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Benefits by Gender: Determinants of Welfare Accessibility for Migrant Women in Western Europe

Abstract

European countries accommodate, on average, 1,000 to 2,000 immigrants per year . Since immigration is a continuous occurrence within Europe, regulations regarding immigrant rights and privileges have been introduced. The European Union (EU) has developed legislation such as Council Regulation 1612/68 on Free Movement of Workers and the Maastricht Treaty to ensure equal access, establishment, and employment for incoming persons regardless of their natural place of origin, and equalize available benefits for migrants between member states. Why are some countries more generous to migrant women than others? Specifically what are the determinants of accessibility to social welfare benefits to migrant women?

Keywords

Welfare

Benefits by Gender: Determinants of Welfare Accessibility for Migrant Women in Western Europe

European countries accommodate, on average, 1,000 to 2,000 immigrants per year (OECD 1998, OECD 1996).^[1] Since immigration is a continuous occurrence within Europe, regulations regarding immigrant rights and privileges have been introduced. The European Union (EU) has developed legislation such as Council Regulation 1612/68 on Free Movement of Workers and the Maastricht Treaty to ensure equal access, establishment, and employment for incoming persons regardless of their natural place of origin, and equalize available benefits for migrants between member states (Papademetriou 1996, Cousins 1999). In theory, this allows migrants within EU countries to receive the same uniform social benefits as national citizens (Sales and Gregory 1996, European Economic Council 1968). Despite these “equal opportunity” guidelines, however, female migrants^[2] experience difficulties in accessing benefits in some EU countries^[3] (Cochrane 1993, Ackers 1996, Knocke 1995, Lichter 1983, Ruggie 1989, O'Connor 1993, Pedraza 1991, OECD 1996, Social Statistics 1995). Why are some countries more generous to migrant women than others? Specifically what are the determinants of accessibility to social welfare benefits to migrant women?

Discussion of the Problem

Immigration statistics reveal inequalities of rights and privileges between male and female migrants. According to OECD data, labor force participation rates among migrant women are generally lower than among migrant men, with most employment opportunities for migrant women limited to part-time jobs within domestic service or laborer sectors (Knocke 1995, OECD 1998, Siaroff 1994). As a result, on average, migrant men are paid more than migrant women (O'Connor 1993). Though migrant women throughout the EU appear to be uniformly disadvantaged, the degree of gender discrimination varies considerably between member states. See Figure 1. Similar employment variation occurs with overall female populations: employment-population ratios for women in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark range from 68% to 76%, whereas in Italy, Ireland, and Spain, the employment percentages range from 35% to 27% (Siaroff 1994). In addition to employment discrimination, research reveals migrant women often face discriminatory immigration and social policies (O'Connor 1993, Pedraza 1991, Knocke 1995).

Migrant women entering certain EU states, such as Germany, have no immediate rights of their own; there is a mandatory grace period before these women are considered eligible to obtain legal rights and privileges (Sales and Gregory 1996). Grace periods allowing a migrant woman's accessibility to work permits, living visa, and citizenship rights are dependent upon the status of her spouse. If a migrant woman's spouse can prove himself financially capable of providing for his family and, in some cases, has evidence of permanent residence, the migrant wife may legally enter the particular country as a temporary citizen. If granted permission to migrate, the woman must then demonstrate her own financial independence via evidence of permanent employment before a state may grant permanent legal citizenship status (Knocke 1995, Sales and Gregory 1996, Ackers 1996, Lichter 1983). The lengths of grace periods vary, ranging from eighteen months to three years in Greece and Spain^[4] to a minimum of three years in Germany. On the other hand, countries such as Sweden and Denmark^[5] have no grace periods -- immediate legal status is allowed for all migrants (Knocke 1995). The absence, or varying duration, of grace periods again demonstrates how discrimination for female migrants varies considerably between EU member states.

Immigration policy, such as grace periods, tends to be directed towards married migrant women. According to a source from the EU the “existing legislation on migrants has been drafted on the assumption that, generally, migrant workers are men, and tends to see migrant women as dependent

[1] Immigrants, although definitions vary, are being defined in this study as incoming foreigners planning to settle, either temporarily or permanently, within a country different from their place of origin.

