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## Between Welfare and Farewell

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# Chapter 6

Conclusions



## 6.1 Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between welfare systems and mobility within Europe increasingly caught the attention of the general public, popular press, policy-makers and scientific scholars. It has been argued that welfare will act as a pull factor in common labour markets without mobility restrictions, whereas this is not necessarily the case for countries that restrict entry or access to welfare for migrants (Razin & Wahba, 2015). This thesis addresses one of the crucial questions in these societal and scholarly debates:

*How and to what extent are intra-European migration decisions influenced by welfare systems in both origin and destination countries?*

In most countries, a trade-off can be identified between the openness borders and migrants' welfare rights (Faist, 1995; Ruhs, 2013). Migration within the European Union (EU) however constitutes a case of 'exceptionalism' in this respect (Ruhs 2015): legislation of the EU grants its citizens the right to move and reside freely within the Union, as well as the right to access welfare across borders (Martinsen, Pons Rotger, & Thierry, 2018). Studying the role of the welfare system in migration decisions for the European context in this thesis thus has both societal importance and scientific relevance.

So far, studies on the role of the welfare system in migration decisions mainly started from an economic pull factor assumption and had a clear destination country bias. My empirical analyses show that the potential impact of welfare systems is much more complex than a general 'magnet' effect. As I found that characteristics of the welfare system can have an attracting, but also a discouraging influence on migration decisions, I conclude that the role of welfare systems in these decisions depends on the way individuals may be affected by them. This depends on the one hand on how national governments have organized different elements of their welfare system, and on the other hand on individuals' welfare needs and rights. My study thus highlights the importance of further disentangling the often-used generic welfare spending measure when studying the link between intra-European migration and the welfare state. Furthermore, as European welfare systems are largely organized along the lines of the life course,

individuals' life course characteristics are crucial to be included. Rather than an independent 'magnet' effect, my research indicates that the welfare system may facilitate intra-European migration by providing protection against uncertainty and risks involved in the migration project. Finally, my empirical analyses illustrate that welfare systems mainly shape decisions to stay or to migrate through the way they are experienced in the country of residence. Including the welfare system at the origin country thus is crucial. In my thesis, I propose a new model on intra-European migration to explain migration decisions as embedded in an individual's life course as well as the broader societal context in which they take shape.

In the next section (6.2), I will recapitulate the main findings of each of the four empirical chapters. In Section 6.3 that follows, I will discuss how these results together answer the overarching research question and elaborate on the scientific implications by means of the conceptual model developed in this thesis. In Section 6.4, I will reflect on some methodological implications and limitations. I conclude by explicating the societal relevance of this thesis (Section 6.5).

## **6.2 Summary of the findings**

### *6.2.1 Migration and welfare access in the Netherlands*

In the European context, concerns regarding 'welfare migration' were fuelled by increased migration from the central and eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 to the more developed welfare systems in the west. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I therefore focused on migrants from two of these new member states – Poland and Bulgaria –, using the Netherlands as a case study. Relying on data from the Dutch Population Registers, I studied the migration flows and labour market status of Polish and Bulgarian migrants and related these to migrant-specific and national eligibility criteria regulating welfare access in the Netherlands. Innovatively, I considered the welfare uptake of these groups within a single welfare system and labour market, yet under different conditions in terms of labour market access. My findings on Polish and Bulgarian migrants to the Netherlands do not support the political and scientific discourse that the

abolishment of border restrictions in the enlarged EU increased pressure on generous welfare systems. Instead, the study highlighted that migrants have to meet migrant-specific and national eligibility criteria of welfare state arrangements before they can access the welfare system abroad. Over the years after the EU enlargements, Polish and Bulgarian migrants were mainly in the early working ages, a life stage in which individuals typically contribute more to the welfare system than they receive in benefits. Furthermore, although most welfare rights are built up over time, a large share of Polish and Bulgarian migrants left the Netherlands within the first years after arrival. In accordance, the sharp rise in the number of Polish and Bulgarian migrants to the Netherlands after the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007 has not been accompanied by comparable increases in the uptake of unemployment benefits, social assistance or old-age pensions for these groups over the studied period (2007 – 2014). My findings further suggest that, under conditions of restricted labour market access, Bulgarian migrants were less able to build up rights for contributory social-insurance benefits in the Netherlands. If dependent on welfare state arrangements, these migrants therefore mainly relied on non-contributory social assistance. However, in the absence of restrictions of labour market access, I found unemployment benefits to become more important than social assistance for welfare-dependent Polish migrants.

