Managing migration in modern welfare states

Essays on the development, causes, and effects of policies regulating family immigration

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Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Brusewitzsalen, Östra Ägatan 19, Uppsala, Friday, 21 October 2022 at 13:15 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English. Faculty examiner: Professor Christian Albrekt Larsen (Aalborg University, Department of Politics and Society).

Abstract

Being the main channel of migration into advanced industrial democracies, family migration has been the subject of increasing contestation in political debate. While previous studies have noted that many OECD countries have introduced more restrictive policies on family immigration during the last few decades, we still know little about how cross-country policy configurations in this area have evolved and varied over time, or about how policies affect inflows and why they differ between countries. This dissertation addresses these research gaps by presenting a set of integrated analyses of variations and changes in family-immigration policies across periods and countries.

Essay I presents a typology for analysing policy configurations and changes therein. It finds that admission policies on average became more restrictive over time, although there were some notable exceptions. Uncovering patterns of congruence and deviation in a more detailed way than previous research has done, this paper qualifies previous expectations about convergence, a ‘race to the bottom’, and a ‘civic turn’ in family-immigration policies. Essay II develops and tests different theories of what causes policy changes. It finds that the restrictive effects of certain risk factors on family-immigration policies, such as growing immigration and worsening economic distress, have been conditioned by the type of welfare regime. Essay III investigates whether and how much family-immigration policies have influenced patterns of family immigration in European states. While restrictive admission policies have led to falling overall levels of family immigration, the analysis reveals stratifying implications, whereby the effect have been greater where the sponsor is a non-EU citizen than where he/she is an EU citizen.

With its three-stage approach, this thesis contributes to the study of comparative migration policies. It presents new findings on the interplay between welfare states and migration policies, on the methods with which states regulate international migration, and on the differential impact of different policies on the size and composition of migrant inflows. It also adds insights on increasingly conditional forms of migration management in modern welfare states.

Keywords: Family immigration, Migration policy, Welfare state, Conditionality, Progressive dilemma, Civic integration, Stratification, Policy configurations, Eligibility criteria, Qualifying conditions, Time-series cross-country analysis, Europe, OECD

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ISSN 1652-9030
URN urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-479625 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-479625)
Till Akon och Dosan
Cover design: Joel Lundblad
List of Essays

This thesis is based on the following essays, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

I. Ahlén, A. Development Trends in Family-Immigration Policies in Europe: Convergence, a ‘Race to the Bottom’, or a ‘Civic Turn’?


Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been an incredible experience of highs and lows. I owe a great debt of gratitude for all the help and support I have received from colleagues, friends, and family in making this dissertation possible.

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisors: Joakim Palme, Karin Borevi, and Axel Cronert. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from you. Thank you for ruthlessly bringing me back down to earth when I was a bit too pleased with what I had achieved and for reminding me of the long road ahead. But equally for all the encouragement and fruitful input when I was struggling and feeling dispirited. Joakim, your influence on my academic career cannot be overstated. You have encouraged me to challenge myself and, patiently, helped me to focus on the fundamental questions in my research. Thank you for being so hard to please. Karin, your research and expert knowledge on migration and integration has been an important source of inspiration for me since well before the PhD program. Thank you for your theoretical insights, for helping me structuring my arguments, and for your compassion. Axel, your entry as supervisor during the last two years has been of immense importance to me. You have guided me through a number of significant challenges thanks to your vast knowledge, creativity, and humble approach; a set of qualities I can only hope to emulate in my future professional career.

This thesis was made possible by funding provided by the Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (Mistra) through the ‘Mistra Geopolitics’ research program (Grant No. 2016/11 #5). I am grateful to the Mistra Geopolitics team for giving me the opportunity to carry out this PhD project. A special thanks to the organizers and students of the Mistra Geopolitics Research School for providing a stimulating research community that I have had the pleasure to engage with on several enjoyable occasions.

To the participants in my manuscript conference, Kristoffer Jutvik, Frida Boräng, and Per Strömblad, as well as Shirin Ahlbäck Öberg and Anna Michalski in my review committee: thank you very much for providing me with comments on my dissertation. My work has benefitted greatly from your input. I also want to express my gratitude to the participants at various seminars, workshops, and conferences for providing me with helpful feedback during these past years.
I am very grateful to the Department of Government at Uppsala University and to all colleagues and staff for offering a research environment so full of expertise and collegiality. Many of you devoted time and attention to improving my work. I am especially thankful to Lutz Gschwind, Marcus Österman, and Oskar Hultin Bäckersten for your input on various texts, for your technical assistance, and for our exchange of research ideas. To Anna Wistus, thank you for all the administrative help, especially this last year.

I feel very fortunate to have been part of the 2017 PhD cohort. Thank you, Oskar, Jaś, Siri, and Max, for all the laughs and inspiring discussions, greatly easing the infamous PhD loneliness. Your friendship has meant and continues to mean a lot to me.

I gratefully acknowledge the funds and foundations that have granted me generous contributions that allowed me to extend my time of writing, to attend conferences, and to work abroad. Thank you Johan & Jakob Söderbergs stiftelse, Stiftelsen Stockholms Nations jubelfeststipendium, The Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF), G-C och B Busolis stipendiestiftelse, Stiftelsen Karl Staaffs fond för frisinnade ändamål, and Erik Borbos Hanssons stipendiefond. My gratitude as well to a few persons that inspired me to apply for the PhD programme: Joakim Palme, Ulf Mörkenstam, Frida Boräng, and my former colleagues at the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi). A special thanks to Caroline Tovatt for also mentally preparing me for the peculiarities of the academic environment.

I had the opportunity during my time as a PhD student to work in different research projects. To Martin Ruhs, my sincere thank you for our previous (and future) collaborations and for hosting me as a guest researcher at the Migration Policy Center at the European University Institute in Florence during 2020. To Jean-Michel Lafleur and Daniela Vintila, thank you for inviting me to participate in the Migration and Transnational Social Protection in (post) crisis Europe (MiT-SoPro) project. For our ongoing collaboration in the Varieties of Attitudes to Family Migration (VoFAME) project, I am grateful to Johan Wejryd, Jonas Hultin Rosenberg, Lutz Gschwind, and Karin Borevi. To start up the project has been truly inspirational and I very much look forward to the work ahead.

I am very thankful for all the support and encouragement I have received from my family and friends during these past years. Much of this thesis was written at Gullmarsvägen 13. My deepest gratitude to my parents-in-law, Eva and Christer, for your hospitality and generosity. To my dear friend Torre for all the wonderful häng and for always offering a place to crash in Uppsala.

Jag tackar dig – jag bara säger. To my dear friend Joel, thank you for lending your creativity to the cover design of this dissertation.

I am lucky to have such wise, curious, and loving parents. Thank you, Ewa and Stig, for your unwavering support. Had I not inherited your Det löser sig-mentality, I am not sure if I would have endured this journey. To my sister
Emma and her family Markus, Alvin, William, and Agnes – thank you for being a source of love, support, and great fun.

My ceaseless gratitude, finally, to the person that has meant the most to me during the course of writing this dissertation – who I will soon be able to call my wife: Anna-Karin. Whenever I needed it throughout these past five years, you extended your sharp-wittedness and keen eye for details, in order to offer me not only insightful input on my texts, but also valuable thoughts for my thoughts. More importantly, your reassurance and belief in me and my capacity has been nothing less than *essenziale* for me to push through. I am so happy I get to share my life with you and Doris. *Jag älskar er båda.*

Stockholm, 28 July 2022
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Introductory essay

1. Introduction

Few would dispute that, with an estimated total of 272 million international migrants (IOM 2020), the world has entered the ‘Age of Migration’ (de Haas, Castles, & Miller 2020). At the same time, new and reinforced measures have been undertaken to restrain cross-border mobility, contradicting previous predictions of a liberalization of migration regimes in the globalized post-Cold War era (e.g., Freeman 1995; Joppke 1998).

