

Restrictive policy preferences on immigrants' access to welfare state and what is behind

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Introduction

In the past years, immigration has become one of the most debated social issues in the United Kingdom. Strong preference for a more selective immigration system, need for stricter border controls and specific measures to limit immigrants' access to welfare benefits and services at least for two years were the key policy recommendations participants of democratic forums agreed on after two days of discussing priorities for the future of welfare states as part of the international research project Welfare State Futures – Our Children's Europe¹ in the Fall of 2015. Among the five European countries taking part in the research, attitudes to immigrants were the most exclusivist in the United Kingdom.

The restrictive policy preferences largely resembled the findings of the 2013 British Attitudes Survey, when almost 80% of respondents agreed that number of immigrants should be reduced (BAS, 2013). Based on the Eurobarometer data, from 2003 onward political salience of the issue of immigration has been outstanding in the UK. One third of respondents viewed immigration as one of the most pressing national issues in the UK, while such perceptions were shared by less than 10% in other Western European countries such as France or Germany before the recent refugees crisis (Alfano, Dustmann and Frattini 2016). Furthermore, proposals intended to guarantee immigrants contribute before taking advantage of the welfare state fitted the dominant public discourse preceding the national referendum on leaving the European Union.

In order to better understand the opposition to immigrants' inclusion to the welfare state these policy recommendations indicate, this paper aims to explore and analyse the processes which led to the formulation of these policy preferences. The paper is devoted to examine the way ordinary people understand and talk about immigration during the democratic forum discussions with particular focus

¹ The research aims to analyse ordinary people's opinions, aspirations and preferences for a future welfare state in 2040. It adopted a qualitative research design including the use of the methods of DFs and focus group discussions. The research is conducted in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. The project started in 2015. Further information on the project and publications can be accessed on <http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/welfsoc/>

on key ambivalences concerning refugees and economic migrants. The extensive discussions developed during the democratic forums enable us to examine

- 1) *how people thematise the issue of immigration*
- 2) *how people differentiate between specific types of immigrants as well as specific social contexts and social circumstances*
- 3) *what are those aspects, considerations, perceptions, interests on which participants base their arguments in relation to specific groups of immigrants?*

The paper sheds new light on the findings of attitudes studies as it reveals that there is a much more complex debate behind the rather exclusivist policy preferences, which are often found by public opinion surveys. In contrast to major quantitative research methods asking individual respondents to position themselves in relation to a limited number of questions, this study relies on the analysis of social interactions during democratic forum discussions. Democratic forums conducted in the Welfare States Future – Our Children’s Europe research encouraged development of discussions providing high level of autonomy for the participants to express and exchange views, preferences and priorities. Thus, democratic forums enable us to analyse attitudes to immigration as they develop through social interaction and shed more light on the context-dependent and dynamic nature of public attitudes.

The study starts with a brief review of the academic literature on attitudes to immigrants’ access to welfare provisions. The third section is intended to present the methodology focusing on the potential contributions of using democratic forums and discourse analysis in attitudinal research. The analytical sections examine discussions on refugees and economic migrants separately along the key topics and issues raised, which triggered ambivalent stances in relation to these two specific groups of immigrants.

Attitudes to inclusion of immigrants in the welfare states

Immigration is often listed among the complex and interrelated social processes which put increasing pressure on welfare states (Taylor-Gooby, Leruth and Chung 2017). The tension between immigration and welfare state support stems from the notion that increasing diversity undermines the solidarity necessary to maintain high level of public support for welfare states (Koopmans 2010; Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Banting and Kymlicka 2006). Inclusion of immigrants to the welfare state challenges the nation-state conception of welfare states, the shared collective (mostly national) identity which is assumed to override individual interests and mitigate social divisions (Kramer and Brewer 1984). Although European welfare states enjoy stable and relatively strong public support, negative

tendencies are emerging in the form of growing welfare chauvinism throughout Europe (Svallfors 2012). Such tendencies are signalled also by the above presented policy recommendations.

Van Oorschot (2008) studying informal solidarity in eighteen European countries finds that immigrants are considered the least deserving beneficiaries of welfare benefits – ranking elderly people, sick and disabled, unemployed more deserving. Van Oorschot (2006) distinguishes five principles shaping perceptions of deservingness. The need principle evaluates the extent of need potential beneficiaries are in – the higher their neediness, the higher their deservingness. Control refers to beneficiaries' control over their neediness – the less control they have over their situation, the higher their deservingness is. Identity principle suggests that people are more willing to share empathy and solidarity with people having similar individual or group identities. Attitude of potential beneficiaries concerns the expected behaviours of compliance and gratefulness, which are rewarded by higher deservingness. Last but not least, the principle of reciprocity is taken into account. The higher are the previous or potential future contributions and the higher is the perception that the person will pay back the value of the support provided, the higher is the deservingness of those people.

