10. Migrants' attitudes towards public childcare

One of the characteristics that define the Nordic countries is a larger reliance on in-kind welfare services such as healthcare, childcare, and elderly care. According to the OECD, Denmark spends around 13.3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on in-kind welfare services. In a comparative perspective, this puts Denmark second in the world just after Sweden (13.9 per cent of GDP) and before Norway (11.7 per cent), and at nearly double the average of the OECD (7.4 per cent) in that ranking (OECD, 2020a). Social services are thus a key feature of the Nordic welfare states and play an important role in most residents' lives. This is due to the countries' high degree of universalism where most residents are entitled to more or less the same level of social services. Furthermore, most social services are organized by the state – including health, education, and care for a number of groups like the elderly, disabled, and children – and is therefore predominantly a public responsibility. Studies on the provision and organization of childcare are a well-elaborated research field, and although this area has been subject to a number of reforms, Denmark and the other Nordic countries continue to stand out from other Western European countries due to their remarkably high coverage rates and dual-earner family model (Breidahl & Fersch, 2018; Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013).

In this chapter, we direct attention towards childcare provision and the extent to which the 14 migrant groups studied in this book living within the Danish welfare state support public and formally provided childcare. Almost all residents are regularly in contact with social services during their lives and thereby subject to policy feedback from these institutions of the welfare state.

The use of public childcare services among families has received considerable public and academic interest in recent years for at least two reasons. First, public childcare is highlighted as a way to better enable parents to reconcile work and family and thereby support a dual-earner family and female labour market participation. Second, high coverage rates in public childcare provision are framed as an important element in increasing fertility rates, and public childcare has received considerable interest due to the prominence of the social investment agenda and the focus on cognitive improvement at an early point in life (Seibel & Hedegaard, 2017).

The Danish context of childcare provision is – in a comparative context – characterized by a comprehensive childcare system and rather high coverage rates. Hence, almost all children between the ages of one and five years attend formal childcare in Denmark. The general coverage rate for children in Denmark is at a high level, around 82–85 per cent for those aged 2–5, and Denmark has invested many resources in early childcare provision during the years (Rostgaard, 2014). As regards children with a migrant background, the take-up rate of childcare is also very high. The differences between children with migrant backgrounds and natives as regards children aged 1–2 years are 5 percentage points. For older children in the age group 3–5 years the difference is non-existent (FOA, 2019). Part of the explanation of the high take-up rates is probably due to the relatively low price and heavy government subsidies of the payment. The price of childcare varies by age group and municipality, but each municipality is obliged to pay at least 75 per cent of the price and there are programmes to help low-income earners and those with siblings also attending public childcare (Borger.dk, 2020).

In spite of these small differences in the take-up rate, there has been much political and public interest in the subject. Especially the non-Western children living in vulnerable residential areas, also known as “Ghetto-areas”, have received much interest due to concerns for early socialization into so-called Danish democratic values and Danish language proficiency. This is in spite of the fact that when singling out this relatively small group there is not much difference in take-up rates, especially for children who are older than two years (FOA, 2019). The interest in migrant children from vulnerable residential areas is based on an assumption that this group in particular will benefit from early institutionalization into Danish day-care institutions. The assumption is that integration into childcare institutions at an early point in life can promote socio-cultural integration patterns among migrants and descendants in the longer run and, most notably, the language skills of small children with a migrant background. These ideas and intentions were in 2018 materialized in a number of policy proposals presented as a part of the “Ghetto plan” that the Danish parliament passed in the spring of 2018 (Government of Denmark, 2018). The plan dictates that the parents of small children living in specific areas can be forced to sign up their children and make sure they show up regularly in public day-care institutions from the age of one. If the parents do not consent, the municipality can withhold the child support benefit. This strong involvement from the state in people’s daily lives reflects some more general paternalistic features of the Danish welfare state, but also an overall integration philosophy that is not only concerned with how migrants behave – but also how they “think” (Breidahl, 2019).

