Alternativas
Cuadernos
de trabajo social

SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT AND WELFARE NATIONALISM IN THE EURO AREA FOLLOWING THE GREAT RECESSION

CONTEXTO SOCIOECONÓMICO Y NACIONALISMO DE BIENESTAR EN LA ZONA DEL EURO TRAS LA GRAN RECESIÓN

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Abstract

This study examined the association between the socioeconomic context of the Eurozone countries in the post-Great Recession era and attitudes of solidarity towards immigrants among the general population. A multilevel analysis was conducted using data from Round 8 (2016) of the European Social Survey as well as Eurostat and OECD statistics. Specifically, we assessed the link between the share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in 2016 and citizens´ support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services. Our results, in agreement with theories explaining that anxiety over-scarcity compromises out-group solidarity, confirmed the existence of such a relationship. Additional findings, however, suggested that some factors, such as holding individual-level universalism values, or the persistence of hardship during the recession recovery period (2011-2016) at country-level, may have had a protective role against chauvinistic attitudes. Recommendations for practice and research are discussed.

Keywords: Great Recession; poverty/social exclusion; immigration; social rights; social Europe.

Introduction

The continuity of the European project depends on its ability to maintain a robust welfare protection system and appropriate levels of social cohesion in increasingly diverse and segmented societies (Ferrera & Burelli, 2019). However, the Great Recession and its socioeconomic consequences have challenged the advancement of the European social model, questioning the grounds of European multiculturalism (Ferrera & Burelli, 2019; Taylor-Gooby, Leruth, & Chung, 2017). The current study investigated whether the contextual socioeconomic characteristics in the aftermath of the Great Recession—particularly the share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion—eroded public support for granting immigrants the rights to social benefits and services. We focused on the countries of the *Euro area*, formed by the 19 member states of the European Union that have adopted the euro as their common currency. The rationale for targeting those countries is that economic and social struggles were particularly severe across the Euro area (also known as the Eurozone) during the post-recession period (Ólafsson, Daly, Kangas, & Palme, 2019; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). This work seeks to build a better understanding of the factors that shape preferences for redistribution and solidarity in times of economic uncertainty and sociopolitical change.

Background

The European social model in times of uncertainty

European societies are becoming more and more diverse in terms of nation-of-origin and ethnic composition as a result of, among other processes, the economic globalization and the rise of transnational migration (Castles, De Hass, & Miller, 2013). In such a context, the welfare state systems, built under predominantly homogeneous societies, have to accommodate an increasing number of newcomers excluded from the basic entitlement of social rights upon citizenship (Schierup, Hansen, & Castles, 2006). There are ongoing debates within the European population concerning the nature and scope of immigrants' access to social benefits (Svallfors et al., 2012). Moreover, these discussions are held in a context of significant transformations in the welfare state architecture. In particular, changes in demographics (e.g., population aging), culture (e.g., the transformation in gender roles), and economic (e.g., labor market segmentation), are calling for a significant reconceptualization of the European model of social protection (Castles & Schierup, 2012). New patterns of socioeconomic inclusion/exclusion are also weakening the cross-class coalition that used to constitute the primary source of support for generous redistributive policies (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

The incorporation of newcomers unveils some of the limitations and contradictions of the European system of social protection. In particular, the processes of racialized exclusion push many migrants towards the lower strata of society, which significantly impacts social cohesion by reinforcing *us* vs. *them* type narratives (Castles & Schierup, 2012; Schierup et al., 2006). Similarly, Sainsbury (2012) demonstrated that welfare policies have a lower effect on poverty reduction among immigrants than among the general population, which evidences persistent patterns of segregation and social stratification. Furthermore, the modern manifestations of racism and national-populism have increasingly labeled immigrants as a social and economic burden, which fostered prejudices even in traditional multicultural European societies such as the Netherlands (Schierup et al., 2006).