### *6.2.2 The influence of welfare on locational choices across Europe*

In Chapter 3, I investigated the influence of welfare spending on intra-European migration decisions between 25 countries over a six-year period (2003-2008). Findings from a conditional logit model showed a positive impact of total social expenditure on locational choices for all age groups except for adults early in their working lives. I further distinguished between social expenditure in three welfare domains (unemployment, family and old-age benefits) and tested whether social expenditure particularly influenced locational choices of individuals within the age groups covered by the respective welfare domains. Young adults moving together with children more often chose destinations that spent more on family benefits, whereas individuals close to or above retirement age moved more often

to countries with higher spending on old-age benefits than younger migrants. These results support the assumption that the impact of welfare systems on locational choices depends on how migrants are affected by them after settlement. However, in contrast with what was expected based on the welfare magnet idea, I found that intra-European migrants were generally less likely to select countries with higher social expenditure on unemployment benefits as their destination. This held in particular for those in the early working ages. Generous welfare state arrangements thus may be attractive to the more vulnerable groups, such as families and elderly, whereas they may have the opposite effect on individuals moving in life stages where they contribute more to the welfare system than they receive in benefits. My study therefore highlights the importance of further disentangling the often used general social expenditure measure when studying the link between migration and the welfare state, as well as distinguishing between migrants in different life stages. Finally, the findings suggest that social expenditure not necessarily reflects the generosity of welfare state arrangements, but rather reveals the level of government interference in specific societal domains. This may explain the mixed findings of previous studies that used general government spending and stresses the need for more precise measures of welfare generosity.

### *6.2.3 Welfare and migration decisions as embedded in time and space*

As individuals' welfare rights and needs in European welfare systems change over the life course, throughout this thesis I studied the role of welfare state arrangements in migration decisions depending on the moment of migration within a person's life. The sociological life course approach highlights the importance of taking into account the dynamics and stage in life as important aspects to understand an individual's behaviour. Yet the often-used models on welfare and migration starting from economic utility assumptions are still rather static in nature and do not pay ample attention to life course dynamics. Expanding on the existing literature in the different domains, in Chapter 4, I therefore developed an innovative conceptual model which combines insights from migration theories with principles of the life course approach. Using qualitative

interview data from European citizens born in Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom (UK) and residing in the Netherlands, I subsequently investigated how the welfare system is perceived and experienced at the individual level, and how such perceptions, knowledge and practices may enter migration decisions.

The study empirically underpinned the main premise of the theoretical model that migration decisions and the factors shaping them should be explained as connected through the life course. My interview data illustrated that migration decisions are typically shaped by factors relevant to the individual at the time of migration, without looking very far into the future. Furthermore, information on welfare state arrangements is mostly sought once the need for some sort of governmental support arises. As most respondents migrated when they did not need or rely on welfare (yet), these results help explain why they rarely considered the welfare system abroad when deciding to migrate. Furthermore, individuals' perceptions of the welfare system were largely shaped by personal experiences with welfare state arrangements, or those of peers. Because of this, it was often only after migration that the welfare system in the destination country entered respondents' frame of reference. More than an attracting effect of welfare abroad prior to migration, I found that the welfare system in the country of residence (i.e., the country of origin *prior* to migration, or the destination country *after*), in some cases enabled migration, and under other circumstances stimulated settlement.

