



Migrants' and natives' attitudes to formal childcare in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany



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ABSTRACT

This study is one of the first to look at migrants' attitudes towards formal childcare, and the first one to do so by means of international comparison. The social investment strategy of the EU have, among other things, focused on expanding formal childcare to improve female participation in the labor market and to include children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The strategy has received a lot of positive public response, but the success of it hinges on support from the groups it targets, which includes migrants. We therefore tested whether migrants themselves share this positive view of the strategy. Using unique data from the survey “Migrants/the main control variables for each migrant group and the Welfare State Attitudes” (MIFARE), we compared the attitudes of nine migrant groups in three countries (The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany) with those of the native populations. We analyzed data in three different dimensions of attitudes towards childcare: (1) attitudes towards the organization of childcare (formal vs. informal), (2) attitudes towards public spending on childcare and (3) satisfaction with the provision of childcare. Drawing on theories concerning the effects of self-interest, gender values and country of origin, we postulated several hypotheses as to why migrants might differ from natives in their attitudes towards childcare. We found for the Netherlands and Denmark that migrants are less in favour of formal childcare than natives, though at the same time they ask for more public childcare spending and are more satisfied with the formal childcare provided than the native population. Results for Germany were more mixed. We also found that attitudes to formal childcare in the country of origin explain most of the attitude gaps between migrants and natives.

1. Introduction

Formal childcare is a central pillar of the EU social investment strategy and has been championed by the EU, national and local governments across Europe as an “inclusive” way to promote growth and limit inequality. The idea is that by providing formal childcare, participation of females in the labor market can be improved, fertility rates can be increased, and the social inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially migrants, can be furthered (Cantillon, 2011; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 2014; Van Lancker, 2013). In the wake of this massive investment in childcare across Europe, a number of both national and comparative studies have examined attitudes towards childcare. If the populations do not support the idea that the government should provide and partially fund formal childcare, then the entire political project is on shaky ground. Generally, the studies so far have shown overall support for formal childcare, accompanied by more ambivalent feelings towards both the quality of the service and its societal consequences (Borck, 2014; De

Tavernier, 2015; Ellingsæter, Kitterød, & Lyngstad, 2016; Fagnani, 2002; Guo & Gilbert, 2014; Mischke, 2013).

The studies have, however, only focused on general populations, and therefore, we know next to nothing about what migrants themselves think about childcare services. Only a few studies exist which look at immigrants' preferences regarding childcare, and they suggest that immigrants prefer informal over formal childcare (Bargłowski, Krzyżowski, & Świątek, 2015; Ryan, 2007). The literature on migrants and childcare tends to focus on the immigrants as producers and not citizens who are potential consumers (Williams & Gavanas, 2008). As with the native population, it is important that migrants express support for formal childcare. If they reject formal childcare, this might spell trouble for the much praised social investment strategy which especially targets that subset of the population (for instance in the EU recommendation *Investing in Children* from 2013). First generation immigrants often have experiences, attitudes, and social values that are quite different from those of the native population. The research question of this article is therefore twofold: Do migrants support formal

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childcare arrangements to the same degree that natives do, and if any differences do exist, how can they be explained?

To answer this question, we used data from a unique survey of nine migrant groups in the Netherlands and Denmark, of eight migrant groups in Germany, and of natives from all three countries. The choice of these host countries is interesting, because although the countries all have an extensive welfare system that provides childcare, there is a lot of variation: First, regarding the provision of affordable formal childcare, Denmark leads with almost 70% of children under the age of three being taken care of in formal childcare, compared to 50% in the Netherlands and only 20% in Germany (Mills et al., 2014). Second, these countries vary in their arrangements of migrant integration. Whereas assimilationism stimulates adaptation to the host culture, multiculturalism makes it more likely that immigrants remain oriented towards the country of origin (Ersanilli, 2010). The Netherlands is characterized as a multiculturalist country and Germany as an assimilationist country (Ersanilli, 2010), while Denmark could be typified as more assimilationist than Germany. We could therefore expect different ethnic attitude patterns and gaps among the three countries. To measure these differences, we identified three dimensions of attitudes to childcare by which we compared migrants and natives of each country: whether childcare should be provided formally or informally, whether more or less should be spent by the public on childcare, and whether the migrants were satisfied with the childcare provided. To explain any potential differences between migrants and natives we have outlined three theoretical explanations that are commonly used in studies of migrants' attitudes in other fields: self-interest, gender values and origin effects.

The next section of the article presents the current literature on attitudes towards welfare among migrants in general, and attitudes towards formal childcare specifically. The subsequent third section describes the design, data and variables used in the article. In the fourth section, the results are presented, and the implications of the study are discussed in the fifth and final section.