This thesis examines national policies regulating family immigration, which is the largest category of entry into the OECD area (see Figure 1). Its overarching aim is to advance the research on comparative migration policies in regard to the development of admission policies over time, the determinants of policy variations across countries, and the ways in which these variations have shaped patterns of family immigration.

While acknowledging the variety of potential drivers of policy output – from historical and current immigration patterns (e.g., Money 1999) to structural economic fluctuations (e.g., Freeman 1986) and various political actors (e.g., Bucken-Knapp, Hinnfors, & Spehar 2014) – this thesis develops a comparative institutional argument on how the design of welfare states has conditioned the policy space for regulating family immigration. In other words, my focus lies on the role played by welfare-state institutions in modifying the influence of exogenous drivers on policy change.

Calls for more restrictive migration policies are often permeated by the interlinked concerns that growing immigration poses both cultural and economic threats to modern welfare states. In ideational terms, a common argument is that ethnic diversity resulting from growing immigration threatens social cohesion and collective feelings of shared national belonging (Alesina & Glaeser 2004). Interest-based arguments point instead to resource constraints and to pressures on welfare programmes stemming from large-scale immigration, which furthermore are assumed to worsen in times marked by economic insecurity (Hay & Wincott 2012). Both of these concerns underpin the idea of a ‘new progressive dilemma’ (Pearce 2004) in modern welfare states, according to which there is an intrinsic contradiction between openness to immigration and a comprehensive, inclusive welfare state (see also Koopmans 2010). This argument, however, has been challenged by scholars who claim that, on the contrary, inclusive and generous welfare states are associated with more open immigration regimes (Boräng 2018; Sainsbury 2012).
In light of the mechanisms and policy dilemmas associated with the theory of a ‘progressive dilemma’, family migration must be reckoned a significant form of migration in this context. It evokes both different normative and cost-benefit concerns. Being the main channel of migration into advanced industrial democracies, family migration has been the subject of increasing contestation in political debate. On the one hand, family migration is seen as a regular\(^1\) type of migration that has a positive impact on the well-being and integration of migrants (Kraler et al., 2011). It has also found favour as providing a ‘safe and orderly’ route of entry in recent international initiatives – as, for example, in Agenda 2030 (reference 10.7) and in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM 2018). On the other hand, family migration has often been depicted – especially in the aftermath of the so-called ‘migration crisis’ of 2015–2016 (Eggebø & Brekke 2019) – as ‘unwanted chain migration’ that poses a threat to social cohesion and the welfare state (Yu 2012; Kofman 2018).

In line with the latter view, many OECD countries, especially in Europe, have introduced more restrictive policies on family immigration during the last few decades. One prominent aspect of recent changes in this regard has been growing conditionality, which is triggered by the introduction of demanding admission requirements. This has not gone unnoticed. Several previous studies have pointed to the increasing restrictiveness of family-immigration policies, which many analysts see as related to broader policy trends

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\(^1\) Regular migration refers to the lawful and orderly movement of persons to a destination or host country. In contrast, irregular migration is movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and receiving countries (see OECD 2017).
connected with migration and the integration of immigrants (such as a ‘race to the bottom’ and a ‘civic turn’) (e.g., Block & Bonjour 2013; Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017), and to Europeanization effects following the 2003 EU Directive on the right to family reunification (2003/86/EC) (e.g., Bonjour & Vink 2013; Groenendijk & Strik 2018). It has also been claimed that the right to family migration has become increasingly stratified: i.e., demanding admission requirements put applicants who are less well-endowed with economic and cultural capital at the greatest disadvantage (e.g., Kofman 2018; Schweitzer 2015).

Yet, previous research has left many questions unanswered regarding the emergence and implications of family-immigration policies. Most strikingly, there is a lack of cross-country studies of the development, causes, and effects of family-immigration policies over time. We still know little, therefore, about how cross-country policy configurations in this area have evolved and varied over time (that is the descriptive question), or about how policies affect inflows and why they differ between countries (these are the explanatory questions).

This thesis addresses these research gaps, by presenting a set of integrated cross-country and cross-temporal studies of variations and changes in family-immigration policies. The purpose of so doing is to conduct a theoretically founded empirical analysis of how modern welfare states manage the type of immigration which has been the largest in the OECD area in recent decades. These countries face multiple economic and demographic challenges, and questions of migration have been politicized in recent decades. Three overarching research questions, therefore, must be addressed: How have OECD countries reacted to these challenges in terms of their response to family immigration? What role does the institutional design of welfare states play in mediating the influence of presumed drivers of policy restrictions? What effects have policy changes had on the size and composition of inflows of family immigrants?

By means of this three-stage approach, I am able to advance the research on family migration conceptually, theoretically, and empirically. The overarching contribution lies in the cross-national focus of the three essays, which expands the geographical and temporal scope of analysis, as compared with that in previous research on family immigration. This dissertation thus contribute new comparative insights on the development of family immigration-policies and provides a good basis for drawing general conclusions about the determinants and effects in this area.

More specifically, I advance the research conceptually by paying more attention than other researchers have done to the underlying multidimensionality of family-immigration policies. In Essay I, namely, I introduce a typology and detailed mapping of policy configurations across countries. This paves the way in turn for my theoretical contributions in Essay II, in which I develop and test different theories of what causes policy changes; and in Essay III,
wherein I examine the effects on policy outcomes. My empirical contribution lies in the new evidence I present regarding the configurations, determinants, and effects of family-immigration policies across countries over time. These empirical patterns have not been noted in previous research. On the methodological level, I carry out inferential statistical analyses using cross-national panel data. This has allowed me to take steps towards identifying certain causal links connected to the causes and effects of family-immigration policies in a comparative perspective.

This thesis also speaks to the broader literature on comparative migration policies, by providing insights on how and by what means states regulate international migration. Specifically, it adds new knowledge on how states have used conditionality mechanisms to manage immigration. Moreover, by advancing an institutionally based theoretical model that highlights the dynamic associations between the welfare state and family-immigration policy, this thesis affords new comparative insights on the interplay between the two. Finally, by showing how admission policies are linked to stratified patterns of family immigration in European states, it provides new evidence on the differential impact of different policies on the size and composition of immigrant inflows.

Family migration
Since this dissertation focuses on policies regulating the admission of family immigrants, a brief definition of family migration is warranted.

Family immigrants are defined here as international migrants who have gained residence for family reasons in a host country (OECD 2019). As delimited here, international migration in the European context includes third-country nationals (TCNs). This term refers to persons who are not citizens of the European Union (EU) and who also do not enjoy the right to free movement within the Schengen area (which also includes the non-EU states of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). Thus, mobility within the EU – including in connection with family immigration – falls outside the scope of this thesis.

The category of family immigration includes two main sub-categories: family reunification and family formation. Family reunification refers to the process whereby a principal migrant who has settled in a receiving country reunites with family members living abroad. The second category, family formation (or so-called ‘marriage migration’), occurs when an individual in the

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2 International migration is typically divided into four main entry categories: humanitarian, labour, study, and family. These categories also correspond to the main types of permits issued in OECD countries (OECD 2017).
receiving country chooses a partner from abroad (Kofman 2004). While family formation makes up an increasing part of family migration in OECD countries, family reunification is the most common type (see e.g., OECD 2017: 115ff).

An important aspect of these types of family immigration is that the resident sponsor (or ‘reference person’, who already resides in the destination country) can be of any nationality as long as she/he has a valid residence permit (and fulfils various other criteria). Usually, however, family reunification involves a sponsor that holds a residence permit in the host country (being her/himself an immigrant); while family formation more often involves a citizen sponsor (OECD 2019).