#### *6.2.4 The role of welfare in shaping migration aspirations*

In Chapter 5, I investigated the role of the welfare system in shaping migration aspirations using experimental data from a factorial survey among 300 Dutch master students. First, I investigated how and to what extent characteristics of the welfare state affected individuals' migration aspirations when evaluating hypothetical destination countries. I found lower migration aspirations among my respondents when the costs of healthcare in the destination country were higher than those in the origin country, and when the waiting time to access unemployment benefits exceeded the length of the anticipated stay abroad. Respondents' migration intentions on the other hand increased with higher levels of unemployment benefits in the destination country. However, a stronger



negative impact of *lower* levels of unemployment benefits in the destination country on migration aspirations suggested that it was more important to them to retain the level of protection they had in the origin country. Second, I tested whether the impact of these welfare state characteristics varied with economic circumstances in the destination country or personality traits of the respondent. Migration aspirations were generally higher for destination countries with higher job chances, yet particularly when combined with higher levels of unemployment benefits. The main effect of higher unemployment benefits was no longer significant after including this interaction term. Whereas risk-averse individuals were generally less willing to move abroad, their migration aspirations increased when the level of unemployment benefits in the destination country was higher than in the origin country. The impact of higher levels of unemployment benefits was also stronger for respondents who scored higher on the generalized self-efficacy scale, which captures how well individuals feel they can manage unexpected events. Overall my findings indicate that welfare state arrangements mainly affected migration aspirations by reducing risks and offering a strategy to cope with unforeseen events.

### 6.3 Discussion of the results

#### 6.3.1 *Welfare systems, migration and the life course*

Literature on the link between welfare and migration has been dominated by the welfare magnet hypothesis as introduced by Borjas (1999). Derived from an economic rational choice framework, the welfare magnet hypothesis approaches migration as a strategy of individuals to maximize their life-long utility. Borjas developed the hypothesis to study immigrants' interstate residential choices when arriving in the United States. Immigrants anticipating higher returns from the welfare system than from the labour market were expected to cluster in the states with the highest welfare benefits.

Applying this perspective to the European context calls for necessary additions to this model. First of all, European welfare systems are not necessary geared towards those in high need only, but aim to cover risks that people face

over the life course in a range of domains. The extent to which this has been developed across Europe however differs, as does the ways in which welfare states are financed (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Furthermore, also intra-European migration calls for a specific approach. Even in the context of freedom of movement, intra-European migration involves the crossing of national borders, and is therefore characterized by different dynamics than interstate mobility within the United States. By entering another EU country, intra-European migrants also face a different welfare system. Since the aim of my thesis was to uncover the mechanisms connecting welfare systems to individual migration decisions in the context of the EU, I combined insights from different disciplinary approaches in my research. I integrated the economic framework of the welfare magnet hypothesis with insights from the literature on social policy, international migration and the sociological life course approach.

The social policy literature illustrates that European welfare systems are largely organized along the lines of the life course (De Graaf & Maier, 2017) and that countries prioritize different welfare domains (Kuitto, 2011). The importance of welfare state arrangements in migration decisions therefore not just varies between categories of migrants, but also over different phases of life. Literature on international migration furthermore recognizes that migration decisions are not just shaped by opportunities abroad, but also by individuals' abilities and aspirations in the country of origin (Carling, 2002). Along this line of reasoning, it thus can be expected that welfare systems may not just shape residential choices, but also the decision whether or not to migrate.

Although the importance of the life course is also increasingly recognised in migration research, commonly used migration models are still rather static in nature. In the thesis I therefore introduced a novel conceptual model in which I combine insights from migration theories with principles from the life course approach (see Figure 6-1). Like previous models on international migration (e.g., Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2011), the life course approach focuses on how people formulate and pursue their life goals (*agency*), and how they may be enabled or constrained by structural opportunities and limitations in their lives (*structure*). However, the life course approach has an additional leading concept: it focuses on

the complex interplay of structure and agency *over time* (Cooke & Gazso, 2009). In the model I developed, migration decision-making thus is an ongoing process, which does not stop once a person has migrated. This is particularly important to understand contemporary intra-European migration decisions, as flexible migration patterns observed across Europe today are in contrast with the idea of migration as a once in a lifetime, life-long decision (Carling & Collins, 2018; Engbersen & Snel, 2013). The principles of *life-span development*, *time and place*, and *timing* of the life course approach provide useful tools to connect a macro-level factor like the welfare state and migration decisions of individuals in a dynamic way (see Chapter 4). The model stresses that the role of structural factors in contemporary intra-European migration decisions depends on where individuals are in their lives, particularly when the impact of these factors can be expected to vary over the life course –as is the case for the welfare state. Furthermore, the model acknowledges that the macro-level circumstances that an individual faces are different before and after migration, and that these changed circumstances will impact the way subsequent decisions to stay or to re-migrate are made. Thus, after migration, the destination context can be perceived as a new potential origin context, and the factors stimulating the initial migration decision might be different from those encouraging further migration or settlement.

