

The devils of the details: Danish welfare chauvinism across policy programs and migrant groups

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In the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2008, the Danish public indicated very low levels of welfare chauvinism, only bypassed by Sweden. However, the ESS asked about “people coming to live in Denmark from other countries” and about “social benefits and services” in general. This paper analyses whether such universal attitudes are also present when Danes are asked about Eastern European workers’ access to seven specific benefits and services. This is done by means of a national representative survey conducted in 2014. In terms of access to health care, child-care and primary education, universal attitudes are present; even more so than the levels measured in the ESS. However, in terms of access to public university education, child-benefits, unemployment benefits and social assistance, welfare chauvinism is present and higher than the levels measured in the ESS. The paper also analyses whether the reluctance to give child- and unemployment benefits to Eastern Europeans are caused by these groups not being framed as EU-citizens; which has been a standard argument in the public debate. This potential framing-effect is analysed by means of a survey experiment, also conducted in 2014, where different groups are asked respectively about the access of “EU-citizens” and “East European workers”. The finding is that Danes are as reluctant to give access to “European citizens” as they are to give access to “East European workers”. The overall argument is that though Danes – and other publics accustomed to a large universal welfare state – might indicate general support for the principle of universalism such ideas are easily challenged by public debates about migrants’ access to specific benefits and services.

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