Outline

The remainder of this introductory essay is organized as follows. In section 2, family-immigration policy is discussed in relation to a broader context of growing conditionality in social and migration policy. A central finding of this thesis is that there has been an increase of conditionality measures in family-immigration policies in many European states. These require applicants to meet various demanding requirements in order to gain admission to the country on a family basis. Below, I highlight how this development forms part of a similar trend in welfare-state reform in recent decades. Discussing family immigration through a lens of conditionality, this introductory essay seeks to identify similarities and overlaps between the fields of social policy and migration policy. This furnish a contextualisation, by putting the results of the individual essays regarding the development, causes, and effects of family-immigration policies in a broader perspective of policy changes in modern welfare states during recent decades. It also provides an impetus for future research on conditionality as a meta-trend in social policy and migration policy.

My overarching research design is the subject of section 3, wherein I discuss methodological concerns, note empirical challenges, and present the analytical approaches of the individual essays. In section 4, I summarize my results and my contributions. In section 5, finally, I discuss avenues for future research.

3 ‘Accompanied family members’, a third type of family migration, refers to the process whereby the members of a family migrate together – i.e., where a migrant is accompanied by his/her ‘dependents’ (Kofman 2004). Since other rules and requirements usually apply for this type of movement (as in the case of seasonal workers, for instance), it is not included in the analysis here.
2. Family migration in the age of conditionality

Social, economic, and political transformations from the 1980s on have brought about a large shift in economic and social risk from states and corporations onto individuals and households (Hacker 2006). A combination of demographic change, slower economic growth, and welfare-state restructuring has resulted in the widespread adoption of austerity measures in affluent democracies (Pierson 2001). These trends have coincided with the rise and spread of neoliberalism and with a shift in the organization of states and markets, resulting among other things in growing economic inequality and declining trade-union power (Spies-Butcher 2020).

During the same period, moreover, we have seen larger and more diverse migration flows, together with a growing politicization of migration questions (de Haas, Castles, & Miller 2020). Reflecting new economic and social realities, much of the political discussion on immigration in the European context has centred on an alleged ‘welfare burden’ associated with large-scale immigration, and given expression to welfare chauvinism – the view that immigrants’ access to the welfare state should be limited and conditioned upon certain deservingness criteria (Kymlicka 2015).

In response to the emergence of new social risks derived from these economic, social, and demographic transformations, new measures have been introduced in several policy areas that condition access to various social and legal rights. In social policy, conditionality commonly refers to the principle that access to certain publicly provided rights and services should be dependent on applicants’ first fulfilling specific obligations or displaying certain patterns of behaviour (Watts & Fitzpatrick 2018). Non-compliance with these conditions is typically linked to sanctions of various kinds, such as a loss of rights and benefits (ibid).

Conditionality has also been discussed in connection with recent reforms in migration policy, although more implicitly and in different terms. One of the most salient debates has revolved around the identification of civic-integration policies in Western democracies (see, e.g., Goodman 2014; Joppke 2007). The ‘civic-integration turn’ has been described as the spread – particularly in Western European countries since the late 1990s – of integration policies with a focus on individual obligations. Among other things, these have involved testing applicants’ competence in the language, history, and political values of the receiving society (Goodman 2014). These policy changes, it has been argued, have reflected a larger shift to an activation-and-workfare paradigm in modern welfare states, with stricter demands being placed on access to social benefits (Ferrera & Rhodes 2000).

By linking these developments, the spread of conditionality appears as a meta-trend that cuts across both social policy and migration policy in modern
welfare states. However, we know much less about the growth of conditionality in the area of migration policy than in that of social policy. Underpinning the discussion about the spread of civic-integration policies is the argument that they represent a general trend towards policy convergence and a retreat from national models (e.g., Joppke 2007). Yet, cross-country analyses have been lacking that systematically assess the claim of policy convergence. This is particularly true in the area of admission policies (especially when it comes to different entry categories) – more so than in regard to citizenship and integration policies.

There is furthermore a need to improve our knowledge about the determinants and effects of cross-country variations in migration policies, including the shift towards greater conditionality. In some countries, for example, family-related admission is being subjected increasingly to the possession of material resources, prompting the argument that ‘class now plays a significant role in stratifying the right to family migration’ (Kofman 2018:33). This highlights the potential institutional interplay between social-policy regimes on the one hand, and policy practices regarding family immigration on the other. Could it be, as those who point to the ‘progressive dilemma’ contend (e.g., Pearce 2004), that welfare states with strong universal and redistributive features are more inclined to impose strict requirements for economic self-sufficiency – in order to avoid heavy pressures on their finances? Or is it instead market-oriented welfare states which are more inclined to impose conditionality, given that they are less concerned with the stratifying implications of demanding requirements in this area?

The increase in demanding admission requirements for family immigration in some countries has also prompted a debate on the stratification of outcomes, whereby economic and civic conditions impose obstacles on applicants – especially those who have migrated from poor countries, fled from conflict or persecution, and possess little cultural capital or means of self-support (e.g., Sirriyeh 2015; Schweitzer 2015). However, while the potential drivers and effects of growing conditionality have been discussed in previous research, no cross-country analyses have so far been done that have assessed these questions. This thesis seeks to advance the current frontier of research in this area. Drawing on a combination of theories from comparative migration research and comparative welfare-state research, it offers some new comparative insights on how and why conditionality measures have varied in different countries over time, and how these variations have shaped patterns of family immigration.

Activation and conditionality in social policy
One of the most salient developments in social policy over the last three decades is the reorientation of policy from income protection to the promotion of
greater participation in the labour market (Bonoli & Natali 2012). Policies associated with this ‘activation turn’ fall into two broad categories: demanding (or ‘enforcing’) policies, which include stricter sanctions and conditions in connection with social protection and access to social services; and enabling policies, which remove obstacles to employment and provide support to the individual – through labour-market programmes, for example (Cronert 2020).

Demanding policies tap into the above-mentioned trend of increasing welfare conditionality across advanced industrial democracies (Watts & Fitzpatrick 2018). This, it has been argued, reflects a new vision of welfare services, focused more on promoting ‘pro-social’ behaviour than on protecting people against ‘social risks’ (Reeves & Loopstra 2017). Although social security and welfare provision have always, to varying degrees, been underpinned by conditionality, researchers on comparative welfare states have detected a ‘broadening’ and ‘deepening’ of requirements (e.g., Knotz 2018).

Conditionality, as a structural recalibration of modern welfare states, is embedded in a broad range of policy areas, including programmes for unemployment and disability benefit; as such, it affects essentially the entire population (Clasen & Clegg 2007). An important conclusion in previous research, however, is that this reorientation towards more demanding policies affects vulnerable groups disproportionately, since they are less able in many cases to meet the stricter conditions (Reeves & Loopstra 2017).

Clasen and Clegg (2007) conceptualize welfare conditionality broadly, within which they distinguish between three ‘levels’ of conditionality. Conditionality of category refers to the restriction of social benefits and services to certain social groups (e.g., one must be unemployed to obtain unemployment benefits). Conditionality of circumstance refers to various criteria that determine eligibility among beneficiaries of a particular kind of support. Lastly, conditionality of conduct refers to requirements of a behavioural kind that recipients must meet in order to keep receiving a certain kind of support.