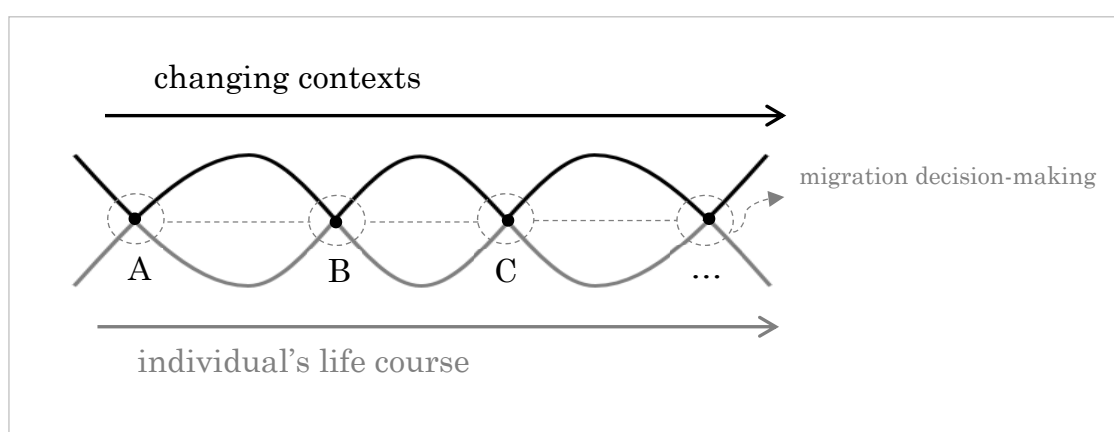


Figure 6-1 The dynamic model of intra-European migration

### 6.3.2 *Welfare as a pull factor?*

Due to the dominant welfare magnet hypothesis, previous research on the role of welfare systems in migration decisions mainly centred around the expectation that migrants are more likely to move towards the most generous welfare systems. Partly in line with an attracting impact of welfare, I found that welfare state arrangements in the destination country influenced migration aspirations of Dutch master students (Chapter 5), and were associated with locational choices of intra-European migrants (Chapter 3). However, instead of a general tendency of people to move towards countries with a generous welfare state, my findings reveal that the impact of welfare state arrangements on locational choices depends on how individuals are affected by them after arrival. Thus, generous welfare provisions abroad can attract migrants, but may also discourage immigration when individuals are not eligible for them, or when they are associated with higher costs. My study therefore shows that welfare cannot be seen as a homogenous package, but that it is crucial to distinguish between specific types of welfare state arrangements and the eligibility criteria that grant access to them.

As welfare access in European welfare systems is intrinsically connected to the life course, my findings further emphasize the importance of considering migrants' life course characteristics when investigating the role of the welfare system in migration decisions. Chapter 3 revealed that the determinants of migration vary for individuals moving in different life stages. Although the outcomes on family and old-age benefits are to some extent in line with the welfare magnet hypothesis, it should be noted that families with children and elderly are generally underrepresented in migration flows. Many EU migrants move in life stages when they are generally less concerned with welfare state arrangements (Chapters 2-4). This helps explaining why limited support for the welfare magnet hypothesis was found in my research. Whereas the welfare magnet hypothesis assumes migrants to 'choose' between work or welfare, no support for an attracting effect of unemployment benefits on migrants in the working ages was found (Chapter 3).

In European welfare systems, welfare rights are often built up over time and in turn depend on individuals' length of residence in a country, or even on paid contributions (Chapter 2). This challenges the belief that, in the absence of border restrictions, individuals can move for the primary purpose of accessing benefits rather than working and contributing. Also contrasting the idea of a work or welfare 'choice', higher levels of unemployment benefits particularly increased migration aspirations in combination with higher job chances, and for individuals with higher generalized self-efficacy. My research thus suggest that welfare state arrangements may enter the migration decision-making process less as an independent 'magnet', and more as a safety net to cope with unforeseen events in the future. Further supporting this mechanism, I found migration aspirations of risk-averse individuals, who were generally less willing to migrate, to increase when levels of unemployment benefits in the destination country were higher (Chapter 5).