The Great Recession in the late 2000s, which was considered the greater economic crisis at a global level since the Great Depression that occurred during the 30s of the last century, has been significantly consequential for reshaping the European social model. The starting point of the recession varied among regions through 2007-2008, but evidence of its severity spread across Europe during late 2009 (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017). The broad consequences of the Great Recession expanded throughout a long aftermath period that lasted until 2016 (Jauer, Liebig, Martin, & Puhani, 2019). As highlighted by Taylor-Gooby et al. (2017), the recession triggered a complex net of crises (social and political on top of financial and economic) that challenged the European project´s solidaristic principles.

The Euro area was particularly impacted by significant increases in poverty and social exclusion (Gómez Serrano, Molero-Simarro, & Buendía, 2016; Ólafsson et al., 2019). By the year 2016, the unemployment rates in several Eurozone countries were still above the pre-crisis level, and the European Union alerted of persistent risks for social cohesion (European Union, 2016). Artiles and Meardi (2014) explained that increasing competition for scarce resources fostered hostility against immigrants among the general population. *Welfare exclusionism* (also known as *welfare chauvinism* or *welfare nationalism*), defined as the belief that granting immigrants access to social benefits should be restricted, has been regarded as a genuine manifestation of those anti-immigrant sentiments (Reeskens and Van Oorschot, 2012).

Shaping solidarity towards immigrants

Public opinion is a critical element for the advancement of the European social policy (Van Oorschot, 2006). Attitudes not only reflect the views of the population on a variety of issues but also shapes the agenda-setting and the policy implementation processes (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). Schierup

et al. (2006) noticed that Europeans' attitudes concerning immigration and immigrants' social rights vary significantly between and within countries. Previous studies assessed the intersection of individual-level factors (e.g., socioeconomic status; education) and contextual conditions (e.g., unemployment rate; share of immigrants) to explain differences on people´s preferences (Artiles & Meardi, 2014; Mewes & Mau, 2012; Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2012). Scholars on political ethics have also suggested that holding values informed by transcending self-interest and the promotion of others´ enhancement, such as universalism and benevolence, predicted welfare attitudes and solidarity towards immigrants (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012).

An economy-rooted theory for explaining preferences for intergroup redistribution is the *realistic conflict* approach (Böhm, Rusch, & Baron, 2018; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). The theory underlines that competition for resources, whether actual or perceived, predicts the extent of solidaristic attitudes. According to the model, material hardships and unequal distribution of resources develop resources stress and group-competition over scarcity (Böhm et al., 2018; Esses et al., 1998). Fiske (2002) has also underlined the role of ideology, pointing out that intergroup biases rooted in the combined effect of economic competition and perceived conflict concerning group-identities. Furthermore, Reeskens and Van Oorschot (2012) suggested that the *principle of reciprocity* (i.e., benefits upon contribution) might mediate people´s support for granting immigrants access to social services.

There is a gap in the literature assessing whether the share of people suffering hardships in the post-recession period related to welfare attitudes and the inclusion of newcomers as recipients of social benefits. The current study aimed to address such a gap by assessing the case of the Euro area. We have formulated the following research question: *Is the share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016 associated with individual support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services?* The conclusions of this Eurozone-based study will contribute to the growing body of comparative literature concerning public attitudes on welfare policies in multicultural settings. This research aligns with the purpose of the social work discipline (specifically its commitment to promoting social cohesion and enhancing people's wellbeing) as expressed in its global definition:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and

respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Methodology

The current study aimed to examine the association between poverty/ social exclusion and attitudes towards immigrants´ rights to social services among the Eurozone´s citizenry in the post-Great Recession era. Under the assumption that both individual and contextual characteristics shape welfare attitudes, we tested a series of individual-level and country-level socioeconomic predictors using a multilevel analysis approach. Multilevel analysis –also known as hierarchical linear model– is particularly indicated for analyzing nested structures, such as students in schools, employees in companies, or population within countries like in the case under examination (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). As pointed out by Raudenbush and Bryk (2002), multilevel modeling increases the control over misestimating-precision and the errors of interpretation that may occur when including different units of analysis in the same statistical model.