This thesis develops, in a manner similar to Clasen and Clegg’s conditionality framework, a framework for typologizing and mapping cross-country variations in family-immigration policies. A central feature of this framework is the distinction between eligibility criteria (EC), which regulate who is entitled to family immigration,4 and qualifying conditions (QC), which represent additional requirements that resident sponsors and incoming family members

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4 In the area of family-related migration, EC concern among other things the legal status of sponsors. Do such persons need, for example, to have a certain type of residence permit (e.g., a permanent one or, in the case of temporary permits, one valid for a certain minimum period)? Must they have resided in the country for a given number of years before other family members can settle in the country? In addition, EC regulate which types of family members may unite with their sponsors – e.g., whether family immigration is allowed for other relatives than spouses and minor children. Age limits for sponsors and family members are also in question here (Helbling et al., 2017).
must meet in order to obtain a given legal status for the latter.\footnote{Where resident sponsors are concerned, QC require them to show proof of financial resources and to demonstrate an ability to furnish adequate accommodations for themselves and their family members. Regarding incoming family members, QC refer to minimum requirements for language skills, country knowledge, and the like – which to a varying degree can be tested both before and after arrival in the receiving country (Bjerre et al., 2016).} I contend that, while EC can be regarded as prior \textit{circumstantial} rules that regulate the scope of access to family immigration, QC represent \textit{behavioural} barriers that come into play after applicants have been judged eligible for family (re)unification. If we see family migration as specific \textit{category}, then the other two levels of conditionality discussed by Clasen and Clegg (2007) resemble the circumstantial and behavioural rules used to regulate the admission of family immigrants. EC largely correspond to what they term ‘conditionality of circumstance’, QC to what they call ‘conditionality of conduct’.

A turn towards conditionality in migration policy?

Focusing on the more complex shifts in migration policy – towards growing conditionality rather than simply greater ‘restrictiveness’ (or, as in welfare policy, towards ‘retrenchment’) – can serve as a useful analytical lens through which to view trends in this area across countries.

The years after the end of the Cold War saw intensified cross-border movements and a diffusion of human-rights norms. During this period, influential analysts predicted a convergence towards increasingly open and non-discriminatory immigration systems (Joppke 1998; Freeman 1995). However, notwithstanding the continued liberalization of immigration regimes, the foremost policy trend of the new millennium – at least on the national level – has been towards preventing large-scale immigration (Boucher & Gest 2018). The picture is complex, however. Comparative studies of migration policy have shown that, rather than becoming more restrictive across the board, migration regimes have become restrictive in new ways, with new layers of selectivity and conditionality being introduced both within and between different categories of entry (de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli 2018; Helbling & Leblang 2019; Beine et al., 2016).

One prominent part of these recent shifts is towards greater \textit{selectivity}, the purpose of which is either to promote or to restrict the entry and settlement of certain migrant categories. Since the late 1990s, a key objective of immigration policies across OECD countries has been to attract – through subsidies or targeted programmes – workers with advanced skills and presumed high economic value (Ruhs 2013). This ‘global race for talent’ was explicitly recognized in connection with the EU’s Blue Card directive, launched in 2007, which grants a series of favourable conditions to highly skilled non-EU workers (ibid: 105).
At the same time, both political parties and the public at large have increasingly sought to reduce the influx of ‘costly’ and unwanted migrants, including low-skilled workers, family migrants, and persons seeking protection (de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli 2018). An agenda-setting example of this discursive reorientation was seen when Nicolas Sarkozy, as French interior minister from 2002 to 2007, launched a new immigration policy granting explicit preference to immigration choisie (chosen immigration) over immigration subie (endured immigration) – by which he meant family migration (Geddes & Scholten 2016).

While selective migration policies entail what Clasen and Clegg (2007) call ‘conditionality of category’, the other policies promoted by recent reforms – which may be said to involve informal types of selectivity – sooner represent ‘conditionality of circumstance’ and ‘conditionality of conduct’. These policies require migrants to meet various demanding criteria in order to gain admission and to obtain various legal statuses. While these policies can be of diverse character – involving, e.g., various circumstantial or behavioural conditions – they imply a shift of responsibility onto migrants (see, e.g., Bonjour & Chauvin 2018). This trend is similar to what has been observed in the welfare-state literature, which has seen frequent discussion – in connection with analyses of the ‘new welfare state’ and the ‘workfare state’ – of growing conditionality in the form of behavioural requirements (i.e., conditionality of conduct) (Cronert 2020; Knotz 2018). However, migration policy differs from social policy when it comes to the type of sanctions involved. In the case of migration policy, namely, failure to comply with the relevant demands puts not only one’s social and civic rights in jeopardy, but also one’s right to enter and remain in the destination country.

Neither selective nor conditional migration policies are new. Many countries have required newcomers to fulfil various conditions in order to qualify for various rights and statuses – e.g., citizenship – for some time (Boucher & Gest 2018). Yet, like students of comparative welfare states (cf. Watts & Fitzpatrick 2018), scholars of migration have pointed to a proliferation of demanding new conditions in the area of migration policy (Goodman 2014; de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli 2018). One point discussed further in the next sub-section, and of particular relevance in this thesis, is the recent increase in conditional requirements that apply at the level of admission, as opposed to those that apply at the level of immigrant integration and citizenship.

This increase in demanding new conditions is exemplified by the civic-integration policy trend noted above. While civic-integration policies (e.g., demands for language proficiency) were mainly introduced as conditions for the acquisition of permanent residence and citizenship, some countries have also imposed obligatory civic requirements as a condition for entry (Goodman 2014). As previous studies have noted, this external aspect of such policies suggests that they are used in order to control migration (e.g., Ahlén & Boräng 2018; Bonjour 2017).
In addition, previous research has pointed to a drift in the character of admission policies – from selectivity based on national or ethnic criteria towards conditionality based on skill, wealth, and integration potential (de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli 2018). Indeed, many policy reforms in recent decades target either the economic utility of migrants or their ‘capacity’ to integrate (e.g., Schweitzer 2015). These attempts to promote ‘pro-social’ behaviour thus reflect a larger shift to an activation-and-workfare paradigm in welfare states during the last few decades (Bonoli & Natali 2012).

In the context of migration policy, Boucher and Gest (2018) have described this as a turn towards a ‘Market Model’ of admission control, where increasingly conditional policies are applied based on migrants’ purported economic ‘value’ and/or ‘integration potential’, in a manner resembling the operation of labour markets worldwide (p. 5f.). According to the authors, this reorientation of immigration control appeals to advanced industrial democracies with ageing populations and an experience of nativist backlash. With such a market model, states can respond to public concerns over immigration by enforcing stricter admission policies, while at the same time tackling demographic change by admitting highly skilled workers. In this way, stricter conditionality can have a ‘dual functionality’ – controlling immigration and facilitating ‘better’ integration at the same time (Goodman 2014).

However, growing conditionality may also result in increasingly stratified patterns of immigration, since more demanding admission requirements tend to be harder to meet for applicants who possess little in the way of financial, social, or cultural capital (de Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli 2018). Apart from explicitly selective policies, conditional admission policies – e.g., civic-integration measures and economic requirements that condition entry and settlement – result in an ‘informal selection’ of the ‘best and brightest’, while excluding those on low incomes and with few resources (Bonjour & Chauvin 2018). This calls to mind observations in the welfare-state literature about the consequences of the growing conditioning of welfare, with its disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups (e.g., Reeves & Loopstra 2017).

While this reorientation towards growing conditionality is to some extent visible in all advanced industrial democracies, countries still differ significantly with regard to when and to what extent they have introduced various policies (Boucher & Gest 2018; Goodman 2014). Furthermore, variations are visible not just between but also within entry categories, with different subgroups in a particular entry category being likely to face difficulty when policies become more demanding. This is particularly relevant in the case of family-related immigration, which is a heterogeneous form of entry. Accordingly, the next sub-section takes a closer look at this question.
Family-immigration policy as a case of conditionality

Earlier contributions to the study of migration typically identified two categories among major immigrant-receiving countries: guest-worker countries and settler countries, the latter of which are much more focused on family migration (see, e.g., Castles 1986). For several reasons, however, this difference no longer applies. As mentioned earlier, family migration is the largest admission category nowadays among OECD countries (OECD 2019). It has also been singled out as a key target for policy restrictions in many OECD countries since the turn of the millennium (e.g., Eggebø & Brekke 2019).