A number of studies have examined public support and attitudes towards childcare provision in a comparative cross-national perspective among the

general population (Ainsaar, 2012; Chung & Meuleman, 2017; Goerres & Tepe, 2012; Meuleman & Chung, 2012). The question of how migrants born in another context than they currently live approach childcare provision is less explored except for a few exceptions. Seibel and Hedegaard (2017) compare the attitudes towards childcare of nine migrant groups with the attitudes of natives in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands and find, among others, that migrants are less inclined to support public childcare (more supportive towards informal childcare) and that cross-national differences appear. A survey study from Denmark finds that the majority in a number of migrant groups disagree with the statement that “children are likely to suffer if their mother is working” but also that some migrants express considerably more conservative attitudes than others do (Gundelach & Nørregård-Nielsen, 2007).

Migrants' attitudes towards childcare is important to study more deeply as migrant children with poor language skills (most notably a number from the Middle East and African countries) have, as pointed out above, been emphasized as a group that will benefit the most from participating in high-quality childcare facilities. Thus, as pointed out above, public childcare has in recent years been framed as an instrument to facilitate and promote female labour market participation (see Chapter 9), in particular among women from the Middle East and African countries, and as an instrument to facilitate early language proficiency among children with a migrant background.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ASSIMILATIVE IMPACT OF WELFARE STATE INSTITUTIONS AND COMPETING PERSPECTIVES

The broader institutional argument presented in Chapter 2 is central to the theoretical discussion in this chapter, shedding light on whether natives and these 14 rather different migrant groups (cf. Chapters 4 and 5) share attitudes on childcare: Do the findings point to a broader assimilative impact of welfare state institutions or can notable attitudinal differences be identified? The theoretical argument in this chapter bears some similarities to the discussion in Chapter 9 on the role of the opportunity structures, different family policy constellations, and endogenous institutional logics.

What is important in the institutional context for attitudes towards childcare provision is the type of family policy constellations at stake. As emphasized in Chapter 9, Denmark, together with the other Nordic countries, belongs to the dual-earner family policy constellation – and thereby differs from countries where the legislated programmes come closer to the “traditional family” model or the market-oriented constellation (Korpi, Ferrarini, & Englund, 2013). Based on the policy feedback argument emphasizing “that how things are affect perceptions of how things should be” (cf. Chapter 7), we should expect

that living in one constellation rather than another could have an impact on attitudes towards spending on childcare and the organizing thereof (Breidahl & Larsen, 2016). It is difficult to distinguish between whether attitudes to public childcare adhere to a “logic of consequentiality” or a “logic of appropriateness” (March & Olsen, 2006; Sjöberg, 2004). If we want to focus on the “logic of consequentiality” then we have to look at the opportunity structures of certain policy institutions and how they are expected to have an impact on attitudes, values, and norms of migrants. On the other hand, the “logic of appropriateness” hints to the endogenous logic of welfare state institutions and how they underpin certain societal norms, understandings, and values. However, compared to attitudes towards female employment (cf. Chapter 9), studying attitudes towards public childcare it is probably more appropriate to use the institutional argument emphasizing the role of available opportunity structures, as attitudes towards childcare provision are a better indicator of (institutional) self-interest. Moreover, in the literature on attitudes towards childcare provision, self-interest figures as one of the most prominent explanations emphasizing that those families with children more strongly support these services than people who are not in need of them (Seibel & Hedegaard, 2017). Thus, the available provision to put children into day-care and combine work and family life are expected to influence the interest of residents towards spending. The regression analysis in this chapter allows us to go a bit more into depth with the influence of opportunity structures, and the premise that the opportunity structures provided by family policies, for example, childcare, create opportunities that women will take advantage of, even if it challenges their traditional beliefs about childcare (Breidahl & Fersch, 2018). The groups that are expected to benefit from formal childcare are families with children and employed.