2. Literature review and theory

Perhaps the most prevalent debate in the literature on migrants' attitudes has been about whether migrants can adapt or “acculturate” to the level of the natives in their attitudes and values (e.g. Röder & Mühlau, 2012; Voicu & Vasile, 2014). If this is not the case, then it might cause native and migrant attitudes to clash in public debates and migrants to act in ways that are not deemed desirable by the general population. Differences in attitudes towards childcare are an example, as these differences might cause migrants to use formal childcare to a lesser degree. In the case of Denmark we know this is true, as the children of immigrants there generally do use less childcare. 76% of immigrant children one to two years old are in formal childcare in Denmark as opposed to 86% of children of natives (The Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2014). Immigrant parents opt to a larger degree for informal solutions to providing childcare. The statistics, however, also show that there was a general rise in uptake levels from 2008 to 2014 from 71% to 76%, which could suggest that there is an ongoing acculturation process. Similar patterns can be found for Germany and the Netherlands (Mills et al., 2014).

Welfare attitudes are a multifaceted subject, and Roosma, Gelissen, and van Oorschot (2013) argue that welfare attitudes can be captured in seven distinct dimensions. This includes the mix between government, market and private solutions for providing welfare, under what rules it should be implemented, who should pay for what, and evaluations of it. We will explore whether migrants and natives differentiate in their attitudes to childcare on three dimensions: (1) whether to organize childcare formally or informally, (2) whether to increase or decrease public spending on childcare, (3) and satisfaction with the childcare provided. The three dimensions in our study thus do not cover the full range of attitudes to childcare, but do give a fairly

comprehensive account of it. For each dimension, we will explore whether and why migrants and natives might differ. Below we will outline what the dimensions encompass, and what existing studies have on attitudes to childcare, either for the general population, or preferably, for migrants in particular. After that, we will outline a number of theories that might help us account for any possible differences.

The first dimension on attitudes about whether childcare should be provided formally or informally has to do with the organization of childcare. This distinction is important, as childcare, like any other form of care, can be provided both formally and informally. However, in terms of realizing the lofty goals of the social investment strategy, formal care is often stressed as an important factor in allowing for professionalization and standardization of the care (Cantillon, 2011; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Van Lancker, 2013). One Norwegian study has dealt with this issue by comparing attitudes among mothers as to whether the family or the state provides the best childcare. Though the study focuses on the general population, it does include migrant status. The study showed that there was no difference in attitude between Norwegian mothers and mothers from EU countries. But when comparing native Norwegian mothers with mothers from non-EU countries, there was a greater preference among the latter for informal and family based care solutions (Ellingsæter et al., 2016).

The second dimension on attitudes about whether to increase or decrease public spending on childcare refers to preferences about public spending and where the responsibility for childcare lies. Quite a lot is known about this dimension from both national and comparative studies, but only for the general native population. Here a number of comparative studies, mostly based on the European Social Survey from 2008, have shown that the support for government responsibility for childcare is strong throughout Europe (De Tavernier, 2015; Goerres & Tepe, 2012; Guo & Gilbert, 2014; Mischke, 2013). As for migrants' attitudes towards public spending or towards responsibility for childcare, we know next to nothing, especially comparatively. An exception to this is a study by Reeskens and van Oorschot (2015), also based on the European Social Survey 2008, that finds migrants to be more in favour of the welfare state than natives. Reeskens and van Oorschot's (2015) study is, however, not focused on childcare specifically but includes it as a part of an index with other welfare policy areas.

The third dimension on attitudes about whether the childcare service provided is satisfactory has to do with overall satisfaction. This dimension is different from the other two, as the first two dimensions refer to input, in terms of support for public organization or funding, while this dimension refers to the output of childcare policies. Satisfaction is, however, also an important part of the feedback mechanism that creates and maintains support for the welfare state (Roosma, van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2014; van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). Two studies about satisfaction have covered the general population (Guo & Gilbert, 2014; Mischke, 2013). In contrast to the strong support found for government responsibility, the studies here found satisfaction in the 15 European countries to be on the low side, with more than half the countries having an average score below the middle of the scale. No studies have covered this aspect from a migrant perspective.

Based on the review of the literature, it was difficult to determine whether we should expect a difference in attitudes between migrants and natives, and in that case whether we should expect migrants to be more or less supportive of formal childcare. This we will explore below. But in order not just to explore, but also explain the possible differences, we will outline theories that can help account for this gap between natives and migrants: self-interest, gender values, and country of origin effects. We have selected these three theories because they are commonly used to explain welfare attitudes (Kumlin, 2007), and specifically the welfare attitudes of migrants (e.g. Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2015). Though this is not an exhaustive selection of theories, it does allow us to provide a comparison between the impact of self-

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