I would argue that conditionality is particularly important to bear in mind if we are properly to understand policy trends regarding family immigration relative to those pertaining to other immigration categories. The main reason for this is that family immigration involves both a resident sponsor (or ‘reference person’) who already resides in the destination country, and at least one family member residing abroad. In other words, it not only involves ‘outsiders’ knocking at a state’s doors and requesting entry’, but also the ‘claim[s] of insiders’, i.e., legal residents of a state who seek to be united with their family [emphasis added] (Block, 2012, p. 37.). This ‘insider-outsider overlap’, which is unique to family immigration, means that family immigration involves partly different assumptions about policy approaches and conditionality measures than those that apply in the case of other entry categories.

First, contrasting perspectives can be distinguished in regard to what states want in connection with family immigration. As mentioned earlier, since family migration often takes place on a safe and orderly basis – as a regular (re)unification process – it has found champions in the international community, as seen in the case of Agenda 2030 (reference 10.7). It has also been argued that family reunification has a positive impact on the well-being of immigrants, and that delays in reunification can have adverse consequences for the integration of migrants in the long term (Kraler et al., 2011; OECD 2019).

However, family immigration has also been increasingly contested in the political debate in many countries (Eggebø & Brekke 2019). Since family immigrants are typically associated with female dependents and children who follow refugees and low-skilled workers, they tend to be portrayed as victims of archaic norms – norms that clash with ‘our’ Western norms of individuality, equality, and economic self-sufficiency (Mai & King 2009). Thus gender, family norms, and social class intersect in public discourse about family immigration (Kofman 2018), which tends to be portrayed – family reunification especially – as an obstacle to integration.

Secondly, contrasting perspectives may also arise in connection with the real or perceived policy space for regulating family migration. On the one

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6 In contrast to irregular movements, e.g., spontaneous asylum applications.
hand, family migration encompasses certain moral obligations, where the territorial right of the state to regulate immigration conflicts with the individual right to protection for marriage and family life (as set out for example in Article 8 and Article 12 of the European Declaration of Human Rights) (D’Aoust 2018). While the right of protection for family life does not necessarily imply a right to family unification, it does provide a strong legal and moral basis for liberal democracies to allow it (Block 2015; Lahav 1997).

On the other hand, since family immigration concerns a resident who seeks to (re)unite with one or more family members residing abroad, policies regulating the admission of family immigrants are (compared to other forms of entry) particularly multidimensional. Different rules may apply, for example, depending on the legal status of the resident sponsor: e.g., is he/she a citizen or a third-country national? If the resident sponsor is an immigrant, the possibility of family reunification may be conditioned on the type of residence permit obtained. For example, does the sponsor have temporary or permanent residence? Was his/her residence acquired based on work or on humanitarian reasons? The ‘insider-outsider overlap’ also means that various admission requirements can be placed both on resident sponsors (who are insiders) and on incoming family migrants (who are outsiders). A key aspect of this ‘double conditionality’ is that demanding conditions (which can be seen as integration policies) – e.g., income and housing requirements targeted at resident sponsors – can be used to pursue goals of immigration control (Ahlén & Boräng 2018; Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017).

This relates, moreover, to the policy space opened up by prevailing international frameworks, such as the EU Directive on the right to family reunification (2003/86/EC). By establishing a set of minimum rights in this area, the Directive limits the manoeuvre for member states to impose certain restrictions in EC, such as on what kinds of family members may unite with their sponsors. On the other hand, it has been argued, the Directive has also enabled member states to introduce other types of policies. These include QC of various kinds, such as those that require sponsors to provide proof of sufficient accommodation and stable financial resources, as well as those that require incoming family immigrants to pass language tests prior to entry (Bonjour 2017). A central finding of this thesis is that the increase in restrictiveness has been much sharper in QC than EC (see Essay I for details). Interestingly, then, both social policy and family-immigration policy have seen a shift towards growing conditionality in recent decades, especially in the form of behavioural requirements (cf. Knotz 2018).

Several previous studies, as mentioned earlier, have noted that family-immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive in specific countries over time (e.g., Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017; Bonjour & Kraler 2015; Helbling et al., 2017). Up to this point, however, no comprehensive cross-country analysis has been done of the varying policy configurations and differing levels of conditionality integral to family-immigration policies. This in
turn means that no detailed cross-national inquiry has been conducted into the causes and effects of policy variation. The aim of the essays in this thesis is to help fill this gap, by providing new insights on general patterns in family-migration policy. In order to fulfil this purpose, I conduct theoretically founded comparative analyses of change and variation in this area. The analytical approaches taken in these studies are described in the next section.

3. Research design

Analytical approach

Figure 2 illustrates the analytical orientation of the three essays, which together form an integrated three-stage inquiry into the development, causes, and effects of policies regulating family immigration. The essays answer different questions and contribute to partly different literatures, but they all compare family-immigration policies across countries. The approach taken in each essay is summarized below.

**Essay I** proposes new tools for typologizing and mapping policy variations. My approach, which goes beyond a unidimensional perspective on policy restrictiveness, seeks to capture the nature of changes in family-immigration policies. Employing a configurational conceptual model that distinguishes between EC (circumstantial requirements) and QC (behavioural requirements), the essay conducts a multi-dimensional analysis of changes in policy formations and in country clusters.

**Essay II** develops an institutionally based explanatory framework for analysing the conditioning influence of welfare-state regimes on family-immigration policies. While recognizing a variety of influences behind reforms in the area of migration policy, the theoretical model focuses on the role played by welfare-state institutions in mediating the influence on policy change of increased immigration and rising unemployment. The theory is that institutional differences between welfare states influence policy changes in the area of family immigration, by either ameliorating or aggravating the impact of certain risk factors that tend to promote greater policy restrictiveness.

**Essay III** analyses the effects of admission policies on the size and composition of family-migrant inflows. Building on the findings of growing policy restrictiveness and of cross-country variation presented in the other two essays, Essay III investigates whether different policies have influenced the overall level of family immigration, and whether they have had a differential impact on different sub-groups. Since restrictive admission policies are likely not just to reduce the overall inflow of family migrants, but to have a stratifying impact among them as well, I seek to account for these differential effects – i.e., to identify informal processes of selection within certain categories of entry.
Methodological reflections

Migration research has for long suffered from a scarcity of comprehensive empirical studies that analyse immigration policies in a cross-country fashion (Helbling & Leblang 2019). This scarcity becomes particularly evident when we consider the great diversity of policy practices and types of migration across space and time.

The three essays in this thesis use quantitative methods and data to answer questions about the development, causes, and effects of family-immigration policies in a large number of countries. As such, they share the same overarching logic of prioritizing a broad scope over a narrow one focused on a restricted phenomenon or context. The object is to increase the chances for generalization. A narrow focus on the national level has been criticized for oversimplifying the complex nature of migration, and for overlooking transnational and local perspectives on migration and migration policy (Favell 2015; Wimmer & Schiller 2003). Indeed, a central challenge in this area is to analyse complex, multi-layered arrangements in a precise manner – i.e., without falling into unwarranted generalization across diverse categories and settings (cf. Boswell 2007).

However, there are good reasons to adopt the cross-country research design applied in this thesis. First, while there are policy variations at the local level, as well as a number of international and regional arrangements for the regulation of migration, the national level is the critical one in this policy area. Thus, achieving the objective of this thesis – to discern general patterns in family-migration policy – necessitates a focus on policy practices and outcomes that play out on a cross-national level.

Second, the cross-national focus of these essays expands the geographical and temporal scope of analysis, as compared with that in previous research on family immigration, which has been dominated to date by in-depth case studies of a small number of countries (e.g., Block & Bonjour 2013; Bech, Borevi,
To make sense of policy trends in a given country, we need to see them in relation to those in other countries. If we are to identify patterns that apply across a large number of cases, we must take a cross-country approach. Without a larger sample of countries, any comparisons of policies across countries will risk getting skewed.