Another prominent explanation when it comes to attitudes towards spending is the influence of values and norms (an indicator of cultural legacy). This perspective comes close to the “house-wife mentality” argument presented in Chapter 9, and is based on the assumption that being religious and holding conservative attitudes towards gender roles predicts attitudes towards childcare provision and spending. As regards the cultural explanation, we take a number of things into account: As already pointed out in Chapter 9, migrants from the 14 migrant groups studied here come from national contexts where support for gender equality is at a much lower level than in Denmark. One could argue that if individuals do not support women’s participation on the labour market then they are not that likely to support childcare provision supported by the state. It is also a common finding that people who are more religious have values that are more conservative.

Moreover, Figure 9.2 in Chapter 9 demonstrated quite remarkable and large cross-national differences in perceptions on whether preschool children

are likely to suffer if their mother is working. Hence, a rather small amount of the residents in Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, and Turkey disagreed on this statement. Are these attitudes from the country of origin also reflected in attitudes towards public childcare in their new destination country?

DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS PUBLIC SPENDING

To shed light on the extent to which migrants assimilate to the welfare attitudes of native Danes, when it comes to childcare provision three items from the two surveys are utilized. From the Mifare survey we get two items. The first measures whether the public sector should spend more or less on childcare provision: *“Listed below are again various areas of government spending in Denmark. Please show ... whether you would like to see more or less government spending (on) childcare care services”*. This was answered on a 5-point scale from “much less” to “much more”. The Mifare survey also includes an item on who should be responsible for the organization of childcare provision: *“Who do you think should primarily provide help to working parents who need childcare?”*. Here the options were: “family members and friends”, “people that live nearby”, “government agencies”, “non-profit organizations”, “private providers that are paid for”, and “cannot choose”. For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus on the group who chose “government agencies” and compare those with other options.

The Comcon survey has one item measuring government responsibility for providing childcare provision. Here the question is *“Would you say that the government or the individual has the responsibility when it comes to childcare? You are asked to answer on a scale from zero to ten, where zero represents that the individual is fully responsible and 10 represents that the government has the responsibility”*.

As in the other chapters all three variables have been transformed into 0–100 scales, where higher scores indicate more support for spending on or government responsibility for public childcare, depending on the question. The different items are not directly comparable as the Comcon item focuses on responsibility – should the government or the individual be responsible – while the Mifare item focuses more on how the respondent responds to the current spending situation (more or less) and responsibility for providing these services. However, indirectly all three measures can help us identify whether the different migrant groups are for or against more government responsibility in this area. As attitudes to childcare have a strong gender dimension, we will present the attitudes for men, women, and the two groups combined.

Figure 10.1 depicts the question of public spending on childcare for the Mifare groups – measuring whether the respondents want more or less government spending on childcare care services (on a 5-point scale from “much less” to “much more”). This is shown as averages on the 0–100 scale for the group in total and divided by gender.

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Mifare survey). Scale ranging from “Much less” (0) to “Much more” (100).

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 10.1 Attitudes towards public spending on childcare (0–100 scale)

Figure 10.1 shows how the majority in all groups want to spend a little more on public childcare, as reflected by the average scores that are between 60 and 70 for most groups (the exception being the men originating from the Philippines). This is driven by a majority in almost all migrant groups stating that they want to spend the same on childcare (not shown). The exception to this is the migrant group from Turkey where the dominant answer was “spend more”, which is also reflected in their high average score. This indicates satisfaction with the status quo. Here we have to take into account how the government spending on childcare in Denmark is already at a rather high level. In general, the differences are rather small and within a 10-point gap when looking at the combined group of men and women.

As regards gender differences, they are rather small for these groups and no overall pattern can be identified – sometimes men are the most supportive and sometimes it is the other way around. We do not find the expected gender

difference, for either Danes or migrants. The biggest discrepancy we find is when comparing men and women originating from the Philippines. This is interesting and surprising, but as we can also see this does not affect the combined score much as the group consists of 90 per cent women.