In the qualitative interviews analysed in Chapter 4, the welfare system in the Netherlands was not mentioned by respondents as one of the main factors guiding their decision to move there. Although respondents reflected retrospectively on their migration decision, this finding was supported by their limited knowledge of Dutch welfare provisions prior to migration. Information on welfare state arrangements in the destination country was typically sought only once the need for governmental support arose after arrival. Nevertheless, despite the limited role of the welfare system in the Netherlands prior to migration, the interviews showed how welfare state arrangements as experienced after settlement could influence subsequent decisions on whether to stay or to return.

### *6.3.3 Origin and destination country*

As Borjas (1999) developed the welfare magnet hypothesis to study interstate residential choices of immigrants after arrival in the United States, his theoretical argument assumes that the welfare system becomes important *after* the initial decision to migrate, yet *before* settlement. However, it is important to recognize that welfare state arrangements may also play a role at other stages of the migration decision making-process, that is, in the decision to move abroad in the

first place, or to stay after initial migration. In fact, empirical evidence of Chapters 4 and 5 suggests that the welfare system as experienced in the country of residence, i.e., the origin country prior to migration, or the destination country after, is more important to migration decisions than the welfare system in the destination country prior to migration. This statement can be motivated in several ways. First, I found welfare dependency after migration to stimulate settlement when individuals were uncertain that they would be able to receive the support they or their family members needed somewhere else (Chapter 4). Similar forces may just as well occur in the origin country, implying that mainly those who do *not* need or depend on welfare will migrate. This in contrast with the welfare magnet hypothesis, which assumes that particularly welfare-prone individuals will be attracted by welfare abroad. Second, as perceptions of welfare state arrangements are mainly shaped through personal experiences, welfare systems in the origin and destination country are difficult to compare for individuals prior to international migration (Chapter 4). However, satisfaction with the way the government of a destination country organizes its welfare system may contribute to individuals' intentions to stay, even though it did not play a role in their initial decision to move there. Finally, my findings showed that aspirations to move were lower when welfare state arrangements abroad were lower than in the origin country (Chapter 5). This finding suggests that a generous welfare system in the origin country can function as a retaining factor *prior* to migration. The thesis therefore highlights the importance of considering both the destination and origin country when studying the role of the welfare system in migration decisions.

## 6.4 Methodological implications

### 6.4.1 *A mixed-method approach*

In addition to bridging between theoretical approaches, to get a better grasp on how a macro-level factor like the welfare system can influence individual migration decisions I employed a mixed-method approach. As each method captures another aspect of the relationship under study, together these studies contributed to a more complete picture. First, whereas specific interactions

between a sending and a receiving country are lost in studies including larger sets of countries, a case study represents a valuable approach to interpret migration patterns from the setting in which they occur. This way, the focused approach of the first empirical study (Chapter 2) enabled me to understand migration patterns and labour market outcomes of migrants from Poland and Bulgaria as shaped by the legal arrangements regulating migration and welfare access of these groups in the Netherlands.

A macro-level approach on the other hand is suitable to identify more general patterns and trends. Analysing bilateral migration flow data, in the second empirical study (Chapter 3) I found the determinants of locational choices of intra-European migrants to vary between different life stages. These findings illustrate the importance of testing more tailored hypotheses, rather than formulating general expectations for all migrants or grouping them merely by country of origin. By distinguishing between categories of migrants I was able to investigate more precisely who is entering and what are their needs. Life stage as indicated by age proved to be a valuable dimension for these categories and has the practical benefit of being more widely available and objective than for instance skill-level or migration motive.

Modelling the locational choices of EU migrants, the approach of Chapter 3 closely follows the reasoning of the welfare magnet hypothesis as formulated by Borjas. However, this type of analysis does not reveal how a macro-level factor like the welfare system is perceived by individuals, or what they know about welfare state arrangements in the destination country prior to migration. The qualitative analysis of the third empirical study (Chapter 4) yielded more in-depth knowledge on how welfare systems are experienced and perceived by individuals, as well as the process of migration decision-making. In much of the quantitative migration research, hypotheses are formulated along the lines of an economic rational choice framework. However, findings from my qualitative interviews challenge the understanding of intra-European migration decisions as a strategy of individuals to maximize their life long utility. Furthermore, the study signals the importance of acknowledging gaps and inconsistencies in (future) migrants' knowledge of macro-level circumstances abroad.