Reeskens and van Oorschot (2012) claim that it is the principle of identity, reciprocity and control where immigrants underscore in deservingness. Accordingly, the authors argue that cultural differences, lack of previous contributions to the social security system as well as the prospects of continuing migration are the main reasons behind. Control over immigrants' situation is considered in terms of their decision to emigrate to the chosen host country, what tends to reduce perceptions of immigrants' deservingness (Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012). The authors claim that the principle of need is stronger in welfare states with limited resources and especially in countries with higher share of immigrants, where perceptions of competition for resources is higher. However, perceptions of deservingness do not necessarily mean complete exclusion from the welfare state. Analysing attitudes to immigrants' access to welfare benefits, Mewes and Mau (2012) as well as Van der Wall et al (2010) find that most frequently people make immigrants' access conditional on tax contributions. Only a minor group of people rejects categorically immigrants' access to welfare provision. While deservingness theory introduces key criteria affecting willingness to give access to social benefits and services, there is extensive literature focusing on specific motivations as well as social and institutional contexts influencing attitudes to grant access to welfare state as well as influencing how people use such deservingness criteria in their everyday life and interactions.

Focusing on the motive of self-interest, evidence shows that working class people, who tend to perceive immigrants as competitors for available resources, are more inclined to welfare chauvinism than higher socio-economic status people (Mewes and Mau 2013; van Oorschot and Uunk 2007).

Adopting institutional approach to the study of welfare chauvinism, Crepez and Damron (2009) argue that comprehensive welfare states limit nativist opposition to and preferences for excluding immigrants by reducing social gaps between nationals and immigrants. In line with these findings, Van der Waal et al (2013) identify that higher level of income inequality and higher level of selectivity of the welfare system lead to higher degree of welfare chauvinism. Their research results confirm the effect of institutional factors on popular welfare views and the authors emphasise that policies and institutions aiming at reducing economic inequalities contribute to cope with welfare chauvinism. In a recent study Larsen (2016) investigates welfare chauvinism in relation to specific welfare programmes in Denmark. Larsen's findings suggest that public opposition increases concerning benefits addressing economic inequalities and insecurities. Accordingly, people tend to be more generous in relation to education, childcare and healthcare services and more reluctant in granting access to unemployment benefits, social assistance and child allowance.

Although the above presented findings rather imply considerations of economic threats, Larsen (2016) finds correlation of perceptions of cultural and economic threats with welfare chauvinism in all areas. Sniderman and Hangendoorn (2007) as well as Sides and Citrin (2007) identified the dominance of the cultural threat perceptions as they found that people would rather prefer fewer immigrants being dependant on the welfare system, than large number of immigrants contributing to the system. Van der Waal et al. (2010) also concluded that cultural considerations and cultural capital are more important drivers of welfare chauvinism than economic issues. Koning (2013) stresses the important role of political framings arguing that even low level of welfare dependence can be used and interpreted as cultural threat thus mobilizing welfare chauvinist measures.

Based on these research findings, study of attitudes to immigrants' inclusion to welfare states is especially relevant in the context of United Kingdom, a country with a liberal-leaning welfare state and numerically considerable and socially diverse population of immigrants. Moreover, the high level of salience of the issue of immigration in the political as well as the public discourse peaking in the period preceding the Brexit referendums also asks for more in-depth research on public opinion and preferences for immigrants' access to welfare provision.

While in the past decades, research on attitudes to immigrants' inclusion in the welfare state has considerably expanded, the fact that majority of these studies use predominantly international surveys (Svallfors 2010; Svallfors 2012; Sundberg and Taylor-Gooby 2013) tends to limit the scope of these studies. Surveys present a rather static picture of attitudes expressed in the pre-defined answers given to a limited number of questions and are less suitable to examine the reasons and processes behind attitude formation. This is especially a field where use of qualitative research methods such as

democratic forums might greatly complement quantitative research findings and contribute to better understanding of processes and mechanisms behind attitudes to immigrants' inclusion in welfare states. The use of the deliberative method of democratic forums enables to analyse the dynamic and context-dependent aspect of attitude formation as attitudes are shared through social interaction.

Research design – use of democratic forums in welfare attitudes research

The Welfare State Futures – Our Children's Europe is the first international research project to apply this specific deliberative method in the area of welfare attitudes research. The research is intended to explore aspirations, priorities of ordinary citizens about the future of welfare states with particular focus on assumptions and values underlying these aspirations (Taylor-Gooby 2015).

Democratic forums constituted of two days of discussion (plenary and small-group discussions) with the participation of 34-35 people in each country. People invited to discuss the future of welfare states formed a diverse group roughly representative of the national population based on age, gender, education, marital and employment status, household income, ethnicity and electoral preferences.

Democratic forums provide a considerably dynamic framework of discussions in which attitudes can unfold without raising direct questions regarding participants' stances on inclusion of immigrants to the welfare state. Throughout the discussions participants enjoyed high level of autonomy in shaping the discussions. Each day five-five topics were discussed in small groups of 10-12 people. On the first day participants were free to raise social issues they considered the most relevant for the future of welfare states. Therefore, a naïve discussion could develop in relation to the issue of immigration, welfare state financing, unemployment, education and aging population, which were chosen by the participants. On the second day the research team set the topics of discussion, although these overlapped with the topics of the first day with the exception of gender. Another specificity of the research design was that on the second day participants were asked to act as policy advisors and agree on policy recommendations for the future government in 2040.