Following the work of Artiles and Meardi (2014), Mewes and Mau (2012), and Reeskens and Van Oorschot (2012), we combined survey datasets and macro-level statistics towards addressing the following research question: *Is the share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016 associated with individual support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services?* The insights from the literature on attitudes about redistribution in times of scarcity allowed us to hypothesize that larger proportions of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion will relate to higher exclusionist positions. The current study used 2016 as the year of reference, which was consistent with the upper bound of the post-recession period across the Euro area (Jauer et al., 2019).

Sources of data

Our sources of data consisted of individual-level data drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS), and macro-data provided by Eurostat and OECD statistics at the country-level. Specifically, we focused on the Eurozone countries that participated in the Round-8 of the ESS (2016). These countries (N=13) were Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

Individual-level data: the European Social Survey

The ESS is a cross-national survey of public attitudes and behaviors pro-
moted by a consortium of research institutions from twenty-one European
countries. The survey was conducted every other year since 2002, using
cross-sectional probability samples drawn from the population aged 15 and
above at each participating country (European Social Survey, 2017). Some
features of the ESS enhanced the cross-national reliability and validity of its
instruments of data collection. In particular, the use of the TRAPD methodol-
ogy (i.e., Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting, and Documentation)
facilitated the cross-cultural equivalence of the translated versions of the
English-language source questionnaire (Jowell, Roberts, Fitzgerald, & Eva,
2007). Furthermore, the European Social Survey subscribed to the Declara-
tion of Professional Ethics of the International Statistical Institute.

Each round of the ESS included a set of items on core topics such as
subjective wellbeing and social trust, as well as socio-demographic data and a
series of questions based on Schwartz´s (2012) Human Values framework. Of
interest for the current investigation is a rotating module on welfare attitudes
that the survey included in two of its waves (Round-4 [2008] and Round-8
[2016]). Such a welfare component aimed to generate knowledge concerning
perceptions of social services and welfare deservingness among the European
population (European Social Survey, 2017).

Specifically, the current study used Round-8 of the ESS, as its fieldwork
in 2016 concurred with the upper limit of the post-recession period. Twenty-
one countries of Europe, as well as Russia, participated in Round-8. In line
with our research goal, we focused exclusively on the survey samples from
the country-members of the Eurozone (Table 1). In all cases, the survey
administration mode was *computer-assisted personal interview* (CAPI), except
for two countries where *paper-and-pencil interview* (PAPI) applied. Round-8
response rates ranged from 30.6 to 68.4, based on a formula consistent with
AAPOR´s (2016) standards:

> *Records in the data file / [(Total number of issued sample units)
> - (Address not residential, or Respondent resides in an institution +
> Address not occupied, or Occupied, but no resident household + Other
> ineligible address + Respondent emigrated, or Left the country long
> term + Respondent deceased)].*

Country-level data: Eurostat and OECD statistics

Eurostat –the statistical office of the European Union– provides databases
on a series of socioeconomic indicators that, as suggested by the literature,

relates with welfare attitudes. Specifically, we used country-based Eurostat data for assessing (a) poverty/social exclusion, (b) income inequality, and (c) foreign-born population. Concerning the OECD, the organization provides standardized macro-data on several domains, including demographic and socioeconomic. The current study used OECD statistics on (a) economy size, (b) unemployment, and (c) social expenditures.

Table 1. *European Social Survey Round 8 (2016): Main Features for Eurozone Participants*

Country	Sample Size	Response Rate	Survey Mode	Questionnaire Language(s)
Austria	2,010	52.5	CAPI	German
Belgium	1,766	56.8	CAPI	Dutch; French
Estonia	2,019	68.4	CAPI	Estonian; Russian
Finland	1,925	57.7	CAPI	Finnish; Swedish
France	2,070	52.4	CAPI	French
Germany	2,852	30.6	CAPI	German
Ireland	2,757	64.5	CAPI	English; Polish
Italy	2,626	49.7	CAPI	Italian
Lithuania	2,122	64.0	PAPI	Lithuanian; Russian
Netherlands	1,681	53.0	CAPI	Dutch
Portugal	1,270	45.0	CAPI	Portuguese
Slovenia	1,307	55.9	CAPI	Slovenian
Spain	1,958	67.7	PAPI	Catalan; Spanish

Note. CAPI: Computer-assisted personal interview. PAPI: Paper-and-pencil interview. Language of the source questionnaire: English.
Source: Own elaboration based on Round-8 2016 Documentation Report (European Social Survey, 2018).

