Civic Stratification, Gender and Family Migration Policies in Europe

A Comparative Analysis of Family Migration Policies and Their Impact on Persons Affected by Them in 9 European Countries (AT, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, NL, UK)
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A Comparative Analysis of Family Migration Policies and Their Impact on Persons Affected by Them in 9 European Countries (AT, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, NL, UK)

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Partner institutions

Social Policy Research Centre, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University, United Kingdom
www.mdx.ac.uk/hssc/research/centres/sprc/index.asp

MAIZ – Autonomes Integrationszentrum von und für Migrantinnen, Linz, Austria
www.maiz.at
Research questions

In the context of restrictive immigration policies, family-related migration has become one of the main, and in many countries, the only legal way of gaining admission to a country. At the same time, the reuniting of families is increasingly at the centre of wider debates on migration and integration and subject to increased state regulation. Family migration policies define the family in various ways on the basis of selection principles and the “quality” of migrant families. These legal mechanisms can be seen as constraining migrant choices.

The project focuses precisely on this aspect and thus on the impact of regulations on persons affected by them. The conceptual focus is “civic stratification” i.e. how “legal discrimination” (unequal legal statuses) is linked to broader patterns of inequality.
Method

The project investigated family migration policies from two angles. First, the project team analysed policies and policy-making with regard to family-related migration in a top-down perspective by studying legislation and public debates and through expert interviews with policymakers, NGOs and other specialists. The aim was to discern the legal framework governing family-related migration in nine countries, focusing on how family migration policies position migrants within an overall system of stratified rights and investigating the rationale of policies and broader public debates on family-related migration. Second, the project investigated family migration policies from a bottom-up perspective in six countries and thus from the perspective of persons affected by them through qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and expert interviews with NGOs.
Results

The results of our analysis of family migration policies (FMP) are mixed: as a consequence of the spread of “migration management” as the main paradigm of migration policy, individual countries’ policies increasingly converge, although major differences remain, for example in the nature of conditions attached to family migration (FM), in the definition of the family, in the importance of dependency for defining the relationship of the dependant migrant (the “incoming” family member) to a sponsor.

Finally, countries also differ in the overall importance of FMP as an admission channel (quantitatively and in the sense whether other options for legal migration are in place). Contrary to its original intentions, EU-level regulation of family migration has only introduced additional axes of differentiation and stratification and brought a further fragmentation of status positions attached to admission as a family member. Somewhat mirroring the convergence on FMP, debates over FM have also converged to a great extent across Europe (much less so in southern and eastern Europe, where FM has received scant public attention). Main topics of public debate
include the unsolicited nature of FM and its associated abuse as an immigration channel ("bogus marriages"), the problematization of the migrant family as a patriarchal, pre-modern institution associated with a range of problematic practices, and FM as a source of chain migration and “difference” (reproduction of migrant communities). The empirical analysis of the experiences of persons affected by FMP, however, shows that many of the assumptions of FMPs as well as broader policies and public debates do not do justice to the reality and the complexity of FM and tend to increase inequality and unequal access to rights.
Outlook

The project revealed the contradictions in contemporary migration and integration policies. In particular, it highlighted the tensions between broader normative objectives, including equality and equality policies, anti-discrimination and incorporation of migrants into all sectors of society on the one hand, and the differential treatment of different categories of immigrants along the lines of citizenship, ethnicity, grounds of admission, gender, etc., and in a sense “legal discrimination”, on the other. By so doing, it showed up fundamental normative dilemmas, in particular whether and to what extent states should compromise broader normative objectives and societal goals for the purposes of migration policy. In this way, the project also contributes to broader debates on democracy in Europe.
Communication

Members of the project team presented the conceptual framework of the project and selected results at various conferences and workshops. They also organized a conference and various workshops in the framework of larger conferences on the broader subject of family-related migration. Finally, they presented project results at a meeting of the European Migration Network (EMN), an EU-sponsored information exchange network composed of contact points of national administrations. Similar policy-focused dissemination activities will be continued beyond the lifetime of the project, for example in the framework of the FP7 project “GEMMA – Enhancing Evidence Based Policy-Making in Gender and Migration”. Results of the project have also been presented in panel discussions and in undergraduate courses and have been published in various essays (Malmoe, www.migrationonline.cz etc.).
Tracks

Website
- http://research.icmpd.org/1233.html

Publications
- Sandra Gil Araujo: Políticas de migración familiar en Europa. In Pedreño, Andres (ed.): Tránsitos migratorios – Contextos transnacionales y proyectos familiares en las migraciones actuales, University of Murcia (Spain).

Conferences

Workshops, panels and conferences organized by the project team
Outcome
The project shows that family migration policies may decisively shape individuals’ opportunity structures and thus their scope for action. The results also show that persons affected by family migration policies are confronted by a range of other challenges. The impact of family migration is thus at the same time over- and underestimated: the effect of state regulations is not the same for all and is closely linked with individuals’ position with respect to their social, cultural and economic capital. The fact that the inbuilt “civic stratification” of migration policies interacts in different ways with patterns of social inequality has implications for both research and policy-making.
“Family life I think is about two things. One is security and the other is enjoyment.”
(Interviewee, UK)