in Western Europe: A Comparative Study for Six EU Countries” in Gent University Department of Sociology, supervised by Prof. Dr. Bart Van de Putte.

experience, household characteristics and related income variables. All the analyses are conducted by using “Multilevel Mixed Effects” modules of the STATA.

The findings demonstrate that, women, the ones with lower education levels, and the non-EU born individuals with a non-EU country nationality (which is foreign-born foreign country citizens in Germany) are the groups, which are least likely to access benefits in these six countries. Moreover, the proportion of unemployment benefits within the overall social benefits receipts of the individual (mostly based on their previous employment) is the main determinant for the final amount of the receipts. The findings also show that immigrants’ longer residence is not always a guarantee in accessing social benefits during non-work. The analysis results partially confirm the assumptions of H1 as the disadvantage of overall foreign-born population in accessing social benefits is the case in Belgium and the UK, whereas the effect is limited to certain migrant groups in Germany, France, Sweden and the UK, and there is no ethnic gap in the Netherlands. H2, which argues the gap in the amount of social benefits receipts between the migrants and the native-born population, is supported by the analysis results in all study countries as the major migrant populations are observed to face some sort of ethnic penalty.