Variables and measures

We have conceptualized a country-level variable named *poverty/social exclusion* as the main predictor for the outcome *welfare exclusionism*. We also defined a set of variables concerning values and personal characteristics to control for at the individual-level. Similarly, a series of economic and social indicators at the country-level were specified.

Variables and measures at the individual-level

(i) *Welfare exclusionism. Welfare exclusionism* comprises the outcome support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services. We framed the variable upon responses to a question (item E15) included in the module on welfare attitudes of the ESS Round-8 (2016). The questionnaire wording was as follows: "Thinking of people coming to live in [country] from other countries, when do you think they should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?". Respondents were prompted with five different options, as 1= Immediately on arrival; 2 = After living in [country] for a year, whether or not they have worked; 3 = Only after they have worked and paid taxes for at least a year; 4 = Once they have become a [country] citizen, and 5 = They should never get the same rights.

We focused on the last category –which Artiles and Meardi (2014) defined as an unambiguous expression of exclusionist attitudes– to conceptualize welfare exclusionism as a dummy variable. The variable was measured as 1 = respondent meets the condition of expressing that immigrants should never get the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens, and 0 = respondent does not meet the condition, including all other categories. The current study used welfare exclusionism as the outcome variable (Table 2).

(ii) *Universalism and benevolence. Universalism* expresses the degree of preference for the value universalism. The variable was measured as the individual mean response, from 1 to 6, to three survey items (ESS, 2016; items C, H, and S) drawn from the Human Values framework (Schwartz, 2012). Universalism capsulizes disposition to out-group solidarity, and one can expect that holding the value will shape positive attitudes towards redistribution and immigrants (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012; Schwartz, 2012). Accordingly, we included universalism as a control variable in our statistical models.

Benevolence indicates the degree of preference for the value benevolence. It was built upon two items from the Schwartz´s Human Values framework (2012) included in the survey questionnaire (ESS, 2016; items L and R). The variable measure consists of the individual mean response to those items (values 1 to 6). Since benevolence represents solidarity towards those within the circles of family and friendship, holding this value will likely foster mistrust for out-group redistribution (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012; Schwartz, 2012). Hence, we have included benevolence as a control variable in our statistical models.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Level-1 variables (N= 17,991)				
Welfare exclusionism (outcome)	0.06	0.24	0	1
Universalism	4.82	0.75	1	6
Benevolence	4.99	0.79	1	6
Age	50.63	17.96	15	97
Gender	0.49	0.51	0	1
Education	4.05	1.86	1	7
Ideology	5.01	2.14	0	10
Income	5.40	2.69	1	10
Ethnicity	0.03	0.18	0	1
Level-2 variables (N= 13)				
Poverty/social exclusion	8.94	3.83	4.12	19.63
Inequality	1.36	3.97	-4.87	12.12
Economy size	6.74	5.87	3.04	25.74
Unemployment	-1.27	4.43	-7.52	3.33
Social expending	-0.32	2.85	-8.74	2.73
Migration flow	0.27	0.41	-0.20	1.10
AROPE change	0.53	1.91	-5	1.9

Source: Author´s estimation.

(iii) *Sociodemographic variables.* We also accounted for a series of sociodemographic variables, namely *age, gender, education, ideology, income, and ethnicity*, as individual-level control predictors. *Age* was a continuous measure of a person´s years of age, from 15 to 97, based on self-reported information. *Gender* was measured dichotomously upon self-identification as male or female. *Education* represented the self-reported higher level of education attained, measured from 1 to 7. The variable *ideology* consisted of values from 0 to 10, based on a scale of self-identification in left-right terms included in the survey questionnaire. *Income* referred to family income, and it was measured upon self-reported household net income, ordered from 1st to 10th decile. *Ethnicity* was constructed as a dummy variable as 1 = respondent self-identified as a member of an ethnic minority.