While limitations of the method concerning inclusivity, high level of context dependency and inequality in participation need to be acknowledged and duly taken into account, the key added value of democratic forums is that they provide a more dynamic analytical framework. First of all, granting freedom for participants to shape the discussions greatly encourages bottom-up discussions drawing a more detailed picture about public understandings and preferences. Secondly, analysis of attitudes through social interactions allows to broaden our horizons on the dynamism and processes of attitude

formation, how specific attitudes might shape in light of new information, new perspectives shared by other participants or by engaging in the elaboration of particular stances and opinion and the need to argue and justify these opinions. This aspect is particularly useful in relation to the study of attitudes to immigration and welfare states as attitudes might change depending on the specific characteristics or mental images of immigrants – e.g. talking about refugee or economic migrants, perceptions of immigrants as hard-working individuals or perception of immigrants as abusers of the welfare system - as well as depending on the perceptions of the welfare system, its roles and functions.

In order to embrace the richness of discussions discourse analytical tools are used to identify thematic patterns in the debates and analyse what ideas, aspects, issues and considerations are raised in relation to immigration. However, it is not enough to identify the diversity of thoughts shared, it is important to follow-up how do participants contextualize and justify their stances and preferences, how they react to new ideas, opinions, what aspects are taken for granted and what considerations tend to be unheard or not even raised during the debates. The following analysis of democratic forum discussions follow these principles in order to shed more light on the key ambivalences emerging during the discussion on immigration. Although the policy recommendations reached by the end of the democratic forums were not targeted at specific groups of immigrants, during the discussions participants clearly differentiated between refugees and economic migrants. As the analysis will show participants' beliefs, perceptions as well as arguments tended to vary depending on the specific group of immigrants, ambivalences concerning refugees and economic migrants are discussed and analysed separately in the following sections.

Moral obligations towards asylum-seekers

Humanity, access to decent life as well as principle of need and reciprocity were emphasised by participants as reasons to help asylum-seekers facing life-threatening circumstances in their countries of origin. In all break-out groups there was consensus that there is **moral obligation to offer help and protection to asylum-seekers, "people in crisis"** and participants would expect the same treatment in case they were in need to cope with such situations. It was widely accepted that the country – the UK – shares responsibility to support people in such unfortunate circumstances. Both quotations below represent the need for social solidarity with people in war torn countries.

"44 Because I think we all, at the end of the day, well I'd hope anyway that if somebody needed help from another country and they're a refugee and they've got children, and they've got nowhere to go. They don't want particularly to get in a boat and travel all this way.

No.

No.

They don't want to risk their lives and all this lot.

They're taking big chances.

But you're quite prepared to help them, but not, only for a certain amount of time." (Day 1, Green Group)²

"87 We are, the UK are part of the EU, a pretty wealthy conglomerate of countries, some of them less wealthier than others but pure humanity must say that we would give support to people who are really living in situations where we would not live, but we [unclear] any day of the week children could be killed or whatever so we must really out of just pure decency accept people from countries like that but it's a matter of quotas." (DAY 1, Orange Group)

However, the discussions also show such moral obligations should be limited in terms of time and conditional on the capacities available considering the social conditions in the host country.

Limits to moral obligations

In terms of time, participants almost took for granted that the **responsibility to help these people should be temporary** until safety is restored in the country of origin. One of the key reasons for encouraging safe return of refugees was the **fear of overcrowding** in the UK and perception of **refugees as burden on the welfare system**. There were suggestions that there were **skilled people among refugees** who could valuably contribute to the system, but issues with language comprehension as well as recognition of qualifications were viewed considerable barriers to make use of their skills. Still, awareness of these issues did not translate into specific proposals how to help refugees to better and faster integrate to the society. Instead, suggestions concerned how to facilitate the process of refugees' return to their countries. It was proposed to **better monitor the situation in the countries of origin** as well as to **facilitate resolution of the conflict** which was considered the primary reason for migration.

Debate on **safety** tended to be contested, too. While some participants argued that finding a safe place to live was a key priority for refugees and refused that people were leaving their homes and risking their life without reason, many participants questioned the **legitimacy of seeking asylum** far away from their countries of origin. They argued that it was dubious whether safety was the actual motivation of asylum-seekers if they were willing to travel as far as the UK instead of settling in neighbouring countries. This suspicion was immediately linked to **motivations of accessing benefits and services** in the UK.

Similarly, while acknowledging the moral obligations, discussions also reflected on the **social issues within the country**. As expressed below by Participant 68 and 69 first of all social issues pertaining in the country should be prioritised and tackled. Helping foreigners – asylum-seekers in this case – should

² Key demographic information on participants quoted in the paper is included in Appendix 1.

depend on the remaining capacities. As stated by Participant 69 UK already provided **financial as well as humanitarian aid for countries in need**, which could be a form of fulfilling such moral obligations. **Perceptions of refugees' overuse of benefits and services** were also used to justify the need for controlling and limiting acceptance of asylum-seekers to the country warning not to set a precedent of allowing entrance of anybody who would like to come to the UK.