Third, we need to develop and to test new hypotheses about the causes and effects of national migration policies. Scholars in the field have stressed the weakness of previous migration research when it comes to identifying causes (Brekke, Roed, & Schone 2017; Czaika & de Haas 2013). Comparative explanations of migration policies and of immigration patterns often fail to make theoretical assumptions applicable to different categories of migration at a particular level of analysis (de Haas 2021). I address these drawbacks through theoretically founded analyses of the causes and effects of family-immigration policies across periods and countries. While a specific focus on family migration does limit my ability to draw conclusions about other forms of migration, it facilitates the development and testing of explanatory hypotheses. Moreover, my quantitative research design allows me to identify causal links more firmly in connection with the determinants of policy variation on the one hand, and the effects of policy output on the other.

In the next sub-section, I discuss some empirical challenges that come with this choice of approach, and I give some indications of how I deal with these challenges in the three essays.

Empirical challenges

The three essays all make use of data provided by Immigration Policies in Comparison (IMPIC) (Helbling et al., 2017) and by the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (Solano & Huddleston 2020). The number of countries examined varies between the individual essays – from 15 in Essay II to 31 in Essay III. Essays I and III focus on the European context, while Essay II also includes three non-European countries (Australia, Canada, and the US). The selection of countries in each case reflects the availability of data in part; as described below, however, it is also guided by the design and analytical objectives of the particular essay in question.

Essay I uses IMPIC data to analyse the development of family-immigration policies in 20 European countries between 1990 and 2010. Aside from reflecting the availability of data, this delimitation arises from my interest in assessing certain expectations concerning the impact of Europeanization on family-immigration policies (in connection with policy convergence and a ‘race to the bottom’). In Essay II, I use IMPIC data to analyse the drivers of policy variation in 12 European and three non-European welfare states between 1985 and 2010. I have chosen these countries on the basis of previous categorizations of welfare-state regimes in connection with social insurance
(Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser 2011; Österman, Palme, & Ruhs 2019) and family policy (Korpi 2000). In Essay III, I use MIPEX data to investigate the relationship between immigration policies and family-migrant inflows in 31 European countries between 2008 and 2019. My focus on European countries in this essay reflects the availability of data (taken from Eurostat 2021) on rates of immigration and numbers of TCNs.

With their use of these indexes, both of which measure the degree of restrictiveness in migration policy, the individual essays in this thesis are the first of their kind to give detailed accounts of cross-country and longitudinal variations in family-immigration policy. Yet, the data provided by these two indexes are limited in different ways. The most important disadvantage concerns their timeframes. IMPIC provides data for the 1980–2010 period; MIPEX does so for 2007–2019. A trade-off thereby arises between focusing on historical policy patterns or on more recent ones. The indexes also differ regarding measurement and coverage – i.e., in their level of aggregation and their operationalization of different policy items. These divergences make it difficult to harmonize the data in any quick or reliable way.

Essays I and II use the IMPIC data to analyse policy variations over time. A disadvantage of the IMPIC data is that it only runs up to 2010, which means that these essays do not capture more recent policy reforms (e.g., new measures introduced after the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015–2016). However, since many policy instruments related to family immigration – behavioural conditions especially – spread across European countries in the early 2000s, the historical range of the data makes it possible to account for policy variations during a period when many reforms took place. Hence, while the data ends in 2010, IMPIC offers a good basis for assessing earlier policy reforms.

Essay III uses the MIPEX data instead. MIPEX mainly offers data on integration policies, but it also provides details on policies regulating the family immigration of TCNs. However, some of the policy instruments that states possess are missing from MIPEX – e.g., requirements that resident sponsors have a certain type of residence permit (e.g., permanent residence), or that their family members be of a certain minimum age. Nevertheless, the latest update of the MIPEX index (December 2020) makes it possible to combine policy data with detailed immigration data from Eurostat (2021) for the 2008–2019 period. For the first time, therefore, we can assess how policy variations are connected with the influx of different sub-categories among family-related migrants. This update also makes it possible to analyse the relationship between policies and inflows during a particularly hectic period: that following the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015–2016 in Europe.

It is important to stress, however, that these policy indexes do not capture the full range of regulations affecting the entry and settlement of family immigrants. For example, since the resident sponsor is often required, if he/she is an immigrant, to fulfil certain residence requirements (e.g., permanent residence) in order to qualify as a sponsor, various requirements regulating the
possibility of acquiring an adequate permit in the first place naturally affect the prospects for family immigration in a second phase. A certain mismatch has also been observed between national and EU legislation on the right to family reunification, whereby some member states have slightly different requirements for TCN sponsors than for citizen sponsors (e.g., Staver 2013). The Court of Justice of the European Union has ruled that equal rules should apply whether the sponsor is a national citizen or a TCN (see, e.g., COM (2019) 162 final); however, it is important that we keep these variations in mind when assessing the impact of policies on different sub-groups among family immigrants.

Furthermore, since the available data on migrant inflows only distinguishes between categories among family immigrants according to sponsors’ citizenship, it is necessary to highlight the challenges of assessing the differential impact of admission policy on patterns of family immigration (see Essay III for details). While the use of the difference between EU and non-EU sponsors as the only stratifying dimension is a limitation, I contend that it still serves as a feasible proxy for differentiating between sub-groups that can be expected, on a collective level, to face differing degrees of difficulty when policies become more demanding.

The challenges above pose certain analytical problems, especially for the longitudinal analysis of many cases. In what follows, I outline the methodological strategies I have used to deal with these challenges, and I discuss the main empirical issues that the essays have in common.

Essays II and III conduct time-series regression analyses of the determinants of policy changes (Essay II) and of the effects of admission policies on inflows of family migrants (Essay III). Some general methodological challenges arise in connection with the inferential statistical analysis of time-series cross-section (TSCS) data. How, for instance, are we to avoid omitted-variable bias and heteroscedasticity? The objective of both essays is to analyse family-immigration policies across countries: as a dependent variable in Essay II, and as an independent variable in Essay III. Like other policies, family-immigration policy is a slow-moving variable, which means that ascertaining its causes and effects is not easy. To account for this statistically, I elaborate on different lag structures, thereby controlling for past values of policy restrictiveness and absorbing the risk of serially correlated errors (Keele & Kelly 2006). Furthermore, building on different assumptions regarding the causes and effects of family-immigration policies, the two essays elaborate on different fixed-effects models, in order to control for time-invariant country-level factors and to avoid omitted-variable bias (Allison 2009).

In Essay II, I take on the difficult task of identifying the causal links between institutional regimes and policy output. To deal with this challenge, I advance a dynamic institutionally based framework that specifies strategic interactions between welfare-state regimes on the one hand and the time-variant
factors of unemployment and immigration on the other. I thus analyse the welfare state as an intervening institutional variable that mediates the relationship between the presumed exogenous drivers of policy restrictions and of policy output. This approach speaks to a recurrent methodological argument in political science more generally. That is, given the complexity of social and political processes, models that specify interaction between variables are ubiquitous in social theory (Berry, Golder, & Milton 2012). As Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006, p. 64) argue, ‘any causal claim implies a set of conditions that need to be satisfied before a purported cause is sufficient to bring about its effect’.

Using newly disseminated data from Eurostat (2021) and MIPEX (2020), Essay III makes a first attempt to analyse how admission policies have affected the inflow of family migrants in a large number of countries. Given the diversity of drivers and opportunities that shape migration processes, any study of the effects of different policies on inflows needs to take the possibility of endogeneity (i.e., when an explanatory variable is correlated with the error term) seriously. Another problem concerns potential spill-over effects between countries. Previous studies have shown that restrictive policy reforms in one country may increase the inflow of migrants into neighbouring states (e.g., Bratu et al., 2018). However, since family immigration requires that a sponsor already be resident in the receiving country, the destination is to a great extent given beforehand (much more so, for example, than in the case of spontaneous asylum applications). Even so, migrant inflows other than family immigration may have an impact on future cases of family reunification.

