



CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

A CROSS COUNTRY STUDY
OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

EDITED BY MARIT SKIVENES, RAVINDER BARN,
KATRIN KRIŽ, AND TARJA PÖSÖ

OXFORD

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CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS AND MIGRANT FAMILIES

AN INTRODUCTION

Ravinder Barn, Katrin Križ, Tarja Pösö, and Marit Skivenes

The aim of this book is to examine where, why, and how migrant children are represented in the child welfare systems¹ in 11 countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, England, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Norway, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States. All of these countries have different histories and practices with migration, as well as various welfare state ideologies and child welfare system approaches. By comparing policies and practices in different types of child welfare systems and welfare states in terms of how they conceptualize and deal with migrant children and their families, we address an immensely important and pressing issue in modern societies. We understand “migrants” as people who move across national boundaries for whatever reason (out of free will or as refugees, displaced persons, etc.). In this book, we study the interactions between child welfare systems with migrants once they have arrived in a destination society of the global north—regardless of whether they intend to move on, return to their sending societies, or permanently settle in the new country as “immigrants.”

Migrant children in the child welfare system are a critical issue, and they seem to face serious challenges that are evident across countries. Children may migrate with their parents, migrate alone, migrate as trafficking victims, or be left behind in the country of origin. Moreover, the contextual and temporal nature of migration has its own consequences for children in terms of health, education, social care, and crime. A range of factors including language and

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cultural barriers, uprootedness and instability, lack of access to basic services such as education and health, statelessness, discrimination, and social exclusion can all hamper the life chances of migrant children. And, of course, the vulnerability of children dramatically increases with irregular migration and the response of the receiving countries, whose laws may criminalize trafficked children or other migrant children and expose them to potential abuse during detention and deportation (UNICEF 2003, 2004; Touzenis, 2008). This book analyzes the child welfare systems' responses to the needs and rights of migrant children and families and is thus relevant for the wider field of health and social care professionals who meet and interact with migrant children and their families.

CONTEMPORARY CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

Societies differ in their ways of protecting children from abuse and neglect and providing for children's needs and interests. The recent cross-country analysis involving 10 high-income countries by Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011) highlights that a child-centric orientation is emerging within Western societies. The child-centric orientation regards children as individuals with particular rights and needs and complements the two traditional orientations: "family-service" and "child protection." Family service systems are concerned with service provisions to families; they are based on a therapeutic idea of rehabilitation and people's ability to revise and improve their lifestyle and behavior. The logic behind family service systems is that the child welfare system should provide services to prevent more serious harm and thus prevent out-of-home placements. The threshold for intervention is low. Child protection systems, on the other hand, are not built around service provision to prevent possible harm but around intervention when there is serious risk of harm for a child; therefore, the threshold for intervention is set to be high and the ambition is to provide services for a possible reunification. This book includes child welfare systems that represent all three orientations, with Finland, Norway, and the Netherlands as family service and child-centric child welfare systems; Austria, Spain, and Italy as family service-oriented systems; and Australia, England, Estonia, Canada, and the United States as child protection-oriented child welfare systems.

Child protection systems do not function in isolation but are related to the existing policy and legislation of each country. The systems are influenced by the general welfare of the countries and the welfare of families and children in particular. This is why we grouped the countries in this book by welfare state systems, based on the typology of welfare regimes by Esping-Andersen (1990) as further developed by Arts and Gelissen (2002). The Gilbert et al. (2011) study mentioned previously is based on the analysis of 10 wealthy Western countries that have traditions of social welfare that differ significantly from those of less economically

developed countries, some of which have introduced only very limited and fragmentary forms of public services for children and families. When comparing the indicators of children's well-being, considerable differences among countries have been found. In a recent UNICEF study, inequality gaps for children were studied and children's well-being was measured along dimensions of material well-being, education, health, behaviors and risks, and housing. Table 1.1 shows the overall results, in which each country's overall rank is based on its average ranking for these five dimensions of child well-being (UNICEF, 2013: 2).

A light grey background indicates a place in the top third of the well-being score, mid-grey denotes the middle third, and dark grey represents the bottom third—the lower the score, the higher the children's well-being in that country. (UNICEF, 2013: 2).

Further, Table 1.2 shows poverty rates for children and the total population in the 11 countries analyzed in this book. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2011), 13% of all children (below age 18) lived in poverty across the 34 OECD countries in 2008. In the social democratic welfare states, child poverty rates were below 10%, whereas the conservative welfare states were around 15% to 18%, and the liberal welfare states varied from 12% to above 20% in the United States (OECD, 2011).²

We can see that the countries offering a wide provision of welfare services, such as the Nordic countries, tend to rank highly in these comparisons. Countries also regulate migration in different ways. In the literature on international migration research, it is common to distinguish between three policy

Table 1.1. Child well-being index

Country	Average rank (all five dimensions)	Material well-being (rank)	Health and safety (rank)	Education (rank)	Behaviors and risks (rank)	Housing and environment (rank)
Netherlands	2.4	1	5	1	1	4
Norway	4.6	3	7	6	4	3
Finland	5.4	2	3	4	12	6
United Kingdom	15.8	14	16	24	15	10
Canada	16.6	15	27	14	16	11
Austria	17	7	26	23	17	12
Spain	17.6	24	9	26	20	9
Italy	19.2	23	17	25	10	21
Estonia	20.8	19	22	13	26	24
United States	24.8	26	23	27	23	23

Note: Boldface indicates a place in the top one-third.

Source: UNICEF, 2013: 2.