“68: I understand the moral issues, I do understand moral issues and I know there's a lot help with needs out there but I do think charity starts at home and look after your own first that's, you know, this country. I'm not saying just the English person or a Jamaican person or Asian person, I'm not saying that, I'm saying try and sort out what's here now and store what you've got left or what you can do to help others...

[...]

69: I'm with you in that I think we tend to forget about the problems we have here and we concentrate on what we can do in other countries now. There is other things that we can do for places like Syria, other than just accept 100,000 people coming to Birmingham in the next two years. You know we already contribute financially across the globe to charities, to aid and all that sort of stuff that actually, that moral obligation we're fulfilling to a lesser or greater degree. I think if you rely solely on bringing these people here, it's a drain...

[...]

69: Yes, you've got a drain on resources, on funds and, you know, in 25 years' time, if that's the policy that we adopt now, it's going to be difficult to turn that around and say 'well actually we did that then but we're not doing it now because of x, y and z reasons' because you've set that precedent now. It's really important at this stage that we get to that point where we say 'we're more than happy to fulfil our moral obligation but it doesn't necessarily mean we're going to be taking everybody in as well'.” (DAY 1, Yellow Group)

Although discussions on moral obligations and empathy towards refugees implied willingness to share solidarity with refugees, questioning the legitimacy of seeking asylum in the UK, emphasising the need to prioritise issues within the country, perceptions of refugees' overuse of benefits and services revealed certain distancing from accepting refugees. Accordingly, there were suggestions to find other ways of helping people in war torn countries such as providing financial support in foreign countries. However, this was also challenged as some participants argued that especially generous humanitarian aid promoted the UK as a wealthy country and attracted more immigrants – including refugees – to come.

Inaction of the government

Fears of overcrowding and overuse of welfare benefits and services tended to dominate the discussions, but participants also raised concerns about the conduct of the government. Statement by Participant 90 reveals **discontent with the government's inaction**. Framing the issue of accepting refugees as a fight itself set a negative context, but the statement also shows that in order to reduce future conflicts between natives and refugees there is need for more information on how many people are coming, why are they coming to the country as well as greater transparency regarding the measures taken to support refugees.

“90 its worrying for me because you're the government, you [unclear] if you don't know how much people are still here and what the purpose of them being here, we've lost the fight before we've even started and then everybody's going to be frustrated because what's going on, what's literally going on, because you've been [unclear] pay so much into Britain to accept so many people but the government don't show you this money is used to do that, it come out of all British people own anything, the benefit system [unclear] you are going to accept twenty thousand people, benefits from the European government is paying to support that, but we're just twenty thousand people come in and [unclear] it's not going to work.” (DAY 1, Orange Group)

Last but not least, the issue of **security** was debated as well – whether refugees constitute a security risk and how can it be dealt with. The quoted passage below reflects the responsibility of the state to prevent potential engagement in crime by **helping refugees to get employed**. However, these aspects tended to be unheard and more emphasis was put on preventing and limiting who can enter the country rather than being pro-active and helping refugees to better integrate and enabling them to get along and contribute to the society.

“63: Yes, sometimes they can be dangerous.

69: There's an extra security aspect.

63: [unclear] and terrorist groups and... I don't know if it's just the media but they're saying that they're going to let people into the country.

60: I think the country should... if the country has more people, say from Syria for example, they should help them as much as they can because if those people won't be able to get a job, they'll start doing crime.” (DAY 1, Yellow Group)

As the discussions focusing on refugees developed participants shared wide variety of considerations in relation to refugees starting with moral obligations, acknowledgement of the difficulties they face in their countries. In this respect **refugees' neediness was recognized**. On the other hand, questioning their motivations and the legitimacy of seeking asylum in distanced countries such as UK set the basis for exclusion of refugees, which were further underpinned by fears of overcrowding as well as perceptions of refugees' misuse of the benefit system. **Moral obligations to help refugees were perceived temporary**, which might be associated also with perceptions of limited reciprocity and limited contribution to the British welfare system. However, the issue of contribution and the need for achieving that refugees contribute to the system was not dealt with – especially not when policy preferences were discussed.

The issue of limited capacities and the **need to prioritise social issues** within the country was also raised to justify reducing UK's responsibility to provide help in form of accepting and accommodating refugees. Discussions also revealed that motivations of refugees as well as transparency of the process of accepting refugees matter to people. Discussions on ways of helping refugees to integrate to the society were almost completely missing. While during the discussions participants reflected on the perspective of refugees and their situation, debate over the policy recommendations was dominated

by the interests of the in-group, which according to the participants could be secured by stricter immigration system and stricter access to welfare provision.

Economic migrants

While in relation to the refugees, moral obligations tended to be in the centre of discussion and how and in what forms should the country fulfil such obligations, in case of economic migrants the debate focused on who should be allowed to live in the country. Participants shared fears of overcrowding, misuse of the welfare system, healthcare tourism, competition at the labour market as well as failure of immigration system to control and monitor who enters and stays in the country as the key reasons for the need to focus more on immigration in the future and set limits to it.