[2] Of the immigrant population, women constitute approximately one-half (Pedraza, S. 1991; Ackers, L. 1996).

[3] This is in comparison to both naturalized citizens and migrant males where difficulties in benefit accessibility are not quite as dramatic.

[4] Grace periods in both Spain and Greece were recently abolished. The recent prohibition still demonstrates women migrants are subject to additional standards.

[5] Until 1992, Denmark had an open door policy for all immigrants -- now open door policy only applies to EU/EC citizens (Knocke, W. 1995).

spouses" (ECC 1988, Knocke 1995, Ackers 1996). Research, however, indicates only 17% of migrant women claim to be married and/or planning to rejoin a spouse in a host state; the majority of the female migrant population classifies as single, divorced, or widowed (Lichter 1983, Ackers 1996). Furthermore, disregarding marital status, migrant women report to be (or become upon arrival) the main wage earner of the family: most women migrants, like their male counterparts, plan to work within their host-state. Although intentions of both male and female migrants are identical, men receive full rights and privileges whereas women may, if at all, receive "derived" rights—privileges that are entitled to them via their spouse (Pedraza 1991, Knocke 1995, Morokvasic 1983, Lichter 1983, OECD 1998). In this light, variation of welfare and employment access for migrant women within the EU becomes important. If men and women migrants report seeking employment at equal rates, both genders should be entitled to equal access of rights and benefits as outlined by EU/EC guidelines. EU guidelines entitle all migrants to the same social benefits as national workers in addition to equal access to social benefits (European Economic Council 1968, European Economic Council 1975). Since the overarching EU policy is the same, other factors can explain differences in the welfare gender gap among EU member states.

Theories Behind Welfare Accessibility

Several bodies of research have identified factors that correlate with welfare accessibility. Each variable can be placed into one of three explanatory categories: the state of immigration, the state of welfare, and the state of feminism. The state of immigration is a compilation of various aspects ranging from size of immigrant population to public opinion. Welfare accessibility, when discussed in terms of immigration, can be linked to citizenship classification. T.H. Marshall (1964) gives a concrete definition of citizenship as "bestowed upon those who are full members of the community." The definition of "full community" from country to country, however, varies—it may apply to those who work, to those who pay taxes, and/or to those who presently reside in a country (Sales and Gregory 1996, Faist 1995). Because definition varies, naturalization processes and citizen rights vary by country as well. Similarly, the ease or rigidity of benefit access depends upon how each country views its immigrant population.

The literature also suggests the public fear of cultural unbalance rises with the size of the immigrant population. A large proportion of immigrants within a country may lead the non-migrant population to feel their country's culture and ethnic balance to be threatened. As a result, studies show that higher immigration populations are often associated with tight border control and strict citizenship requirements (Golini et al. 1993, Schram et al. 1998). This suggests the first hypothesis, *that the larger the immigrant population in a country, the lower the access to welfare benefits for migrant women.*

Explanations that emphasize the state of welfare examine both the structural and opinion-based aspects of welfare. Welfare can be defined as a system that eases social distress to maintain a basic standard of living (Pringle 1998, Esping-Andersen 1990). Yet recipients of welfare must fit a specific definition of those worthy of receiving help (Pringle 1998, Taylor-Gooby 1985). The literature suggests three variables that may explain welfare generosity: percent GDP spent on welfare, percent Catholic, and degree of leftism.

Research suggests the more a state allocates to welfare spending (as percent of GDP), the wider the distribution of public goods and services (Esping-Andersen 1990, Rose 1995, Schram et al. 1998, Brochmann 1993, Gough et al. 1997). If greater public goods are available, more benefits would be potentially available to migrants. Research suggests the greater total welfare available for distribution, the fewer restrictions placed on recipients: hence welfare can be more easily distributed to both nationals and migrants (Schram et al. 1993). This suggests a second hypothesis, *that the greater the percent of GDP spent on welfare, the greater the access to social welfare benefits for migrant women.*