Next, we look at attitudes towards the organization of childcare, also from the Mifare survey. This is depicted in Figure 10.2, and here we distinguish between those who prefer government agencies on the one hand and those who prefer other solutions – family members, friends, and people nearby or non-public agencies – on the other. This question is also related to the distinction between formal and informal care – whether childcare should be provided formally or informally.

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Mifare survey). Percentage choosing “Government agencies” rather than “family and friends”, “people that live nearby”, “non-profit organizations”, “private providers that are paid for” or “cannot choose”.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 10.2 Attitudes towards whether the government should have primary responsibility for childcare

As we can see from Figure 10.2 the majority in most groups, except for migrants from Romania, express that state agencies should mainly be responsible for providing childcare. This is reflected in them having scores of 50 or above. When examining this figure, we find some larger group differences than we did in Figure 10.1. It appears that Danes and migrants from Russia are the most supportive of government agencies providing childcare while migrants from the US, Romania, Poland, and China are the least supportive. This finding thus partially contradicts assumptions about the assimilative impact of the welfare state.

We also find much larger gender differences in this regard. For the migrants from Turkey, the Philippines, and the US we find that the men are more supportive of government organization of childcare. For the Danes and the rest of the migrant groups we find the opposite picture, that the women are more supportive of government-organized welfare. This difference between the genders is quite large for the migrants from Russia, Japan, Poland, China, and Romania.

Next, we turn to the Comcon groups. As described above, this survey gives us one item on government versus individual responsibility for providing childcare. Figure 10.3 presents the descriptive results on attitudes towards government responsibility for childcare provision. This is presented for women, men, and combined for the five Comcon migrant groups, from Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Danes.

Note: Migrants and natives in Denmark (Comcon survey). Scale ranging from “The individual is responsible” (0) to “It is a government responsibility” (100).

Source: Data collected from the Comcon survey (2015).

Figure 10.3 Attitudes towards government responsibility for childcare (0–100 scale)

If we start looking at the overall mean value for each group, we see a pattern where most of the groups are more inclined to support government responsibility rather than individual responsibility in providing childcare (as the mean is closer to 100 than to 0). Some internal group differences also appear: Most notably, migrants from ex-Yugoslavia are more inclined to support state responsibility for childcare compared to the other groups. Migrants from

Lebanon, Iraq, and Pakistan do, to a lower extent, support government responsibility in providing childcare.

Again, it is interesting to observe the remarkable gender differences in attitudes for some of the groups. Hence, for all groups we see a pattern where men and women disagree on this issue and where the gender differences are bigger than the differences in attitudes across groups. It is particularly interesting to observe how women from Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, and ex-Yugoslavia are less inclined to support government responsibility in this area compared to men. Especially women from Lebanon are much less supportive towards government responsibility.

Compared to the findings in Chapter 7 (for the five Comcon groups) the results in Figure 10.3 illustrate how the support for the government providing childcare is at a lower level than for providing help for the sick, old, and the unemployed (the same findings for native Danes). Hence, as appeared from Chapter 7, we have a pattern where natives and the 14 migrant groups to a large extent share a very similar view of what the role of the government should be in relation to helping the sick, the old, the unemployed, and those unable to work.

PATTERNS BEHIND ATTITUDES TO CHILDCARE

The descriptive results reveal how the different migrant groups from an overall point of view share attitudes towards childcare – as the majority are supportive towards government responsibility and rather high spending. On the other hand, some notable differences also appear. The question becomes how to interpret these observed differences in spending attitudes across the groups? Do the differences disappear when we control for compositional effects and gender attitudes, and what role does self-interest and cultural attitudes play? In order to go more into depth with these perspectives, we control for a number of factors in the OLS-regression models below – illustrated as coefficient plots. Figures 10.4 and 10.5 focus on the Mifare groups and Figures 10.6 and 10.7 on the Comcon groups. From the Mifare survey we only used the question concerning spending preferences, shown in Figure 10.1, as the other one is a binary variable that is not suitable for the OLS-models we use for the coefficient plots.