Throughout the discussions participants clearly differentiated between **“good” immigrants, who contribute to the country** and **“bad” immigrants, who are taking advantage of the welfare system** and live on benefits. Accordingly, they tended to draw two stories of immigration. One, where immigrants are coming to the country to improve their lives and work hard to achieve it. As expressed by Participants 80 they contribute to the country by offering their skills, paying taxes, purchasing goods, etc. Hard-work and strong work ethic was widely acknowledged in all break-out groups. The other story is the story of freeloaders as Participant 84 in the below quotation calls them, who are motivated to live an easy life, living on benefits and misusing the British welfare system.

“84: I think none of us have got an argument with the fact that if somebody comes into England or Great Britain or whatever and starts work, pays their taxes, pays their dues, shops in England, buys a house, rents a house, we haven’t got a problem with that. What we’ve got a problem with is...

85: Freeloaders.

84: ...people coming and...

85: Not contributing.

84: ...absolutely so if they contribute welcome them in. I mean to us we’ve always had that policy in England where we’ve let x amount of people in to do x. As long as they’re working and contributing to the society they’re living in.” (Day 2, Orange Group)

Contribution and immigrants’ access to welfare benefits and services

There is high level of consensus that taking advantage of the healthcare services, taking out of the welfare system without contributing to it and living on benefits is unacceptable. Throughout the discussion **immigrants’ access to welfare benefits tends to be taken for granted**. While usually there are some participants who critically reflect on issues, this specific aspect was explicitly challenged only once and even then there was no reaction, no follow-up, as if it was unheard. Discussions reveal a similarly **strong perception of healthcare tourism** claiming that foreigners misuse and take advantage of the National Health Service. These are those costs the participants were the most sensitive and the

most concerned about and what they aimed to fix by **introducing a more selective and stricter immigration system** and by limiting immigrants' access to benefits and services.

As the discussions developed various aspects and questions were raised and debated like why are immigrants choosing the UK, how the country is presented abroad, what were the reasons for increasing demand for foreign labour force reflecting also on the conduct of in-group, what should be the key criteria of entering and staying in the country. In this respect **contribution** tended to be a cornerstone of the discussions – what contribution is expected of immigrants. As for entering the country skills and employability of immigrants is considered, but as the discussion progressed language skills, health conditions, (un)employment history as well as savings were demanded in order to prove certain level of **financial independence of state services**.

Advocating for **point-based immigration system** Participant 83 argued that first immigrants need to offer their skills, to contribute and only then should they expect something back. She stressed the importance of motivation and work ethic. She highlighted that a better regulated and selective immigration system could secure dignity and feeling of being useful for the immigrants. But more importantly, it would guarantee benefits for the country and its economy.

“83 Yes you’ve got to have specific skills so you’re going to be able to contribute, you’re going to [unclear] so that when you enter that country you have got something valuable to give you know it’s about giving something and then receiving something and I think that also preserves people’s dignity and sort of humility as well that they’re able to give something and not feel bad about what they’re getting back for that. [...] So that’s why I agree with the whole Australian ethos is about you come in, you’ve got that strong work ethic and then you’re going to boost the economy, bring some really valuable skills into that country and hopefully that will pass down the line to the next generations. For me it’s about having containment, control, regulations and all of those things need to be put in place rather than just letting every tom, dick and harry come in.” (DAY 1, Orange Group)

Participants also agreed that there should be follow-up monitoring how immigrants manage in the country. Employment is viewed essential as it is articulated by Participant 41.

“41 So there needs to be stricter border controls, we need to be stricter letting people to come in here and then they need to be monitored to make sure that they are actually working and putting back into the system because, then that would help the rest of (everything) to go.” (DAY 1, Green Group)

On the other hand, there was also awareness that there might be harder times, crisis situations. However, even in such cases it was expected that unemployment was only temporary and people made effort to find a job. Discussing the possibility to do voluntary work while being on benefits,

Participant 69 also stressed **the relevance of contributions, taking part in the collective effort to build the country.**

“69: No, no, [its about a] contribution to society. We survive in our society, we build our economies by working together to, you know, to build our community and I agree wholeheartedly with you....

68: Yes.

69: Circumstances will dictate how an individual, how much they can contribute to society but the bottom line is everybody can contribute to society if they worked or wanted and as long as they understand that and they provide people those opportunities, there shouldn't be any reason why people can't earn their benefit.” (DAY 1, Yellow Group)

The participants also reflected on the fact that it was the system that allowed life solely relying on benefits. While such conduct was viewed unacceptable and unfair towards working people, it was highlighted that this should not be generalized to all immigrants.

“49 And that's I think we need to focus a lot more on that [poverty] than people coming here and sponging off the system, that's always going to happen, but we can't stigmatise everybody just looking at those people.

No I know. Sorry.

51 Whether immigrants or not, whether they want to work or they don't want to work, there is a benefit system and lots of people are taking advantage.” (DAY 1, Green Group)

Labour market competition – hard-working and/or lazy unemployed?