Aware of these analytical challenges, I carry out a rigorous time-series regression analysis including a variety of theoretically selected control variables, in order to assess the relationship between policy changes and family-immigration rates. This analysis is then validated by a series of robustness tests, the purpose of which is to address concerns about reversed causality and to control for the confounding influence of other factors. Among other things this includes, following Angrist and Pischke (2009, p. 245), the use of fixed effects and of lagged dependent variables as alternative identifying assumptions in separate models. This enables me to bound the causal effects of interest, while at the same time avoiding the risk of basing inferences on biased parameter estimates – the so-called ‘Nickell bias’ (Nickell 1981).

The discussion above highlights some of the empirical challenges involved in the kind of cross-country analysis of causes and effects done in this thesis. It is indeed hard to identify causal links in a comparative setting with the use of observational data. Yet, this dissertation provides a good basis for drawing general conclusions about the determinants and effects of family immigration-policies, because it presents theoretically founded and statistically rigorous cross-section time-series analyses. As such, it contributes to an emerging body of quantitative research on the emergence and effects of immigration policies over time and across a large number of countries (e.g., Boräng 2018; Brekke,
4. Results and contributions

With its three-stage approach, this thesis offers an integrated account of variations across time and space in the area of family-immigration policy. Essay I provides a detailed mapping of policy configurations. This in turn feeds into the examination in Essay II of the determinants of policy change, and from there into the analysis in Essay III of the effects on policy outcomes. In addition, each essay contributes new findings on questions previously unanswered in comparative migration research.

Trends in family-immigration policy in Europe

Deploying new conceptual tools and a set of empirical analyses, Essay I provides a more detailed mapping than has been seen in previous research of cross-country and longitudinal policy variations in the area of family immigration.

While the general tendency was towards growing restrictiveness over the 1990–2010 period, and while cross-country variations in Europe have diminished to some extent, the shift was neither universal nor unidirectional. My configurational analysis reveals substantial differences between the policy formations of different countries; some policy changes go against the general trend. Countries have not just differed in their degree of restrictiveness; they have also introduced different types of policies, as in the case of EC and QC for resident sponsors and/or incoming family members. These findings suggest we must qualify certain conclusions drawn from previous research about cross-country variations in family-immigration policy: e.g., that policy convergence is occurring (Groenendijk & Strik 2018), or that European states are involved in a ‘race to the bottom’ (Block & Bonjour 2013).

Moreover, the findings of Essay I cast doubt on the idea of a turn towards civic integration in Western states. This notion largely overlooks the economic conditions that regulate immigrants’ access to various rights, including that of family reunification (e.g., Goodman 2014; Joppke 2007). In fact, my analysis shows, there has been a dual move towards growing conditionality in the form of behavioural QC: on the one hand in the form of stricter civic conditions for incoming family members, and on the other hand in the form of stricter economic conditions for resident sponsors. Certain countries, however, have a very low degree of restrictiveness in QC; some have no civic conditions at all for incoming family members. Thus, the ‘civic turn’ in family-immigration policy is as yet restricted to certain countries (cf. Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017).
The differences between countries observed in Essay I highlight the importance of going beyond a unidimensional perspective on policy restrictiveness. This is necessary if we are to capture the variation in changes in family-immigration policy in European countries (and presumably elsewhere). Thus, by providing more detailed observations of congruence and deviation than is found in previous research, this essay challenges simplified interpretations along the lines of convergence, a ‘race to the bottom’, or a ‘civic turn’ in family-immigration policy.

**Viewing cross-country variations in family-immigration policy through the lens of welfare-state regimes**

Building on findings of policy variation in Essay I, Essay II offers a first comprehensive cross-country analysis of family-immigration policies over time. It finds that the institutional design of different welfare states has shaped family-immigration policies, by modifying the effects of certain risk factors on policy restrictiveness. In contrast to what the idea of the progressive dilemma would lead us to expect (e.g., Pearce 2004; Freeman 1995; Hay & Wincott 2012), market-oriented welfare states with weaker universal and redistributive features have been more likely to sharpen restrictions on the admission of family migrants when under pressure from increasing immigration and higher unemployment. This tendency is particularly noticeable with regard to qualifying conditions: Basic Security welfare states have been inclined to introduce various behavioural conditions in connection with family immigration, such as language tests and financial requirements. This indicates that the conditional features of Basic Security welfare states overlap with increasingly conditional policies on the admission of family immigrants (cf. Sainsbury 2012; Shutes 2016).

By providing evidence that the institutional design of different welfare states matters for cross-country differences in family-immigration policy, Essay II supports the conclusion of previous studies concerning the importance of the welfare state in shaping the politics of migration and integration (Boräng 2018; Geddes 2003; Sainsbury 2012). It also contributes to this literature, in three important ways. First, it demonstrates that institutional variations in welfare states affect not just immigrant-integration policies, but immigration policies as well (cf. Sainsbury 2012; Koopmans 2010; Römer 2017).

Second, it moves beyond earlier research regarding the relationship between the welfare state and migration policy (Boräng 2018; Crepaz 2008; Kolbe & Kayran 2019; Freeman 1986). Not only, that is, does it analyse how variations in migration policy are linked to differences between welfare states; it also demonstrates that the degree to which increased immigration and rising unemployment provoke restrictive changes in immigration policy depends on the institutional design of different welfare states. Previous studies have
shown that political tensions over immigration can harden in times of economic distress and increasing migrant inflows, and that admission regulations can then be affected in turn (Neumayer 2005; Money 1999). As this essay shows, however, the degree to which these risk factors elicit greater restrictiveness depends on the institutional design of different welfare states.

Third, Essay II goes beyond the measurement of ‘welfare state generosity’ (Scruggs, Jahn, & Kuitto 2014) commonly used in studies of the relationship between the welfare state and immigration policy (see, e.g., Boräng 2018; Römer 2017). Instead, I focus on the institutional configurations of different welfare states – i.e., the design of their social-insurance institutions (Österman, Palme, & Ruhs 2019) and of their family-policy models (Korpi 2000) – in order to identify mechanisms that link institutional attributes of welfare states with different policies for family-based admission. This focus on the welfare state as an intervening institutional variable casts new light on how migration management overlaps with the design of different welfare states.

Differential effects of admission policies on rates of family immigration

As the first cross-country time-series study of the relationship between admission policies and family immigration, Essay III contributes new evidence on the influence of policies on the size and composition of inflow patterns over time. It finds that restrictive admission policies have led to falling overall levels of family immigration. It shows too that these policies have had stratifying implications: i.e., their effect is greater when the resident sponsor is a non-EU citizen than when he/she is an EU citizen. Thus, the essay offers new comparative insights on the differential effects of restrictive immigration policies. As such, it substantiates previous claims regarding growing stratification in family-immigration policy (e.g., Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017; Bonjour & Kraler 2015; Block 2015; Kofman 2018; Schweitzer 2015).

Moreover, Essay III adds new findings to the emerging body of comparative literature on the effects of migration policies on immigration patterns. Most previous studies of the determinants of immigration have analysed bilateral and aggregated flows between specific sending and receiving countries (e.g., Helbling & Leblang 2019; Fitzgerald, Leblang, & Teets 2014; Ortega & Peri 2013; Mayda 2010). Such studies overlook the effects of policies and other factors on the different entry categories (humanitarian, labour, and family) which form the foundation on which migration policies are based. I con-

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7 Only third-country nationals (TCNs) who have been granted residence permits for family reasons in a European country are included in the definition of family immigrants applied here. Resident sponsors, however, can be of any nationality. The operative distinction is whether the sponsor is an EU citizen or a non-EU citizen – i.e., a third-country national with a valid residence permit in a European country.
tribute to this line of research by showing that admission policies have influ-
enced both the size and the composition of family immigration (which has
been the largest admission category in OECD countries during the past few
decades).

