

# Scandinavian Social Democrats Facing The ‘Progressive Dilemma’: Immigration and Welfare States In Left-of-Centre Party Programs



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## ABSTRACT

An increasing concern in European politics is the potential tension between immigration and inclusive welfare states, suggesting that policy actors must choose one or the other. This is known as ‘the progressive dilemma’, which in Scandinavia becomes the social democratic dilemma. This article analyses how Scandinavian social democratic parties frame immigration and welfare policies to diffuse the dilemma in their party programs. Building on a review of the sociological, political and economic arguments underpinning the notion of a progressive dilemma, I undertake a qualitative analysis of the most recent party programs, as well as targeted documents on immigration, produced by the party organisations. Six social democratic and socialist parties in Norway, Sweden and Denmark are included. The analysis identifies a variety of ways to weave welfare state issues and immigration together. Abstracting from the empirical findings, I distil three key frames that dissolve the progressive dilemma, all drawing on established social democratic traditions: the social investment frame (the third way), the redistribution frame (Marxist tradition) and the social cohesion frame (social democrats as the voice of ‘ordinary people’).

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There is a large and growing literature on how immigration can alter the dynamics of the welfare state (Brochmann & Grødem 2013), and on how welfare policies influence the dynamics of integration (Koopmans 2010). One particular strand of this literature suggests that there may be fundamental tensions between inclusive welfare policies on the one hand, and high levels of immigration on the other. This is known as the ‘progressive’ (Goodhart 2004) or ‘liberal’ (Reeskens & van Oorschot 2012) dilemma. The dilemma may arise either because of high levels of immigration upset the institutional balance of national welfare states and labour markets (Brochmann & Grødem 2013, 2019), or because of immigration undermines the sense of social cohesion that makes voters willing to support welfare spending (Goodhart 2004; Putnam 2007). The argument is mainly associated with asylum seekers, but can also be invoked with regard to intra-EU labour migration (Cappelen & Midtbø 2016).

If one accepts the premise that policy actors have to choose between immigration and welfare state ambition, European social-democratic and socialist parties are placed in a painful dilemma. These parties have traditionally fought for inclusive welfare states and, in keeping with their traditions for international solidarity, they have pursued generous immigration policies. How do they respond to the notion that there is an impossible dilemma at the heart of their politics? In answering this question, we need to go beyond the literature on how social democrats respond to the populist challenge (Bale et al. 2010; Heinze 2018; Schumacher & van Kersbergen 2016). We should not assume that social democrats approach these issues from a defensive position, but rather that they look to their own strengths and traditions for ways to reconcile large-scale immigration and an ambitious welfare state project. In other words, they will assert themselves and *reframe* (Entman 1993) the issue in ways that suit their purpose.

Different liberal/social democratic/socialist parties in different regions of the world will approach this conundrum in different ways, depending on the nature of the challenge they face, and their own history and ideology. In this article, the analysis is limited to social-democratic and socialist parties in a region, which historically have been characterised by comprehensive welfare states, namely Scandinavia. The main questions asked are how do the parties frame immigration, how do they frame the national welfare state and how – if at all – do they frame the relationship between the two? Are they able to reframe the issues so that the putative dilemma vanishes, and if not, how do they propose to resolve it?

To frame an issue is to ‘select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entmann 1993). The notion of framing is explicitly linked to political competition – the conscious shaping of argument to win voters (Bacchi 2009: xii) – which makes it more suited for our purposes here than similar approaches like problem representation (Bacchi 2009) or narrative analysis. Hence, framing is the process by which political actors define the issue for their audience (Hänggli & Kriesi 2012: 266). Both immigration, labour market relations and welfare states are multidimensional, complex phenomena. Political actors chose to highlight some aspects of this complexity while downplaying others, and the ambition of this article is to analyse which aspects are highlighted and which are ignored by social democrats.