Discussions specifically focusing on the labour market activities of immigrants revealed the most ambivalent stances. First of all, **perceptions of increased competition at the labour market** were shared and how such perceptions could lead to intergroup conflicts.

“49 (There are lots of different levels) in terms of, for the people living here and born here, and have got their second, third generation children here, and then when they see that their children aren't getting the jobs that they should, or they're not getting access to the education that they should, because of the immigration situation that can cause friction in the society and then they have people, oh it's their fault, it's their fault. It's, the blaming pointing the finger thing. That can be concerning.” (DAY 1, Green Group)

While discussions on a more regulated and monitored immigration system emphasised the demand for skilled and experienced labour force, this was also challenged. Labour market competition tended to be framed as a **tension between skilled, more experienced immigrants and young, less experienced people** advocating for more opportunities and prioritisation of young people.

“40 But immigration could be simply because we have that fear of like others coming and taking over our

44 Taking what's ours.

40 Over our space and the opportunities that we possibly could have had. So, something that, like you know educating ourselves or trying to work ourselves, and the next minute someone else comes in and that's it, they've taken your job opportunity because they're a bit more skilled, you know you've been studying for four years and hoping to get that right sort of position but someone with more experience comes along and takes (a little bit) (Unclear) so we're like, you know

44 I'm all for employing the right person to do the right job.

Yes but if that means that person comes in from overseas -

40 Yes, but I think sometimes others have got to be given the opportunity because then if you can discover someone that's more experienced, when is that person going to be experienced?" (DAY 1, Green group)

As the discussion developed participants in all three break-out groups critically reflected on **natives' reluctance to take low-paid, unskilled jobs** and on the issue of small difference between working for minimum wage and receiving benefits.

"80 If we back all those years immigration started purely because the people of England were too lazy to get off their bums and go and work we had to employ [unclear] to come into the country to do the job.

89 That's a good point there because [unclear] Britain also send the people to come here to help build the country and a lot of immigrants do contribute but it's the same all round really, it's not being highlighted properly because even in the NHS a lot of people are immigrant working, a lot of the jobs in this country as you rightfully say, a lot of people pick and choose what job they want." (DAY 1, Orange Group)

"71: I mean [unclear] at the time when, for example, a lot of Polish people started to come here and on the street and in the news [unclear] and billboards saying that Polish people are taking our jobs...

67: Yes.

68: But if we were willing to do it you couldn't take it could you?

67: Yes.

71: No [unclear] Romanians, before that it was Indians you know.

67: Yes, yes, yes. And that's... the thing with that is it's not the people that are already in employment saying that is it, it's the unemployed people thriving on benefit and it's just an excuse.

68: Yes. I know [unclear]. I don't have a problem say with immigrants coming over and wanting to work and [unclear] because I've seen a lot of people that come from other countries work hard." (DAY 1, Yellow Group)

The quotations presented above are from two different break-out groups and were discussed independently from each other. Both touch upon the same issue, but highlight two different aspects. The first one stressed the need for greater recognition of immigrants' work and contributions to the country, while the second one questioned whether accusations of immigrants taking away opportunities could be justified at all, if they do jobs natives show limited interest in.

There was an agreement that **immigrants' hard-work needs to be better recognized**. It was several times repeated and confirmed that immigrants – who want to work, have strong work ethic and whose skills are needed – are the “right people” to come to the country. As highlighted by Participant 66 immigration brings benefits and opportunities to the country, immigrants' skills and hard-work are contributions, which will be required even more in the future due to higher international mobility of young people (natives).

"66: Negative press from the media, you've got to remember what the good things immigration [and the good opportunities it] brings to the country, not only just the illegal immigrants which everyone seems to focus on. Because I think if you look at the NHS, it's a lot of the immigrants who sort of work in there, nurses who come over from Africa and things like that, so they do make a valuable contribution.

67: Yes, yes, yes.

66: And I think when we look at immigration, you know people... [but if they bring a skill] and there's a skill shortage and I think that's what we're looking at but looking to the future, I actually think we're going to get a lot of people, young people now, who are doing degrees and as part of their studies are actually going to

Australia, they're going to different parts of Europe, so by 2040 I actually think we're... Going to get a lot of our younger generation thinking 'actually, you know what, enough, let's move [unclear]' you know, they'll emigrate to other countries and I see that happening by 25 years." (DAY 1, Yellow Group)

At the same time, there were also perceptions that due to lack of control **unemployable immigrants** are let into the country also suggesting that solution should not be to hire foreign labour force, but to find people already living in the UK to do these jobs as it is expressed by Participant 81.