Because most migration studies focused on those who actually migrated, either quantitatively or qualitatively, it remains unclear from previous literature to what extent welfare systems influence considerations on whether or not to migrate. In the fourth empirical study (Chapter 5), I therefore investigated the impact of characteristics of the welfare system on migration aspirations (i.e., a person's conviction that leaving would be better than staying) for a broader group of people. To this end, I used a factorial survey which combines an experimental design with survey questions. In the survey part, I included well-established scales on self-efficacy and risk aversion. The experimental setup represented a relatively unexplored approach to capture the trade-offs that characterize migration decisions in a controlled setting. Using this method, I was able to investigate the relative importance of welfare state arrangements to migration intentions. Furthermore, I could empirically test whether this importance varied with labour market characteristics in the destination country, as well as personality traits.

Together, the four empirical chapters of my dissertation reveal that the indicators of welfare generosity and migration often used in previous studies investigating a link between the two at the macro-level are too crude. Generic measures of welfare spending conceal important variation between welfare systems in terms of the welfare domains they prioritize. In addition, social expenditure is likely associated with other country characteristics, such as general prosperity or labour market conditions. These issues with generic social expenditure measures may explain mixed findings in previous literature and highlight the need for more precise indicators in future research. Furthermore, by merely looking at the size of migration flows, one could easily jump to biased conclusions about the importance of welfare in individual migration decisions, because welfare state arrangements may not matter to all migrants equally. Instead of treating migrants as a homogeneous group, variation within migration flows in terms of personal characteristics such as life stage, but also personality traits should be acknowledged. Additionally, I found the impact of the welfare system on migration decisions to vary with characteristics of the labour market in the destination country. Instead of treating welfare as an independent magnet, future research on migration decisions should therefore look more closely at the



interplay between welfare systems and labour markets. Finally, my research highlights the importance of understanding migration decisions not just from opportunities in the destination country, but also from potential losses in the country of residence. This is particularly relevant as international migration studies are still often characterized by a destination country bias, and largely ignored a retaining impact of generous welfare provisions in the origin country. The mixed-method approach of my thesis illustrates how these different aspects of the link between welfare systems and migration decision can be addressed at the micro- and macro-level.

#### *6.4.2 Directions for future research*

The theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in this thesis aim at a better, more comprehensive understanding of how a macro-level factor like the welfare system enters and potentially shapes migration decisions at the individual level. Although the thesis contributes to the literature on this relation from different angles, a number of limitations in its scope as well as avenues for future research can be identified.

Findings of Chapter 3 signal the need for a more detailed way to measure welfare generosity when investigating the link with migration, as the typically used social expenditure measures are likely associated with other country characteristics, such as demographic composition, general prosperity or labour market stability. These factors in turn may explain the locational decisions of migrants rather than the amount of welfare spending. As more precise policy indicators are becoming increasingly available (for instance, see Scruggs, Kuitto, & Jahn, 2018), future research could elaborate on my study at the macro-level by including policy indicators like replacement rates in statistical models on migration flows. At the same time, findings of Chapter 5 show that migrants' knowledge on specific features of the welfare system in the destination country is often limited prior to migration. Because of this, it seems questionable to what extent individuals are informed about more subtle cross-national differences when making the move. An alternative yet interesting way ahead would therefore be to investigate from a micro-perspective the impact of these more precise welfare

indicators on decisions to stay in a particular country rather than to (re-)migrate, for both immigrants and natives.