A third determinant of welfare accessibility for migrant women is percent Roman Catholic Church identification. Literature suggests that the greater the degree of Catholic Church identification within a state, the less total availability of social welfare benefits. This is associated with the Catholic Church's emphasis on the privatization of social services (McLaughlin, E. 1993, Esping-Andersen, G. 1990). Welfare is defined by the Catholic Church as voluntary charity—the intended giving from family or community. Participation in welfare is then regulated by the social order instead of the government, those who "have" give to those who "have not" (McLaughlin 1993). Moreover, strong levels of Catholic Church participation are associated with stronger traditional-conservative welfare regimes. A conservative welfare regime gives central government a smaller role in welfare distribution. Because historically the Catholic Church believes welfare distribution is based upon social order (i.e. keeping the "rich" wealthy and the "indigent" poor), governments of strong Catholic countries would not participate in the regulation of economic equality (Esping-Andersen 1990, McLaughlin 1993). If welfare benefits via government are decreased, it is probable that welfare will be less available for immigrants as welfare distribution would be primarily based on voluntary contributions (which may not be a consistent donation). Furthermore, the Catholic Church tends to associate the family structure with patriarchy: men are considered the "breadwinners" of the family unit (McLaughlin 1993, Manning 1997). Hence, in strongly Catholic countries, benefits tend to be granted to men. This suggests the third hypothesis, *that the greater the Catholic Church membership, the lesser the access to social welfare benefits for migrant women.*

Ideology of a country is another important aspect to consider as an indicator of welfare accessibility in that leftist countries tend to be liberal in welfare policy and distribution (Esping-Andersen 1990, George and Wilding 1976). According to scholars, there are various concrete ways to measure leftism. The first, the degree of unionization within a country, measures leftism under the argument that ideology blends with industrial democracy. For example, unions can increase economic income for both the country and individuals. Additionally, unions create further public access to welfare and benefit programs. Since unions produce further opportunities for public access to employment, better income, and benefit programs, countries with a large number of labor unions tend to have greater public access to welfare (OECD 1996, Jenkins 1973). Hence the fourth hypothesis, *the more unionized a society, the greater the access to social welfare benefits for migrant women.*

The second measure of leftism, gross personal per capita income, proposes that the greater the individual income, the more liberal-minded the country. Prosperous countries tend to have the resources to focus more on post-material values instead of survival. Economic growth also coincides with increases in public awareness of quality of life issues: these results indicate to scholars that societies of individuals with higher levels of income tend to be leftist (Inglehart 1990, Inglehart 1977). Leftism also tends to coincide with liberal welfare policies. In other words, the more leftist a country, the more likely that country to have a liberal welfare policy—greater benefits are accessible to a wide range of persons. Hence the fifth hypothesis, *that the higher the individual per capita income of a country, the higher the level of welfare accessibility for migrant women.*

Finally, explanations that focus on the state of feminism emphasize the relationship between women and their perceived role in society. The societal role of women varies in each case—women can be viewed as financially dependent, self-reliant, mothers, wives, or workers. Depending on the perceived role, women gain or lose welfare accessibility. If perceived as mothers and wives, women may be excluded from benefits, whereas if perceived as workers, accessibility may increase (Pringle 1998, Taylor-Gooby 1985). Moreover, the literature indicates that the greater the participation of women within a country's workforce, the more likely the citizens of that country to support feminist ideals. A larger proportion of working women assists the movement of a society from traditional to less traditional ideals as high employment rates of women appear to correlate with an increase in the perception of women as independent and self-reliant entities (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993, Plutzer 1988, Klein 1987, Social Statistics 1995). As theory suggests, a large population of women in the work force is highly correlated with an increase in women's overall economic resources, which in turn increases women's power within the family structure and society (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993, Klein 1987, Norris 1987, Gerson 1987). Moreover, countries with high percentages of women

workers, tend to distribute family benefits to mothers as opposed to fathers. Thus, in countries with a high desirability for female work, the more likely women are to receive welfare benefits (Siaroff 1994). This suggests the sixth hypothesis, *that the greater percentage of women participating in the workforce, the greater the access to social welfare benefits for migrant women.*

Research Design

Because EU regulations apply to all EU member states, it is important to include all current EU countries to determine which variables explain welfare accessibility for migrant women. EU countries include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and UK. Using a most similar system comparative approach is appropriate, as all 15 countries are very comparable to each other. All countries included are subject to the same EU regulation standards involving immigration and welfare. They differ, however, in the de facto level of welfare accessibility for migrant women.