"81 So I think the issues around immigration are not going to go in years, it's going to take years and years for anything to be done because at the end of the day we've got a lot of people here now who aren't working and we should be looking at how to make them skilled to have jobs so we can fulfil them rather than bringing people into fill jobs that we can get people here to do them. So I think that's a big issue as well because there are people that could do them but we're bringing people in the skilled workers." (DAY 1, Orange Group)

The discussions on economic migrants centred on **contribution** and **ways of securing reciprocity** debating what forms of contribution are expected of immigrants who would like to live in England. Along this line they draw the key criteria who should be admitted to the country and who should be made leave the country if these basic principles are not fulfilled. The debate showed that people clearly differentiate "good" and "bad" immigrants. Accordingly, ambivalences emerge as participants discuss these two categories – taking advantage of the welfare system on the one hand, and recognition and support for hard-working, skilled migrants on the other. Such differentiations also reflect perceptions on immigrants' deservingness primarily principles of control, identity, reciprocity and attitude - considering their control over their neediness and showing reluctance towards those immigrants who do not contribute enough and do not act as it is expected by the in-group. In terms of identity, participants did not share concerns about cultural differences, emphasis was on identification with immigrants who work hard, contribute to the system, who help to tackle rather than aggravate social issues.

Despite of the fact that the discussions enhanced articulation of various perspectives including positive aspects and benefits of immigration, the policy recommendations fully focused on the **perceived costs of immigration**. While the shortcomings of the welfare system were acknowledged, in terms of policy recommendations the possibility or desirability to encourage immigrants' better integration was not raised. Participants seemed to be inclined to exclude those who do not comply and did not even try to propose how "bad" immigrants could be helped and encouraged to contribute more (considering that contribution was the key condition).

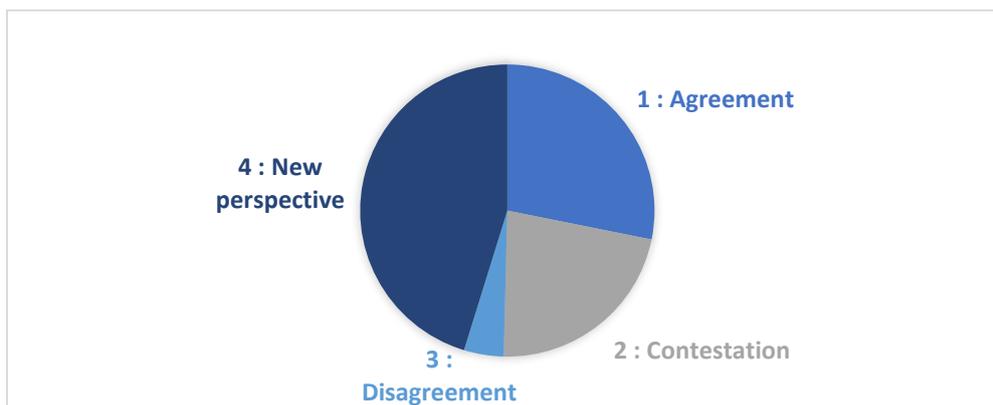
Moreover, while all groups considered the need to recognize the contributions and hard-work of working immigrants, there was no reflection on their needs – their vulnerability in the labour market,

the precarious working conditions, low payments and higher level of exposure to poverty a considerable group of immigrants faces. These issues were mentioned only in relation to the in-group, but not considered in relation to immigrants, which signals certain level of **non-interest in the needs of immigrants**, in improving their chances and opportunities in a more systematic way. The discussions clearly reflect the preference for skilled economic migrants who are financially independent, who can cope on their own without any collective or public support needed.

Discussion

The policy recommendations reached at the end of the democratic forum discussions represent more restrictive attitudes to the issue of immigration and exclusivist preferences in relation to immigrants' access to welfare. In contrast to these conclusions, the above analysis showed that the discussions leading to such policy recommendations were much more diverse, touching upon various perspectives. During the democratic forums there was little confrontation or conflict between the participants. It was more driven by **sharing various ways of looking at the issue, sharing both positive as well as negative considerations, beliefs and experiences in relation to immigration**. Focusing on the dynamics of the discussion Figure 1 shows that participants frequently contested each other's views and there were even more occasions, that participants raised new perspectives, a new idea or a new way of viewing the issue of immigration, what also signals a diverse debate.

Figure 1 - Share of agreements, disagreements, contestations and new perspectives identified and coded in democratic forums discussions



Variety of approaches and perspectives behind attitudes manifested also in relation to specific groups of immigrants. Debates on refugees concerned the moral obligations to help people in need for protection, but also considering motivations behind and legitimacy of seeking asylum in foreign countries. Therefore, here the focus was more on **the country's and society's obligations towards refugees**. In contrast, debates on economic migration focused more on the **key expectations and**

obligation of immigrants as individuals. While discussions tended to be more diverse taking into account the perspectives of immigrants, the out-group as well as the in-group, policy recommendations tended to reflect only the costs of immigration and the **interests of the in-group**, proposing a rather protective and restrictive approach. None of the policy recommendations considered the interests and needs of immigrants, they rather concerned how immigrants' access to the country and to the welfare state can be limited.

Concerns about overcrowding, the misuse of benefit system as well as healthcare services tended to override considerations highlighting the benefits of immigration mentioned during the discussion and led to exclusivist preferences. In this respect it is important to note the **difference between the discussions on immigration as a social issue and discussions on the specific policies on immigration and immigrants' access to welfare.** The analysis of reasons for such differences are beyond the scope of this paper. However, it would be worth to study the potential explanations for it, which might be related to the strength of dependency culture beliefs in the British political, public and media discourse (Jensen and Tyler 2015), but perceptions of overuse of welfare benefits (Roosma, van Oorschot and Gelissen 2016) might be relevant as well. Trust in government and institutions, in the ability to handle immigration policies and welfare policies as well as the impact of dominant media discourse on immigration policies might greatly influence public preferences for future policies.