Variables and measures at the country-level

(i) *Poverty/social exclusion. Poverty/social exclusion* was measured as the percent of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) for a given country in 2016. Data on AROPE was gathered from Eurostat statistics. AROPE corresponds to the sum of persons who are either (a) at risk of poverty, (b) severely materially deprived, or (c) living in a household with a very low work intensity (Eurostat, 2019). Gómez Serrano et al. (2016) regarded AROPE as a useful indicator towards assessing the asymmetries on the Great Recession´s impact and the recovering processes across European countries. The current study used poverty/social exclusion as the main independent variable at the country-level.

(ii) *Economic variables.* Based on the work of previous scholars (i.e., Algan, Guriev, Papaioannou, & Passari, 2017; Kunovich, 2004), the current study has conceptualized a series of economic control-variables, namely *inequality*, *economy size*, *unemployment*, and *social spending,* as the changes-amount from 2011 to 2016. Algan et al. (2017) showed that it was the change in unemployment during the Great Recession period, rather than its level at a reference year, which correlated to sociopolitical attitudes. Moreover, Kunovich (2004) pointed out the convenience of using a five-year window to assess potential country-level effects on anti-immigrant prejudices.

We measured *inequality* using the Gini index provided by Eurostat statistics. The index (from 0 to 1) quantifies the extent to which the distribution of income within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution represented by a Gini value of zero (European Union, 2016). We followed Grabka and Frick (2013) -who assessed the evolution of Gini upon the formula of relative change- to define our variable inequality as Gini´s relative change from 2011 to 2016 in a given country.

The variable *economy size* was measured upon OECD data on the gross domestic product (GDP). GDP consists of the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific period (Ólafsson et al., 2019). We followed the work of Mewes and Mau (2012) to define our variable economy size as the absolute change of the GDP per capita (as purchasing power parity in US dollars) from 2011 to 2016 in a given country, divided by 1,000. OECD statistics were also used for data on unemployment and social expenditures.

Concerning *unemployment*, its measure consists of the absolute change from 2011 to 2016 on a given country´s unemployment rate. The rate consists of the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labor force (Mewes & Mau, 2012). The variable *social spending* was measured based on the absolute change from 2011 to 2016 on social expenditures, as

a percent of GDP, in a given country. It included cash benefits, direct in-kind provision of goods and services, and tax breaks for social purposes.

(iii) *Social variables.* Finally, we framed the variables *migration flow* and *AROPE change* based on Eurostat datasets. Following previous works, such as Gómez Serrano et al. (2016), and Mewes and Mau (2012), we included both predictors as control variables in our statistical models. *Migration flow* was measured as the percentage point change of the foreign-born population in a given country, using 2016 as the time-reference. Concerning *AROPE change*, we measured the variable as the absolute change from 2011 to 2016 on the rate AROPE for each country (non-anchored rate).

Analysis

Two-level multilevel logistic regressions were estimated to assess the association between support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services and the share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016. The multilevel logistic analysis is also known as *mixed-effect logistic* or *hierarchical generalized linear model* (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). The method allowed us to estimate the odds of the occurrence of exclusionist stands –the binary outcome in the current study– while taking into account that the survey respondents (Level-1 units) were nested within a higher-level structure conformed by countries. Our analyses were conducted using the multilevel modeling software HLM-6 (Raudenbush, 2004) with a maximum likelihood estimation procedure set to 14 interactions.

