

Abstract

Title Waiting for welfare – studies on social assistance among immigrants.
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This thesis examines social assistance reciprocity among the immigrant population in Sweden.

Article I investigates whether immigrants receive social assistance on a permanent basis or if they manage to earn their own living after due time in the new country. This article is based on the immigrant's land of origin. The study is based on two random samples from Sweden's statistical register of the population: 1 percent of the Swedish-born population and 10 percent of the foreign-born population. The variation and dynamics among the recipients is observed over a ten-year period, 1983–92. This study shows that the foreign born are highly represented among the recipients, irrespective of their land of origin. After 15 years in the country the immigrant's level of social assistance is comparable to that of a native Swede. There is, however, a great variation among the immigrant population. The study confirms a great mobility from social assistance as well as an extensive experience of social assistance among the immigrant population.

Article II analyses the differences in social assistance reciprocity between the foreign-born and the Swedish-born. The same data set as in article I was used, with focus on the years 1983 and 1995. The number of recipients of social assistance varies dramatically between groups of immigrants of different origins. The overrepresentation for immigrants can not be explained by observable socio-economic characteristics. Using a multivariate model reveals that utilisation of social assistance decreases with time spent in Sweden – irrespective of level of education and reasons for migration. But the pace of economic assimilation is slow. For some immigrant groups it takes two decades until their social assistance reciprocity is equivalent to that of a Swedish born person. By analysing the years 1983 and 1995 the increase in social assistance reciprocity almost exclusively can be ascribed to recently immigrated groups.

Article III focuses on the social assistance recipients' living conditions. Previous research has shown that social assistance recipients in general constitute a vulnerable group in the population. In this article a study is made to determine if this also applies to the foreign born. The objective of the article is to investigate the relationship between the individual's support situation and occurrence of welfare problems. Three means of support are compared: social assistance, transfers and earnings. Data from a national immigrant survey performed by the National Board of Health and Welfare in 1996. The study encompasses four different immigrants groups, namely persons born in Chile, Iran, Poland and Turkey. All of the interviewed were 20 years to 44 years upon arrival and came to Sweden during the period 1980–1989. The study reveals that social assistance recipients make up an exposed group and that they are at risk of living on the margins of society. Factors such as the persons' ages and time spent in the country are central to the probability of being affected by welfare problems. Also country of birth gives a significant effect on most welfare indicators. The study does not, however, show any relationship between the persons' experiences from their native countries and from the immigration period and the support situation in Sweden.

Article IV The growth of social assistance among the immigrant population has given rise to societal concern and anxiety as to whether the immigrant population has developed a special dependency upon social assistance. Using a qualitative research approach this article examines orientations toward social assistance reciprocity among both Swedish-born and foreign-born persons. The recipients represent both current and former recipients. The results reveal a complex picture of how recipients relate to their situation. From the analyse of 43 recipients four ideal types can be identified. Two dimensions stand out from which the ideal types vary; the type of problem solution and the way the recipient relate to the social welfare office. The research shows that there is no immigrant-specific relationship to social assistance. Neither background nor external conditions seems to predetermine an individual's course of actions. Instead there is evidence of a rich variation among both Swedish-born and foreign-born recipients in the ways in which they relate to social welfare.