The dependent variable is measured via a scale of welfare accessibility for migrant women. Measured in a positive direction, the scale ranks countries with a high score as high welfare accessibility for migrant women whereas countries with low scores would indicate low welfare accessibility. This scale consists of five equal components: immigration regulations, equal rights regulations, degree of welfare benefits, eligibility regulations, and restrictions or disincentives for migrant women (Esping-Andersen 1990). Each category was scored by a system of positive points.

Immigration regulations consist of mandates such as work permits, resident permits, language or residential requirements, or citizenship requirements (Esping-Andersen 1990, United Nations 1995, Cousins 1999, Pringle 1998). A score of zero was given to countries labeled as having very strict immigration regulations—these countries would have at least two restrictive clauses of either language requirement, work permit, residence permit, age provision, or marital status provision. A score of one was given to countries that only had one restrictive clause. Finally, a score of two was given to countries that had no restrictive clauses for immigration.

Equal rights regulations consist of two separate aspects; one, whether gender discrimination is prohibited by law and two, if gender discrimination can be tried in a court of law (United Nations 1995). A score of zero was given if a country had neither a government document prohibiting gender discrimination nor legal action available for gender discrimination. A score of one was allocated if a country had one of the above legal clauses. Lastly, a score of two was given if a country had both governmental prohibition and legal action for gender discrimination.

Degree of benefits included all benefit options pertinent to migrant women such as family benefits, unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, and disability benefits (United Nations 1995). Pension benefits were omitted because these involve a long-term allowance and this study measures the access to immediate benefits. A score of zero was given to countries that did not have any of the above basic benefits. A score of one was assigned if a country only offered the above basic benefits. If a country offered extra benefits that would further assist migrant women, such as emergency relief, housing, living allowance, child rearing, or geriatric care allowance, the country was allocated two points. Extra benefits are viewed as favorable in that more opportunities to receive welfare can increase migrant women's accessibility.

Eligibility requirements are the various stipulations for each welfare benefit category (Synder 1992). A score of zero was given if a country had a time limit (i.e. have to work "x" number of days or have to be sick "x" number of days) to qualify for access to benefits, and if there was a "group" requirement (i.e. benefits only applicable to specific groups such as men, permanent residents, or married individuals). A score of one was given if a country had one of the above restrictions. Finally, a score of two was given if a country had neither of these restrictions.

Disincentives are short welfare pay periods or reduced benefit pay after a specific time period, as well as preferential treatment to specific groups (Synder 1992). ^[6] A score of zero was given to country with short pay periods that provided for less than 365 days and had a group preference. A score of one was given to a country if it had one of the above limitations. Lastly, a score of two was allocated if a country had neither of the above restrictions.

Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, France, and the Netherlands all scored as highly accessible to welfare benefits for migrant women with scores ranging from 7 to 9. The middle category ranges in score from 5 to 6. Finally the low accessible countries, Greece, Italy, Ireland, had scores of 3 to 4. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of the scored welfare accessibility index. Table 2 illustrates the ranked order of countries from high accessibility to low accessibility.

Table 1: Scored Breakdown of the Dependent Variable Scale^[7]

Country	Immigration Regulations	Equal Rights Regulations	Degree of Benefits	Eligibility Requirements	Restrictions	TOTAL
Finland	1	2	2	2	2	9
Sweden	1	2	2	2	2	9
Luxembourg	2	1	2	2	1	8
France	2	2	1	1	1	7
Netherlands	2	1	1	1	2	7
Denmark	1	2	1	1	1	6
Germany	0	1	1	2	2	6
United Kingdom	2	1	1	1	1	6
Austria	0	1	2	0	2	5
Belgium	1	1	1	2	0	5
Portugal	1	2	1	1	0	5
Spain	0	2	1	0	2	5
Italy	2	0	1	0	1	4
Greece	2	0	1	0	1	4
Ireland	1	0	1	0	1	3