We started analyzing a null model which consisted of an initial specification with no predictors at either level (model 1; Table 3). The output of such unconditional configuration provided information on the variability between countries regarding the outcome towards confirming the convenience of using the multilevel approach. Subsequently, we examined the response of key individual-level variables by regressing a set of Level-1 predictors on welfare exclusionism (model 2). Finally, we modeled a fully conditional specification (model 3). Model 3 allowed us to estimate the odds of supporting welfare exclusionism as a function of the Level-2 predictor poverty/social exclusion while also controlling for a set of lower-level and higher-level variables, as suggested by the literature. The full-model´s specifications included Bernoulli distribution, and population size and post-stratification survey weights at Level-1. All the predictors (except for gender and ethnicity that were binary measured) were grand-mean centered to facilitate the interpretation of the results. Due to the limited number of units at the upper-level, this study did not consider robust estimation. Following the work of Papazoglou and Galariotis (2020), we applied listwise deletion to handled missing data. As

a result, our final analytic sample consisted of 17,991individuals nested within 13 Eurozone countries. A multicollinearity diagnosis yielded variance inflation factors (VIF) below 1.5 for all the variables under examination.

Table 3. *Multilevel Logistic Regression*

Welfare exclusionism	Model 1 (Unconditional Specification)			
Intercept	Coefficient	SE	Variance	SD
	-2.79	0.209	0.55	0.742
	Model 2		Model 3	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Intercept	0.03	[0.01-0.10] ***	0.04	[0.02-0.06] ***
Individual-level variables				
Universalism	0.57	[0.52-0.62] ***	0.54	[0.49-0.59] ***
Benevolence	1.24	[1.14-1.35] ***	1.27	[1.15-1.39] ***
Age	1.00	[0.99-1.00]	1.00	[0.99- 1.00]
Gender (Ref. male)	0.92	[0.81- 1.03]	0.99	[0.86- 1.13]
Education	0.79	[0.75-0.82] ***	0.76	[0.72-0.79] ***
Ideology	1.09	[1.07-1.13] ***	1.17	[1.13-1.20] ***
Income	0.91	[0.88-0.93] ***	0.89	[0.86-0.91] ***
Ethnicity (Ref. minority)	1.23	[0.87-1.74]	0.42	[0.23-0.74] **
Country-level variables				
Poverty/social exclusion			1.14	[1.01-1.27] *
Inequality			1.05	[0.88-1.23]
Economy size			0.95	[0.72-1.25]
Unemployment			1.23	[0.95-1.57]
Social spending			1.01	[0.61-1.66]
Migration flow			1.17	[0.19-7.04]
AROPE change			0.57	[0.32-1.00] *

Note. SE= standard error; SD= standard deviation; OR= odds ratio; CI= confidence interval.
*** p ≤.001, ** p ≤.01, * p ≤.05.

Results

The estimated results for the unconditional specification (model 1) indicated that, assuming that countries' log-odds of welfare exclusionism were normally distributed with mean -2.79 (SE 0.209) and variance 0.55, we would expect about 95% of the countries to have values between -4.24

and -1.24. If converting to probabilities for a 95% confidence-level, these results indicated that Eurozone countries' scores concerning support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services laid between 0.014 and 0.207. We observed that the typical probability for a random effect = 0 of support for welfare exclusionism was 0.057. In summary, the unconditional model revealed the existence of considerable variation to be explained and confirmed the convenience of applying the multilevel approach. Concerning model 2, the results demonstrated the significant association (p<.001) between a series of characteristics at the personal level (i.e., embracing the values universalism and benevolence, education, ideology, and household income) and individual views on welfare exclusionism. The observation of such significant relationships supported the inclusion of those variables in our final regression model.

The results for the fully conditional specification (model 3) showed that a higher rate of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016, holding constant the other predictors in the model, was significantly associated with higher odds (OR=1.14) of supporting the exclusion of immigrants from the rights to social services (p<.05). Such findings supported the hypothesis that a more substantial proportion of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion at the upper limit of the post-recession period will correspond to chauvinistic positions. However, our results also provided statistically significant evidence that a raise in the AROPE change from 2011 to 2016 appeared to be negatively related (OR=0.57) with the odds of endorsing welfare exclusionism (p =.05).