As a starting point for this discussion, the next section reviews what we know about political responses to immigration to the Scandinavian countries, with an emphasis on similarities and differences between the countries. I then unpack the ‘progressive dilemma’ through a review of the literature on how immigration may pose a challenge to welfare states. This section will give pointers regarding what to look for in the empirical section. The empirical section begins with an overview of the cases and analytic strategy, before presenting the findings.

## SCANDINAVIAN DIFFERENCES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WELFARE STATE

The three countries discussed are Sweden, Norway and Denmark. These countries are selected because the supposed dilemma must be assumed to be particularly acute here: these are the archetypical ‘social-democratic’ welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990), with encompassing and inclusive welfare institutions, yet they have also faced high rates of immigration in recent years. As documented by the Nordic Council of Ministers (2018), net immigration rates as a percentage of the total population have over time been well above both the EU and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average for all three countries. Sweden, in particular, has received high numbers of asylum seekers. All the Nordic countries are net recipients of labour migrants from the European Economic Area (EEA) (Heleniak 2018), and in periods the number of labour migrants has been very high. This is particularly true for Norway, which is not an EU country, but still part of the common labour market through the EEA agreement.

The three countries share a number of cultural and institutional similarities, but when it comes to immigration and integration their responses have been different (Brochmann & Hagelund 2012; Hagelund 2020; Hernes 2018). Most studies accept the formulation of Brochmann and Hagelund (2012: 252) regarding national integration policies: ‘In short (and thus somewhat oversimplified), we can say that Denmark has gone for the “stick”, Sweden for the “carrot”, and Norway for both’. Studies of topics as different as labour market integration policies (Breidahl 2017), access to citizenship (Midtbøen, Birkvad & Erdal 2018), newspaper debates on immigration (Hovden & Mjelde 2019), the multicultural debate (Kivisto & Wahlbeck 2013) and responses to right-wing populism (Heinze 2018) have all produced similar images of restrictive Danes, permissive Swedes and Norwegians in the middle.

Typically, the studies about Scandinavian differences do not deal explicitly with the welfare state. The welfare state, however, with its redistributive measures and service provision, is a political battleground of its own. Also, comprehensive welfare states interact with national labour markets by maintaining a competent and educated population, promoting stability and encouraging flexibility (Barth, Moene & Willumsen 2014). This gives social democrats a lot to play on when developing policies at the intersection of immigration and welfare policies: it is not only about the number of migrants and the national integration strategies, but also about the key role of the welfare state and the perceived operation of the labour market.

Existing studies of Scandinavian differences rarely discuss the specific challenges of intra-EU labour migration. Labour migrants are not targeted by integration policies, and their right to move cannot be curtailed by national policies – this right is

fundamental in EU law. For these reasons, they command limited interest in studies of migration strategies and immigration control. Still, high levels of intra-EU labour migration will have implications for national labour markets and hence for public finances, and EU migrants' presence in a country may influence attitudes towards tax-funded welfare as much as the presence of immigrants from outside the EU (Cappelen & Midtbø 2016).

This article expands on the existing literature about Scandinavian differences in immigration and integration policies in two interconnected ways. First, the analysis takes the welfare state – as a set of interconnected institutions, and as a political battleground of its own – seriously. Just as immigration can be framed in a number of ways, so can the national welfare state. Second, we look at the frames applied by key political actors by a qualitative examination of their own authoritative texts, that is, the party programs. This is a different approach from studying expert committee reports (Vogt Isaksen 2020) or media representations (Hagelund 2020) – we want to study how parties frame immigration, welfare states and the links between the two in documents that express the parties' primary positions and core beliefs.

## WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM IS IMMIGRATION IN THE WELFARE STATE?

The notion of a 'progressive dilemma' can be seen as an umbrella that covers a number of different arguments. It needs to be unpacked: What is it about migration that 'challenges' the welfare state, and in what respects are welfare states 'challenged'? For reasons of space, the arguments cannot be presented in full breadth here (but see Brochmann & Grødem 2019). In this section, I separate between economic, political and sociological challenges to the welfare state.