Table 2: Rankings of Welfare Accessibility

COUNTRY	RANKED WELFARE ACCESSIBILITY SCORE
Finland	9 High Accessibility
Sweden	9 High Accessibility
Luxembourg	8 High Accessibility
France	7 High Accessibility
Netherlands	7 High Accessibility
Denmark	6 Average Accessibility
Germany	6 Average Accessibility
UK	6 Average Accessibility
Austria	5 Average Accessibility
Belgium	5 Average Accessibility
Portugal	5 Average Accessibility
Spain	5 Average Accessibility
Italy	4 Low Accessibility
Greece	4 Low Accessibility
Ireland	3 Low Accessibility

Operationalization of Independent Variables

Based on the literature, independent variables in this study will be size of immigration population, percent of GDP used on welfare spending, size of Catholic population, union membership, gross personal per capita income and percent of women in the workforce. Data sources include: OECD *Trends in International Migration*, *The European Women's Almanac*, *Government Finance Statistics*, "Social Assistance in OECD Countries" *Journal of European Social Policy*, *European Marketing Data and Statistics 1999 and 1998*, *United Nation's Statistical Yearbook*, Eurostat *Demographic Statistics*, ILO *World Labor Report 1997-1998*, and World Values Survey 30 (Golini et al. 1993). Welfare spending is defined as "total social assistance^[8]" and is recorded from country statistics (Gough et al. 1997). Percent Catholic denomination is based on self-reported statistics. Union membership, gross personal per capita income, and percentage of women in the workforce was recorded for each case from country statistics (ILO 1998, World Values Study Group 1994, Euromonitor 1998, 1999, Synder 1992, OECD 1998).

Findings

In this study, results are derived from both cross-tabs and bivariate correlation analyses. It is important to consider this study involves statistical measurements with a small-N case selection; inherently, this situation poses difficulties in data analysis. Yet, bivariate correlations prove necessary in targeting the relative strength and direction of the relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable. Results appear in Table 3.

Table 3: Determinants of Welfare Availability

IV	Pearson R Correlation Coefficient	Statistical Significance (Two-tailed significance test was used).
Immigration Population	.314	.25
% GDP Spent on Welfare	-.304	.270
Percent Catholic Denomination	-.428	.112
Union Membership	-.095	.737
Gross Personal Per Capita Income	.382	.160
Percent Women in Workforce	.611	.016

N= 15

Although most of the variables did not correlate significantly with welfare availability, one variable emerges as an important indicator: percent women in the workforce. This variable has a positive correlation coefficient of .611 at a .016 level of significance. Thus the data supports hypothesis six, *that the greater the percentage of women participating in the workforce, the greater the access to social welfare benefits for migrant women*.

Conclusions

Welfare accessibility for migrant women has the strongest link to percent women in the workforce. Although the other variables do not appear to be indicators of welfare accessibility for migrant women, it would be illogical to assume size of immigration population, percent GDP spent on welfare, percent Catholic denomination, union membership, and gross personal per capita income have absolutely no impact. The insignificance of this variable indicates welfare accessibility for migrant women has a lesser correlation with structural issues, such as immigration and the wealth of a particular nation, and a greater correlation to a country's view of the role of women in society.

Percentage of women in the workforce is a factor in shaping societal views of proper gender roles. A high percentage of women in the workforce indicate women are viewed in a less traditional light. Furthermore, a high percentage of women in the workforce demonstrate women are seen as self-reliant. Hence, women have more authority in the family and society. Moreover, the literature and data support the notion that the greater the percentage of women in the workforce, the more likely women are to be the recipients of benefits. In this light, the degree of welfare accessibility for migrant women can be linked to public opinion. Such findings warrant the exploration of public opinion to determine if the perceived role of women in society truly correlates more strongly with welfare accessibility for migrant women, as opposed to public opinion of immigration or the proper role of government in the welfare state. It is appropriate to investigate another question, to what extent does public opinion affect welfare accessibility for migrant women?

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[5] Until 1992, Denmark had an open door policy for all immigrants -- now open door policy only applies to EU/EC citizens (Knocke, W. 1995).

[6] Full benefits are given only to specific groups and partial benefits are given to non-preferential groups. For example manual workers receive less sick pay than non-manual workers.

[7] Breakdown of scoring provides an example of variation in each of the different areas between each country.

[8] This includes general, group, cash, housing, and other assistance and excludes pension.