Regarding the individual-level variables included in the full model, the results pointed out some significant findings. We observed that respondents holding a stronger inclination for the value universalism were less likely to support the exclusion of immigrants from social services (OR=0.54, p<.001) compared with those less universalism-committed. A significant negative association was also shown by education and income. One unit increase on educational attainment (OR=0.76, p<.001) and household income (OR=0.89, p<.001) decreased by 0.274 and 0.122, respectively, the predicted log-odds of welfare exclusionism. Finally, holding an ethnic-minority status also correlated with lower odds of supporting exclusion (OR=0.42, p<.01). Conversely, the results indicated that respondents showing a greater alignment to the value benevolence (OR= 1.27, p<.001), and to the right-wing ideology (OR= 1.17, p<.001), were more likely to express a preference for denying immigrants the rights to social services. For the full specification, Wald t-statistic takes a value of 75.47 (5 degrees of freedom, and p<.001).

Discussion

This study confirmed that a larger share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in 2016 was significantly associated with support for excluding immigrants from the rights to social services among the general population of the Euro area. Such a finding aligned with existing literature underlining the linkage between socioeconomic adversity and exclusionist stands (e.g., Artiles & Meardi 2014; Mewes & Mau, 2012; Reeskens & Van Oorschot, 2012). More precisely, our study was consistent with works rooted in the realistic conflict theory (Böhm et al., 2018; Esses et al., 1998), which explained that perception of financial risk and scarcity over resources generate resources-stress that trigger out-group anxieties. However, our findings also indicated a puzzling effect as the AROPE change from 2011 to 2016 related to lower rather than higher chauvinistic attitudes. Examining such apparent contradiction may constitute one of the main contributions of this work.

Although both poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016 and AROPE change from 2011 to 2016 accounted for socioeconomic adversity at the country-level, they actually invoked distinctive concepts. While the former portrays the context at the upper limit of the post-recession period, the later speaks of the challenges of the recovering process. Finding that a poverty-stricken setting in the year 2016 correlated with a preference for withholding immigrants´ social rights does not necessarily conflict with identifying that persistent hardships over time were associated with a lower inclination for excluding immigrants from social services. In other words, although a higher number of people in a situation of poverty/social exclusion seems to have eroded out-group solidarity, an arduous recovering from the challenges of the Great Recession may have contributed to forging a sort of in/out-group solidarity in the struggle.

Additional research is needed to explore the extent to which contextual factors modulate the effect of resources-stress on solidarity towards immigrants. Perhaps, exploring the evolution of poverty/social exclusion and inequality at a regional level will help us to capture the specific responses of the socioeconomic indicators under examination. Recent studies, such as Czaika and Di Lillo (2018), have used the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS regions) as the upper-level unit of analysis for hierarchical inquiries concerning anti-immigrant attitudes. As shown by Moretti and Whitworth (2020), the use of sub-national statistics is a promising avenue to improve comparative research on welfare attitudes throughout a deeply segmented Europe in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Specifically, since our analysis did not provide significant evidence to confirm that unemployment, inequality, or migration flow related to welfare exclusionism,

it will be worthwhile to examine indicators for both predictors in a regional
dimension. Assessing the within-country variability concerning the relative
changes in net migration from 2011 to 2016 will provide a valuable account
of the migration dynamic over the post-recession period.

The current study has also demonstrated that a series of individual-
level factors, namely values, political orientation, education, income, and
ethnicity, were significantly related to the welfare exclusionism outcome.
Concerning values, we found that holding universalism was associated with
a greater inclination for granting social services to immigrants, which is
consistent with the out-group solidaristic foundation of a pro-universalism
ethic (Davidov & Meuleman, 2012; Schwartz, 2012). Conversely, we showed
that an individual´s preference for the value benevolence was associated
with supporting immigrants´ exclusion. This finding was consistent with
Schwartz´s (2012) thesis that benevolence accounts for conditional solidarity
upon family-and-friendship ties, fostering hesitation towards out-group
redistribution. Future studies applying the insights from the minority threat
theory (e.g., Wang, 2012) would analyze symbolic causes of the perceived
threat against immigrants, such as a feeling of socio-cultural competition.