Conclusion

The starting point of this paper was the description of rather exclusivist attitudes toward immigrants' access to welfare state as it was presented in the policy recommendations participants of democratic forum discussions agreed on as part of the Welfare State Future – Our Children's Europe research project. These policy recommendations articulated the need for a more regulated and selective immigration system, stricter borders controls and initiated specific policies to limit immigrants' access to welfare benefits and services at least for two years. This control applies to immigrants in general without distinguishing the specific types and circumstances of immigrants coming to the UK. If we consider these policy recommendations as the key results democratic forums, we can easily relate them to the findings of latest public opinion surveys. However, this paper argued that in order to better understand the opposition to immigration we need to look at the process leading to these policy recommendations. The paper was intended to analyse democratic forum discussions with particular focus on key ambivalences in relation to the issues, advantages and disadvantages participants associate with immigration. In the centre of the analysis was *what considerations, beliefs, interests do participants use and articulate in their arguments for or against the inclusion of*

immigrants. In line with participants' differentiation between issues and considerations concerning refugees and economic migrants, ambivalences were also examined separately.

The analysis found clear differences how participant thematised issues in relation to refugees and economic migrants. Regarding refugees, discussions centred on the country's obligations toward refugees, debating the ways of fulfilling moral obligations as well as ways of reducing UK's responsibility to accept and accommodate refugees. In contrast, concerning economic migrants it was obligations and expectations of immigrants that dominated the debates.

Despite of the fact, that discussions in all three small groups touched upon diverse perspectives, various approaches were raised in relation to both groups of immigrants, these aspects were not translated into policies. Policy recommendations largely focused on how to limit the costs of immigration. Policies facilitating the integration of immigrants or improving their chances, their working and living conditions were not considered, which also signals a gap between the way discussions on social issues and discussions on policy preferences tended to develop. While discussions on social issues were more open and to certain extent more inclusive, debates on policy recommendations were dominated by restrictive and exclusionary stances. Although the identification of the potential explanations for this gap is beyond the scope of this paper, the more detailed analysis of considerations which were taken for granted and rarely contested, comments and contributions which even if expressed tended to be unheard as well as missing aspects might provide useful information for further research.

To sum up, policy recommendations themselves provide valuable information on the public concerns as well as policy preferences. However, as the analysis shows the considerations, opinions, beliefs and the contexts in relation to which specific social issues were raised vary greatly and there are diverse ways of looking at immigration as well as the welfare state. The strength of deliberative methods such as democratic forums is that they can facilitate a bottom-up discussion, where such attitudes, opinions and priorities can be articulated and discussed. Thus, allowing us to shed more light on the processes and mechanisms behind attitude formation and complement the existing academic literature on complex social issues as immigrants' inclusion to welfare state is.

Appendix 1

Key demographic data of participants quoted in the paper

Participant number	Vote for party in next election	Gender	Age	Highest level of education	Work status	Household's total net income, all sources	Ethnic minority
Green group - overrepresentation of unemployed							
40	No Answer	Female	25-34	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	M - 4th decile	Yes
41	No Answer	Female	45-54	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working part time	S - 6th decile	No
44	Conservative	Female	35-44	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working part time	D - 9th decile	No
48	Labour	Male	45-54	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Permanently sick or disabled	C - 3rd decile	Yes
49	Labour	Female	45-54	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working part time	J - 1st decile	Yes
51	UKIP	Female	Under 24	Lower secondary education completed (ISCED 2)	Stay at home to look after house/ family	S - 6th decile	No
Yellow Group - overrepresentation of participants with ethnic minority background							
60	Don't Know	Male	25-34	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working full time	J - 1st decile	Yes
63	Conservative	Female	Under 24	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	In full-time education	Unassigned	No
66	Labour	Male	45-54	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	H - 10th decile	Yes
67	Labour	Male	25-34	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	P - 8th decile	No
68	Labour	Female	35-44	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working part time	F - 5th decile	Yes
69	Labour	Male	25-34	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	D - 9th decile	No
71	Don't Know	Female	25-34	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	P - 8th decile	Yes
Orange group - overrepresentation of self-employed							
80	Conservative	Female	45-54	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working part time	R - 2nd decile	No
81	Don't Know	Female	Under 24	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	D - 9th decile	No
84	Conservative	Male	45-54	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working full time	P - 8th decile	No
85	Conservative	Male	65+	Lower secondary education completed (ISCED 2)	Retired	J - 1st decile	No
87	Conservative	Female	65+	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Retired	S - 6th decile	No
88	Don't Know	Male	25-34	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working full time	H - 10th decile	Yes
89	Labour	Male	45-54	Tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent level (3 years or less)	Working full time	K - 7th decile	No
90	Labour	Female	25-34	Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)	Working full time	F - 5th decile	Yes

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