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Table 1.2. Poverty rates for children and the total population, 2008

Country	Total population (%)	Children (%)
Finland	8.0	5.4
Norway	7.8	5.5
Austria	7.9	7.9
Netherlands	7.4	9.7
Spain	14.0	17.7
Italy	11.4	15.3
United States	17.3	21.6
Canada	12.0	15.1
United Kingdom	11.0	12.5
Australia	14.6	14.0
Estonia	12.5	12.1
OECD 34-average	11.1	12.6

Source: OECD, 2011.

models concerning how states manage ethnic diversity (Sainsbury, 2006) and in particular how a country's rules and norms affect inclusion into and exclusion from social services (Castles and Miller, 2003). The three models are (a) the differential exclusionary model, (b) the assimilationist model, and (c) the multicultural model. In the differential exclusionary model, states treat migrants differently from the nonmigrant populations, for instance through social services and housing policies. States following the assimilation approach promote migrants' assimilation such as language learning and incorporating migrant children into the mainstream education system. In the multicultural model, the state supports ethnic community formation and provides services toward migrants' integration into the host society (Castles and Miller, 2003; Sainsbury, 2006). Typical of these models is their focus on adults. Therefore, our focus on migrant children and their needs and rights at the juncture of child protection and migration policies may cast new light on both the migration and welfare studies, as well as studies of child welfare policy.

CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

Countrywide child welfare systems are, by their very nature, based on national jurisdiction and policies. Such national legislation is, self-evidently, valid only in certain political and geographical areas. However, there are and have been child welfare activities that transcend the borders of nation states. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has created a globally recognized norm structure for child welfare. Moreover, charity

organizations, nongovernmental associations and international agencies such as UNICEF, among many others, have acted globally to promote the best interests of all children.

As migration has increased globally, national child welfare systems have become challenged in meeting the needs and concerns of migrating children and families. A key question has been raised by those working in the field of child welfare: how do and can public authorities meet the needs and rights of these children and families? In the welfare state literature, there is debate about the solidarity foundation for the social security net and how increased migration and heterogeneity may dissolve this foundation (cf., e.g., Mau and Burkhardt, 2009). Are we witnessing some of the same challenges in the child welfare systems and their approach to migrant children? Clearly a fundamental change in the welfare states meeting with migrants is that residency matters more and more. Some scholars conceptualize this as the denationalization of solidarity practices (Mau and Burkhardt, 2009), which shows how new population groups that are present in a nation are included in the welfare state on other premises than nationality.

People migrate from one country to another for several reasons. They may look for safety and refuge or employment and education; some may look for better living conditions or fulfilment of personal interests and family ties. Ecological disasters, military conflicts, and the uneven distribution of resources across the globe entice people to move to the extent that these changes are seen to be major challenges for social welfare and human rights globally. Existing studies suggest that people who migrate are younger than the population in general, and therefore the issue of families and children becomes a relevant migration concern. There are also such distinctive themes such as unaccompanied migrant children, transnational families, international adoptions, and child trafficking, which increase the complexity of migration issues of our time (Alba and Waters, 2011). The situation for an unaccompanied refugee child is different from the needs of a child whose family is moving to a new country because the parents were invited to work in a highly skilled job. Nevertheless, entering and living in a new country with its cultural norms and traditions may mean the newcomers encounter the kinds of problems that the child welfare systems are likely to deal with.

There are, for instance, challenges related to language proficiency, knowledge about cultural and social aspects, and knowledge about the public systems of the destination country (Barn, 2007; Chand, 2008; Dettlaff, 2008; Križ and Skivenes, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). Perhaps most significantly, the challenges may include collisions of ideas and beliefs about how to raise children, children's place in the family and society, and children's rights. Academic research evidence in this area from across the globe is growing and suggests the need to take into account the effects of immigration status, the impact of migration and acculturation, families' socioeconomic situation, and the need for

comprehensive cultural assessments of children and families (Earner, 2005; Rome, 2010). However, overall we know little about how child welfare systems operate with newcomers who are children and families with a migrant background. Increasing the knowledge base about this important theme was the main rationale behind writing this book.

MIGRATION TRENDS AND PUBLIC POLICIES

The process of migration and its consequences for public service provision are an important concern among academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The impetus for this book arose from a recognition of the recent growth in migration, the resulting increase in racial and cultural heterogeneity in Western societies, and the question of how welfare states, especially child welfare service providers, deal with this heterogeneity when interacting with migrant children and their families. Although Western societies cannot claim to have been historically culturally homogenous, it is evident that in contemporary times the forces of globalization have led to greater movements of people resulting in vast changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political landscape.

While the economic processes of globalization are in evidence in regard to finance, communication, deregulation, and trade liberalization, we are also witnessing the impact of globalization on the relationships between people and cultures across international boundaries. Historically, while colonialism, slavery, and imperialism led to the transportation of Africans and South Asians to the Caribbean, the Americas, and Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we know that a desire among the colonizers to populate the newfound lands with white “stock” also resulted in the movement of white Europeans to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Americas—thereby changing the racial and cultural demography of these spaces (Jupp, 2002).

Free mass migration—in which people migrate out of their own free will (and are not coerced to migrate as slaves or indentured servants)—is a phenomenon that is relatively recent (Williamson, 2006). In 2008, the United Nations (UN) estimated that the number of international migrants would reach 214 million (or 3.1% of the world population) by 2010; 16.3 million international migrants were refugees (UN, 2009). The proportion of migrants who were women was projected to be 49.0% by 2010. In terms of age, the median age of international migrants was 39 years in 2010, compared to the median age of 28 years in the total world population. Compared to the total world population, international migrants are overproportionally of working age and over age 65; young people are underrepresented among migrants (Henning, 2012). The regions of the global north are currently experiencing the major gains in in-migration (UN, 2009). In 2010, 59.7% of all international migrants lived in these regions, while 40.3% lived in the global south (Henning, 2012). Migration within the global south countries is as common