Another conclusion we can draw is that family-immigration policies are
not significantly associated with changes in migrant inflows except in the case
of family immigration. While this finding confirms the relationship of interest
in this study (the effect of admission policies on rates of family immigration),
it may also seem somewhat surprising. One might plausibly expect a given
country’s migration policy to be relatively coherent – i.e., for it to display a
similar degree of restrictiveness in relation to different types of immigration.
Yet, Essay III highlights the diversity both of migration policies and of types
of immigration. Restrictive reforms in one area of migration policy do not
necessarily entail restrictions in other areas, and the effects of different poli-
cies can vary in relation to different categories and sub-categories of migrants.
This accords with the approach taken in this thesis: namely, that we must dif-
ferentiate between different policy tools and dimensions in connection with
different immigration categories if we are to analyse the relationship between
policy outputs and outcomes in a precise manner (cf. Boswell 2007; de Haas
2021).

Migration management in modern welfare states in the age of
conditionality

Taken as a whole, this thesis contributes to the study of comparative migration
policies. It presents new findings on the interplay between welfare states and
migration policies, on the methods with which states regulate international
migration, and on the differential impact of different policies on the size and
composition of migrant inflows. It also adds insights on increasingly condi-
tional forms of migration management.

As noted above, there are indications of a meta-trend towards condition-
ality in contemporary welfare states, and this applies to both social policy and
migration policy. It behooves us, therefore, to link the parallel discussions that
take place in the two policy fields. As this thesis demonstrates, social policies,
immigration policies, and immigrant-integration policies have become in-
creasingly entangled in contemporary migration-policy regimes (see Essay I
and Essay II for details). The connection between conditionality in social pol-
icy and conditionality in connection with immigrants’ social rights has been
analysed in previous studies (e.g., Sainsbury 2012; Gschwind 2021). How-
ever, the overlap between increasing welfare conditionality and growing con-
ditionality in the area of immigration control has not received the same atten-
tion.

While the requirements differ between the latter two policy fields, there has
been a shared trend in both towards introducing behavioural conditions (i.e.,
conditionality of conduct). Both policy areas have seen a shift of responsibility to applicants. As in the areas of social policy and immigrant-integration policy, conditionality in the area of immigration control may create a system of informal selection that favours ‘the best and brightest’, while penalizing those who have less in the way of economic and social capital (c.f. Reeves & Loopstra 2017; Kofman 2018). Yet, importantly, the context of immigration policy involves other types of sanctions compared to social policy: it not only concerns access to various internal rights, but also the possibility of acquiring admission to a country.

On the one hand, this turn towards growing conditionality in migration policy can be seen as a logical consequence of the increasing interest in making migration more favourable economically for receiving countries (see, e.g., Boucher & Gest 2018: 155ff). By introducing more demanding policies, states can kill two birds with one stone: they can respond to the section of the electorate which is critical of immigration, while at the same time improving the integration potential of those who are admitted.

On the other hand, this raises the question of a state’s moral and political order in connection with the ‘family’. This issue is closely connected with ideals and structures inherent in the welfare state. Strict admission requirements – particularly qualifying conditions that focus on the deservingness of resident sponsors – arguably collide with the norms inherent in comprehensive welfare states, such as universality and equal treatment (Borevi 2015). Adding to this tension is the fact that family migration is one of the few cross-border pathways that are regular and safe. As such, restricting the right to family immigration can be seen as at odds with the efforts of global governance institutions and the international community to promote regular and ‘sustainable’ entry tracks, and to extend and harmonize rights for migrants and displaced persons (see, e.g., GCM 2018).

Clearly, the regulation of family migration – especially through demanding conditions – does more than just raise questions about policy variations between countries; it also highlights political and normative dilemmas. The turn towards greater conditionality in migration policies should prompt us to ask questions about whether migrants’ economic utility (or their ‘capacity’ to integrate) should determine their access to various rights and legal statuses. To what extent should the right to family migration be regulated by contributivist and other merit-based criteria? Or should other and more solidaristic norms apply?

This type of normative problematization is too often missing from current political debates. Migration tends either to be portrayed as a threat to the host society or to be discussed in terms of migrants’ economic contribution (Boréus 2020; Bonjour & Chauvin 2018). The question of which, how many, and on what grounds immigrants should be admitted will always be a balancing act for voters and policymakers. However, regardless of one’s views on the mat-
ter, the evidence presented in this thesis on the stratifying effects of increasingly demanding admission policies highlights the issue of how these effects are, or can be, justified by policymakers in affluent democracies.

5. Possible avenues of future research

This thesis offers new answers to an under-researched set of questions, but it also raises new issues. There are still very few explanatory accounts of family-migration policies, or of migration policies more generally. It should be worthwhile, therefore, to expand the scope of current research on the causes and effects of migration policies in a comparative perspective.

Let us begin with the effects. Since available data now makes it possible to distinguish between policies that regulate different entry categories (e.g., Solano & Huddleston 2020; Helbling et al., 2017), future research on comparative migration policies should devote greater attention to policies that target different entry categories, and to the effects of such policies on inflow patterns. This relates among other things to the turn towards more conditional migration policies, and to the ways in which policies can have varying effects on different sub-groups among immigrants. It would be helpful, for example, to have data on immigrant inflows that distinguish not just between different categories of entry, but also between different sub-groups within these broader categories. In the case of family migration, that would mean data that separate cases of family reunification from cases of family formation. Where the former are concerned, moreover, it would be good to have data that separates cases where the resident sponsor obtained a resident permit on humanitarian grounds from cases where he/she obtained such a permit on other grounds. This should make it possible to explore the stratifying implications of certain policy reforms in greater detail, yielding a better basis for causal inference.

One question that arises in both Essay I and Essay II concerns the interplay between national policies and international and regional frameworks. In line with some previous accounts (e.g., Block & Bonjour 2013; Groenendijk & Strik 2018), both essays demonstrate that the EU Directive on the right to family reunification has influenced policy changes in the area of family immigration. Moreover, demands for stronger EU coordination in migration management have intensified since the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015–2016. Stricter admission regulations have been one of the top priorities. These tendencies contrast with recent efforts by the UN and other global governance institutions to promote family migration, on the grounds that it offers a safe and regular migration pathway (GCM 2018). It should be worthwhile in future research to look more closely at these apparently conflicting objectives.
Another area that may be worth exploring concerns the impact of political parties and of anti-immigration sentiment on policy changes and inflow patterns in this area. This thesis has touched on various party-political dynamics, but it has not elaborated to any great extent on the influence of the political environment on family-immigration policies. The role of parties and of other political actors on the development of family-immigration policies should be explored more thoroughly in future research. A cross-country perspective would be particularly valuable in this regard. While the politicization of recent policy reforms in this area has been analysed in previous studies of a few cases (see, e.g., Bech, Borevi, & Mouritsen 2017; Borevi 2015; Sirriyeh 2015; Staver 2015), little comparative research has been done on how party positions and political discourse link with policy practices in this area.

This thesis explores the causes and effects of increased conditionality in family-immigration policies. As mentioned above, there has been growing conditionality in both migration policy and social policy. This ‘institutional congruence of conditionality’ calls for scrutiny by future researchers. What reforms of this type have been introduced in both areas, and have common factors lain behind them?

There are of course many other crucial issues than those raised here, including the integration of family migrants in host countries. We know little, for example, about public attitudes towards family migrants. These and many other matters are beyond the scope of this thesis, but they illustrate the complexity of international migration. I must therefore emphasize once more the importance and analytical value, for advancing research on the evolution and effects of migration policies, of devoting closer attention to different migration categories.
References


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Editor: The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences

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