All the figures are structured around three or four models, depending on whether the Danes are included or not. The first model only contains the origin countries and is therefore called the binary model. These results are largely similar to those in Figures 10.1 and 10.3, though some minor differences can occur due to list-wise deletion when building the hierarchical models. In the second model we control for the compositional differences between the groups by controlling for the variables covered in Chapters 3 and 4. Here we

thus control for age, gender, income, benefits, employment, education, partner status, and religiosity. In the third model we control for whether the respondents have children and their gender values, both factors that the literature points to as important for migrants' attitudes to childcare (Seibel & Hedegaard, 2017). The fourth model contains the variables that are only relevant when comparing the migrant groups. This is variables on the number of years lived in Denmark, language skills, citizenship, and identification with Denmark in the Comcon survey and the origin country in Mifare.

Note: Mifare survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=2,431.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 10.4 Attitudes towards public spending on childcare (0–100 scale)

As we can see from Figure 10.4 the differences in the binary model are quite small. This is not a surprise since this is also what we found in Figure 10.1, but from this we can see what happens when applying 95 per cent confidence intervals. Here we find that in the initial models, when compared to the Danes, the migrants from Romania and Turkey are significantly more positive towards public spending. On the other hand, then, migrants from the US and the Philippines are significantly less supportive of public spending on childcare. However, it is important to mind the scale on the x-axis, as we can see that the differences are within +/- five points on the 0–100 scale. Thus,

while we find significant differences in attitudes, they are still relatively small in absolute terms.

We can also see that adding the models on compositional differences between the groups explains why the migrants from the USA and the Philippines are less supportive of public spending than the Danes. However, adding the compositional differences and the variables on having children and gender values does not explain why the migrants from Turkey and Romania are significantly more positive towards public spending on childcare. This finding indicates some degree of self-interest or an impact of institutional opportunity structures. On the other hand, adding the variables on having children and values around gender equality does not influence spending attitudes for these groups. Therefore, it seems that spending attitudes for these groups do not reflect some sort of cultural legacy. In general, we also see that these variables do not cause much movement in the differences, meaning that they do not explain much of the differences in attitudes between the Danes and the migrant groups.

Note: Mifare survey. Regression models comparing migrants from Great Britain (vertical line) to the other migrant groups. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. N=2,229.

Source: Data collected from the Mifare survey (2018).

Figure 10.5 Attitudes towards spending on childcare (0–100 scale)

Figure 10.5 shows whether there are any differences between the migrant groups. Similar to Chapter 9, migrants from Great Britain are used as the

dummy as they come rather close to the attitudes of native Danes. The results in Figure 10.5 do not differ much from Figure 10.4. The reference group here is the migrants from Great Britain and again the migrants from Turkey are slightly more willing to spend public money on childcare, while the migrants from the US are slightly less willing to support public spending on childcare. Again, we need to remember that the differences are small and all within a range of $\pm$ five points. As in Figure 10.4, we find that it is largely the compositional differences that explain the variations in attitudes. We also see that adding the variables that are only relevant to migrants – the number of years lived in Denmark, language skills, citizenship, and identification with country of origin – does not really seem to matter, when looking at the intergroup differences.

Finally, we direct attention to the Comcon groups in Figure 10.6. Comparing the five groups to the Danes in terms of government responsibility in providing childcare demonstrates larger differences than for the Mifare groups. On the left-side, we can see that compared to the Danes the migrants from Iraq, Lebanon, and Pakistan are significantly less supportive of government responsibility for childcare than the Danes. These differences are partially explained for the migrants from Iraq and Lebanon when applying the compositional model, but not to the level where the differences are insignificant (at $p > 0.05$). Adding the model of having children and gender values does not close this gap, and if anything, it widens it slightly. Therefore, we are left with some small differences in attitudes we cannot explain using theories and variables used in this book.