By revealing a series of factors and mechanisms that shaped people´s
views regarding immigrants accessing social services, this study contributed
to advance the comparative literature on welfare attitudes. Specifically, we
have generated some knowledge to better understand the roots of solidarity
among the general population of the Eurozone in the aftermath of the
Great Recession. Hence, this paper contributed to the ongoing discussion
held by policy-makers and social practitioners concerning the solidaristic
and multicultural dimensions of the European project. From a social work
perspective, confirming an association between poverty/social exclusion and
welfare exclusionism can inform policy advocacy towards the promotion
of equitable access and distribution of resources and wealth, in line with
the ethical principle of promoting social justice (International Federation
of Social Workers, 2018). By identifying how different human values may
modulate the effect of economics on anti-immigrant attitudes, this study
could also support the development of a cultural-sensitive program of
education towards building solidarity and promoting inclusive communities.

We expect that the contributions of the current study will counterbalance
some of its limitations. First, there was a conceptual limitation in the way the
questionnaire of the ESS prompted respondents using the term immigrants
without any specification. Such a lack of precision omitted the existence of
various categories of immigrants, such as economic-migrants or refugees,
that would likely motivate different attitudes among the general population.

Secondly, the current study could not examine all the societies of the Euro area, since six Eurozone-members did not participate in the Round-8 of the ESS. The list of Eurozone countries that were not assessed included Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Luxemburg, Malta, and Slovakia. Finally, given the limited number of Level-2 units in our multilevel model (N=13), we could not consider robust estimation when conducting the logistic analysis.

The findings of the current study confirmed the applicability of the ESS module on welfare attitudes to analyze people's stances about out-group redistribution. However, the complexity of the processes of the formation of attitudes suggests the need for further analysis accounting for a more comprehensive set of variables. The use of items from the survey sections on *social exclusion* and *national and ethnic identity* will allow us to examine significant dimensions, such as resources stress and cultural expectations, that have not been evaluated in the present work. Furthermore, future research applying a fixed effect approach for analyzing data from different rounds of the European Social Survey will enhance the current analysis´s scope, strengthening its conclusions.

Conclusions

The current study assessed the effect of the socioeconomic context –specifically the levels of poverty/social exclusion– on solidaristic attitudes towards granting immigrants the rights to social services. By using multilevel modeling and focusing on the post-Great Recession period in the Euro area, we have developed an original approach that reinforced some of the conclusions presented in previous investigations. In particular, this study confirmed that a higher share of people at risk of poverty/social exclusion in the year 2016 was significantly associated with exclusionist attitudes among the Eurozone´s citizenry. Such a finding was consistent with previous literature suggesting that anxiety over scarcity compromises out-group solidarity.

An additional contribution of this study was to identify that the persistence of hardships over the recession recovering period, from 2011 to 2016, related to lower rather than higher chauvinistic attitudes. Such a paradoxical phenomenon contradicted the principles of the realistic conflict theory. We have speculated that unremitting poverty/social exclusion in the aftermath of the Great Recession reinforced inter-group solidarity, which pointed out a direction for further research for social work and related fields.

The modeling of a limited set of variables, the use of exclusively one round of survey data, and the insufficient attention paid to the symbolic threats concerning immigrants were some of the limitations of the current study. Assessing additional characteristics of the context, such as the scope

and quality of the systems of social services, would advance our knowledge on how welfare attitudes are conformed among the increasingly diverse societies of the Euro area. We also suggested that examining socioeconomic indicators at the regional level will enhance the country-level conclusions drawn by the current study.

Our findings underlined the need for advocacy towards the distribution of resources and wealth, as alleviating poverty and social exclusion will contribute to neutralizing anti-immigrant stands. Since the value universalism appeared associated with solidaristic attitudes, this study can also inform evidence-based educational programs towards the promotion of universalism-based ethics. Ultimately, this work constitutes a significant albeit modest contribution to the advancement of social work practice and research across the multicultural and complex European contexts in times of generalized discontent.

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