Literature on the link between welfare and migration stresses the importance of considering the possibility of reversed causality, that is, the impact intra-European migration might have on national welfare systems (Giulietti & Wahba, 2012). This is particularly relevant for the interpretation of the findings of Chapter 3, because broad associations between welfare generosity as measured by social expenditure and migration flows were tested here. On the one hand, social expenditure may be higher in countries that are characterized by larger immigration flows due to migrants entering the welfare system (Böheim & Mayr, 2005; Dahlberg & Edmark, 2008). However, a positive relationship between social expenditure and locational choices of EU migrants was found only in the domains of family and old-age. As families with children and elderly migrants are generally underrepresented in migration flows, it seems less likely that these associations are driven by this type of reversed causality. On the other hand, in countries with larger immigration flows, national governments may have reduced their welfare spending in order to prevent a magnet effect (Soroka, Johnston, Kevins, Banting, & Kymlicka, 2016). This explanation can be applied to the negative association that was found between social expenditure on unemployment benefits and locational choices of migrants in the working ages. However, the findings indicate that if such restrictive measures were introduced, they did not discourage young migrants to move to these countries. Finally, welfare policies or migrants' welfare rights may be altered if policy makers and governments believe that the current welfare system is attracting immigrants (Barrett, 2012; Sinn, 2002). It is therefore important to acknowledge that migration decisions are not made in a political vacuum, but that migration and national responses to it continuously shape each other. Findings on the welfare usage of Polish and Bulgarian migrants in the Netherlands as presented in Chapter 2 for instance may have been different if the Dutch government did not restrict labour market access for these groups over the years after EU accession. Although it is difficult to fully rule out possible changes in welfare systems caused by migration in research using macro-level indicators,

Chapters 4 and 5 of my thesis illustrate ways of using micro-level data to study migrants' responses to welfare systems in a more direct fashion.

The experimental design of the factorial survey of Chapter 5 allowed me to disentangle characteristics of the labour market and the welfare system that are often confounded in reality, and to measure causal relations. This way, the approach presents a promising avenue for future research on the role of welfare state arrangements in migration decisions, or the determinants of international migration in general. Nevertheless, some limitations of this approach should be recognized as well. In the factorial survey, respondents evaluated descriptions of hypothetical destination countries. These vignettes are by definition a simplification of reality, and do not replicate the full complexity of migration decisions. Furthermore, it is uncertain to what extent the migration aspirations are indicative of actual behaviour. Although these issues are to some extent inherent in experimental methods, future work could address part of the uncertainty by means of a two-step design (for an example, see Baláž et al., 2016). In such design, respondents evaluate each vignette twice, whereby the country name is revealed only the second time. This way, unobserved variance associated with specific destination countries can be measured by the researcher, and migration aspirations can be compared to actual migration rates. As a final limitation, in this thesis the factorial survey was conducted among Master students, which is a highly selective target group. It can be expected that the findings would be even more pronounced for populations with different welfare needs (e.g., parents, elderly, low-educated) and in combination with other welfare domains (e.g., family benefits, old-age support, social assistance). It remains to be tested in future research how the conclusions of this study would translate to such alternative settings.

Because parts of the research of this thesis were conducted with the Netherlands as the receiving (Chapter 2&4) or sending (Chapter 5) country, it is important to consider how specific features of the Dutch welfare system may have affected the results. First, in the typology of Esping-Andersen (1990) the Netherlands is often characterized as a 'hybrid' welfare regime, as its generous benefits are largely financed by social insurance contributions. One could

therefore expect figures on EU migrants' welfare uptake (see Chapter 2) to be different for countries with a liberal, corporatist or socio-democratic welfare regime. However, studies investigating the fiscal impact of EU migrants in the UK (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014; Dustmann et al., 2010), Denmark (Martinsen & Pons Rotger, 2017) and Sweden (Ruist, 2014b) each found EU migrants to contribute more to the welfare system than they took out in benefits. Thus, despite significant differences in the way these countries have organized welfare access, these findings are in line with the conclusion of my study that increased migration within the enlarged EU did not result in increased pressure on the welfare system of the destination country. Second, welfare in the Netherlands is largely institutionalized, whereas in other countries citizens rely more on the family. This division of support seems particularly relevant to migrants, as migration entails a physical move away from the informal support system in the origin country. Migrants' experiences with and perceptions of welfare (see Chapter 4) may be different in destination countries with a more familiaristic welfare system. Whereas this thesis has focused more on formal welfare state arrangements, the interplay between formal and informal support after migration therefore appears an interesting avenue for further research. Third, benefit levels in the Netherlands are generally perceived as relatively high. Whereas migration aspirations of Dutch respondents decreased when the levels of unemployment benefits abroad were lower than in the Netherlands (see Chapter 5), such a retaining impact of welfare may be less strong for origin countries with less generous welfare state arrangements. It is therefore important to investigate how these findings translate to other contexts.

