

Immigration and the Categorical Welfare State in Israel

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In recent years, immigration has become an issue of major political, social and fiscal interest in many welfare states. The focus of this paper is upon an aspect of the impact of immigration upon welfare states that has not been the subject of much research - the link between immigration and social protection in welfare states. More specifically, the paper will begin by offering a conceptual structure that underscores the diversity in the ways in which social protection systems in various welfare states relate to immigrants and to their access to these systems. On the basis of this structure, a detailed study of the ways in which the social protection system in Israel deals with immigration will be presented. It will be claimed that this is a case in which the dominant form of social protection employed by the state to deal with immigrants is that of "categorical benefits". The paper will discuss the characteristics of this type of social protection system and attempt to employ an institutional perspective to explain its emergence and endurance. In particular, notions of path dependency and ideas will be employed. Finally, on the basis of findings from a quantitative study of benefit receipt, the implications for both immigrants and non-immigrants of the categorical approach of the social protection system to immigrants will be discussed.