

Accessing Household Benefits Across Europe: Is Migration Neutrality reached over time?

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According to established results, an overall scenario of migration neutrality (Recchi 2016) emerges when comparing the use of welfare of migrants with that of natives within European countries (Medgyesi and Poloskei 2013; Juravle et al. 2013; Zimmermann et al. 2012). Differences between natives and migrants prove to be either not significant, or, when statistically significant, substantially very small. Nonetheless, this picture may change if one considers different groups of migrants along the time spent in the country of destination, and even over generations. Building on recent results (Eugster 2018; Huber and Oberdabernig 2016; Maquet, Maestri and Thévenot 2016; Hooijer and Picot 2015), this paper explores intra-EU migrants' access to welfare benefits along the time spent in the country of destination by using the lens of migration neutrality, rather than that of ethnic penalty. Migration neutrality addresses the irrelevance of citizenship as a predictor of social outcomes and, most notably, of the risk of falling into social exclusion (Recchi 2016). We adapt this concept to study the access to welfare benefits, and define migration neutrality considering the country of birth rather than citizenship. Our aim is to assess whether and to what extent migration neutrality holds for intra-EU migrants when considering the length of residence, and then expecting that the longer the length of residence, the more likely it is to observe migration neutrality.

Our main research questions are the following: Do intra-EU migrants enjoy migration neutrality? If so, are long-term migrants more likely to access welfare benefits as easily as natives, and more easily than newly arrived migrants? Can differentiated accessibilities be detected across different groups of destination countries, on the basis of their welfare schemes? Given the scarcity of longitudinal data on migrants (especially for cross-country comparisons), the time dimension is operationalized along two time thresholds. On the one hand, the access to benefits is explored along years of residence, picking the first five years as a relevant threshold due to the EU legal framework. On the other hand, the welfare use of first generation migrants is compared to that of second generation migrants, corresponding to natives with foreign-born parents. Therefore, three groups of migrants will be analysed (the newly arrived, the long-term migrants and the second generations) as they were in 2011, by using the 2011 *ad-hoc* module of the EU-SILC database on *Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantages*, which concerns migrant and national populations aged 18-65.

Our analysis regards twelve European destination countries, among those representing the main destinations of mobile EU citizens, which also embody four types of welfare regimes: Continental (Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland), Southern (Italy and Spain), Liberal (Ireland and the United Kingdom) and Nordic (Finland, Norway, Sweden) (Esping-Andersen 1990; Ferrera 1996). Since the EU-SILC data do not provide information on the single country of birth, all mobile European citizens are analysed jointly. As for the type of benefits we examine, previous examples of comparisons across countries analysed each cash benefit available in EU-SILC separately (Medgyesi and Poloskei 2013; Zimmermann et al. 2012), while Huber and Oberdabernig (2016) grouped all benefits into either individual or household benefits. The latter group, in particular family/child-related and housing benefits, stand out for presenting higher rates of receipts among migrants as compared to natives (Kaczmarczyk and Rapoport 2014). Therefore, our analysis will concern household benefits, including both family and housing benefits but excluding minimum income schemes, which represent a smaller sample in the dataset.

The analysis has two steps. Firstly, migration neutrality is assessed through odds ratios, as proposed by Recchi (2016). In particular, the odds ratios of migrant households are calculated over years of residence (before and after the first 5 years) and generations (first versus second generation). Contrary to expectations, our results suggest that the newly arrived migrants are closer to natives in their

use of welfare, while second generations and long-term migrants present a higher probability to access household benefits compared to natives. However, this analysis – although providing a straightforward benchmark for assessing differences between migrants and nationals (Recchi 2016) – does not give a conclusive answer to our questions, since these compare not only migrants to natives, but also long-term migrants to newly arrived to second generations. Hence, we move a step forward by controlling for confounding factors such as age, gender, education, employment status and household structure. Furthermore, a key control variable at the country level has been considered, namely, the type of welfare regime of the hosting country, as previously described. Our second step of analysis consists of a logit regression in which all the above-mentioned control variables are taken into account, and the key explanatory variable is the length of residence (newly arrived, long-term migrants and second generations) as compared to being natives of the hosting country. The dependent variable is the probability to receive family or housing benefits, grouped together, against no benefit.

The predicted probabilities overturn the results we got from the odds ratios analysis and allow to confirm the expectation of migration neutrality over time, depicting an even better-than-expected situation. Once controlled for the household, individual and country characteristics, the newly arrived intra-EU migrants turn out to be the only group consistently enjoying a lower probability to access household benefits, as compared to natives, while second generations and long term migrants enjoy the same probability as natives, as for the access to household benefits. As for the differences in the probability between welfare regimes, and contrary to the findings of Osterman, Palme and Ruhs (2019), who do not detect differences across welfare regimes, our results suggest a significantly lower access to benefits in Southern European countries as compared to countries in other welfare regimes. This difference does not impact on migration neutrality, because also natives have a reduced access to household benefits in Southern Europe. This can be explained by considering the traditionally higher reliance on family resources instead of state transfers typical of the Southern, familistic model of welfare, which impacts on natives and migrants alike.

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