Finally, the scope of this thesis has been limited to intra-European migration decisions. In turn, the conclusions are at least partly tied to specific features of this type of migration, such as relatively low costs in terms distance or legal restrictions, as well as its flexible nature (Engbersen & Snel, 2013). Nevertheless, an interesting question is how the results would relate to migration of third country nationals, or specific categories like asylum seekers. As higher costs of migration can be expected for third country nationals moving into Europe, it is possible that their migration decisions involve a larger amount of planning.

This could mean that welfare state arrangements abroad play a more prominent role in their locational choices. Still, also for these types of migrants it can be expected that welfare systems will be difficult to evaluate or compare prior to migration. Finally, it is important to remember that third country nationals' welfare access in the destination country is not just regulated by eligibility criteria, but also by restrictive migration policies.

## 6.5 Societal implications

Over the past decade, concerns have been raised that European welfare systems are under pressure as a result of migration. It has been suggested that generous welfare state arrangements would influence and direct intra-European migration flows (De Giorgi & Pellizzari, 2009; Greve, 2014; Martinsen & Werner, 2018). That these concerns can be very powerful has become clear over the past years. Several EU member states expressed the desire to constrain EU migrants' access to welfare state arrangements (Lafleur & Mescoli, 2018; Ruhs, 2015). Furthermore, the topic featured prominently in the referendum of the UK on leaving the EU (Blauberger & Schmidt, 2017; Kahanec & Pytlikova, 2017). Case law of the European Court of Justice initially aimed to broaden obligations of EU member states towards an inclusive EU citizenship (Heindlmaier & Blauberger, 2017), yet recently has become more permissive to member states placing restrictions on EU migrants' welfare access. This shift clearly responds to national concerns that mobile EU citizens are abusing the welfare systems of their host states, even in the absence of strong empirical evidence for these claims.

As several scholars have pointed out, restricting welfare rights of EU migrants may have adverse consequences. Banning EU migrants from the welfare system in the destination country may discourage them from participating in the formal economy, because they would be unable to access the benefits they pay contributions for (Koettl et al., 2006; Lafleur & Mescoli, 2018). Such development is likely to worsen these migrants' socio-economic integration, and in the long run may even increase welfare claims (Mantu & Minderhoud, 2016). Furthermore, large shares of migrants working for reduced wages in the informal economy will increase unfair competition between migrant and native workers in the labour

market (Koettl et al., 2006). Findings of this thesis are in line with this and suggest that limiting EU migrants' welfare access may reduce incentives to migrate also for high-skilled individuals in their early working ages. This is undesirable, as high-skilled workers are most likely to be net contributors to the host country's economy and welfare system (Razin & Wahba, 2011; Ruhs, 2013). In addition, welfare state arrangements were found to play a role in migration decisions, but not so much in the shape of an alternative to income from paid labour. Rather, welfare state arrangements facilitated migration by protecting against life uncertainties and risks in migration projects. This could mean that individuals are less willing to make the move in the absence of the safety net the welfare system provides. With freedom of movement as one of the fundamental principles of the EU, measures that restrict EU migrants' welfare access can therefore be perceived as contrasting the aims of the European Commission.

Finally, the thesis indicates that within Europe, welfare rights of EU migrants – like those of natives – are often build up over time and in turn depend on individuals' length of residence in a country and/or paid contributions. In addition, European welfare state arrangements are often targeted at specific life stages. People are generally a net burden on the welfare system while they are in state-financed education, net contributors while they are working, and once again a burden when they are retired or require expensive medical services (Legrain, 2008). Results of this thesis show that many EU migrants move in life stages when they are least reliant on welfare state arrangements, and often leave the host country before gaining full access to its welfare system. These insights are not just important to nuance political and societal debates on this topic, but also have implications for the way the link between welfare systems and migration should be investigated. Rather than focusing on the size of migration flows, the more important question is *who* enters – and how these individuals are affected by the welfare system in origin and destination countries.