The right side of Figure 10.6 depicts only the differences between the migrant groups, with the migrants from ex-Yugoslavia serving as the reference group, as they come closest to the attitudes of native Danes. Here we can see that the migrants from Iraq and Lebanon are significantly less supportive of public responsibility for childcare than the migrants from ex-Yugoslavia. Adding the controls for the compositional effects does little to explain differences in attitudes for these groups. The models that add having children and gender values move the needle very little, but the migrant relevant variables on migrants from ex-Yugoslavia do. Adding this makes the differences insignificant for all groups except the migrants from Lebanon. If we look into the models (not shown here), we see that it is especially the variables on the number of years lived in Denmark that seems to matter.

BROADLY SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC CHILDCARE AND SOME DIVERGENT TRENDS

In this chapter, we have examined attitudes towards childcare provision among the 14 migrant groups living within the Danish welfare state – and thereby

Note: Comcon survey. Regression models comparing native Danes (vertical line) to the migrant groups, N=1,181 (left). Regression models comparing migrants from ex-Yugoslavia (vertical line) to the other migrant groups, N=361 (right). OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Data collected from the Comcon survey (2015).

Figure 10.6 Attitudes towards government responsibility for childcare provision

an institutional context characterized by high take-up rates on childcare and a context where the pressure as well as opportunities to live according to the dual-earner family ideal are rather strong. This institutional context is rather unique in a broader comparative perspective and the question therefore becomes whether “how things are” in the Danish welfare state has an effect on perceptions of “how things should be” among these rather different migrant groups.

The overall empirical findings of this chapter point in different directions. On the one hand, the results indicate that the 14 different migrant groups to a high extent share attitudes with native Danes towards childcare. Most of the Mifare groups support childcare spending levels as they are currently (or want even more) and the majority among the Comcon groups agree that it is a government responsibility to provide childcare. For the Mifare groups, we also see that some groups are more supportive towards increased public spending than native Danes (Turks and to some extent Romanians).

This finding is remarkable taking into account how different the countries of origin appear when it comes to formal childcare provision and, not least, as regards attitudes towards whether children suffer if the mother works. The similarities are also remarkable taking into account that the groups are rather different as regards taxes paid and benefits received (cf. Chapter 5). For many groups, men and women hold different attitudes and for some items, the differences between men and women are larger than between groups.

Although the support for government responsibility in general is strong (the mean rather high) among the Comcon groups, it is interesting to observe that it is also an area where the support is lowest compared to supporting government responsibility within other areas of the welfare state (cf. Chapter 7).

In spite of the overall impression of “shared attitudes” some differences also appear – most remarkable in terms of attitudes towards the provision of childcare among the Mifare groups where native Danes are remarkably more supportive towards government agencies providing childcare compared to, for example, migrants from Romania, China, the Philippines, and the US. Here it is important to point out that even though they are rather supportive towards public spending on childcare it does not say anything about whether childcare should be provided by the state, private providers, or non-government institutions as government spending can go to different types of operators. This reminds us to be aware of not directly comparing different survey measures. Also, in this case, the three used items differ in a number of ways.

Looking at the factors that explain the identified group differences, and thereby have an effect on these attitudes, we find that it is largely the compositional differences covered in Chapters 4 and 5 that seem to explain the differences. On the other hand, then, controlling for factors such as gender values, identification with Denmark or the origin country, and time lived in Denmark

does not help explain differences. Therefore, the relatively small differences in attitudes we find seem to be structured more by differences in the composition of the groups and self-interest than cultural legacies.

What do these results tell us? Do we – from an overall perspective – share values across different ethnic groups or not? The overall conclusion is yes – most seem to agree that the “government solution” is desirable.