It should be noted that the notion of a 'progressive dilemma', as such, typically refers to sociological and political accounts. The key argument, presented by Goodhart (2004) and others, is that the general population will be more willing to support redistribution if the beneficiaries are people like themselves, facing risks they themselves may face one day. In diverse societies, this sense of community may crumble. Economists have, however, chimed in on this debate with calculations of the balance between taxpayers and benefit recipients. The core argument is that the willingness, and even ability, to fund large-scale redistributive programs will be threatened if a smaller proportion of the population have to carry an ever-increasing burden. The arguments based on calculations of the welfare state's financial sustainability can therefore be treated as another aspect of the putative dilemma.

## POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

There are two main sociological and political arguments underpinning the notion of tension between immigration and national welfare state. I have already hinted at the key sociological argument: Immigration rocks the sense of 'being in the same boat', and there is concern that citizens withdraw from joint projects when communities become more heterogeneous (Putnam 2007). Trust and social cohesion may be difficult to sustain if the neighbours are seen as holding alien values and engaging in unfamiliar practices. To what extent this actually happens in Europe is however contested. The many analyses of survey data have not produced a clear

consensus (Burgoon & Rooduijn 2021; Meer & Tolsma 2014): results vary by the level of analysis, the countries and regions included, and the definition of the variables. Importantly for the Scandinavian case, some studies argue that solid institutions breed social cohesion, even in the face of high levels of immigration (Rothstein 2017). This suggests that any weakening of social cohesion over time may not be due to increased immigration, but stem from distrust in the institutions' ability to deal adequately with the newcomers.

The key political argument highlights stable political coalitions. Arguably, diversity allows political actors who oppose welfare spending to play on ethnic and religious cleavages and thus split pro-welfare coalitions (Alesina & Glaeser 2004). One way to do this is to convince the majority that welfare spending mainly benefits the minority. To the extent, this image of 'majority payers' and 'minority beneficiaries' catches on and threatens to undermine the legitimacy of welfare benefits, pro-welfare politicians may wish to boost legitimacy through limiting minorities' access to benefits. This can happen through introducing long waiting periods before one qualifies – a strategy known in the literature as welfare chauvinism (Reeskens & van Oorschot 2012) – or through retrenching the benefits that are disproportionately used by migrants (Grødem 2017). For intra-EU labour migrants, the most controversial issue may be benefit export (Bay, Finseraas & Pedersen 2016). EU regulations allow export of benefits within the EU area, which is controversial in many countries that are net recipients of labour migrants.

## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Comprehensive welfare states are expensive, and depend on a large tax base. In order to ensure this, labour market participation rates must be high, and labour markets must be well regulated and transparent. If participation rates are low, welfare states of the Scandinavian type suffer a dual loss: tax revenues are lost, and benefits must be paid to the non-working person (Holmøy & Strøm 2017). If labour markets are not well regulated and transparent, the risk of tax evasion increases. The persistent high level of labour migration to Scandinavia has presented labour market with a supply-side shock, which some argue has skewed the balance of power in the direction of employers. Recent research has uncovered displacement and distributional effects, increased inequality and increased pressure on labour institutions in exposed sectors in the wake of EU labour migration (for a review, see Friberg 2016). These developments may be seen as challenges to the institutional balance that underpins the Scandinavian welfare states (Barth, Moene & Willumsen 2014).

Among immigrants from countries outside the EU, a low employment rate is seen as the biggest challenge. Employment rates are much lower among immigrants from countries in Africa and Asia than they are in the general population in Scandinavia (Nordic Council of Ministers 2018), which may over time undermine the financial sustainability of redistributive welfare states. The reasons behind these lower employment rates are, however, contested. Some observers argue that the welfare state itself is the problem: high benefits create perverse incentives and serve to discourage labour market participation among immigrants (and others with low-wage prospects). Others argue that the root of the problem is the wage setting mechanisms, which has led to a compressed wage structure with 'high low wages' (Barth, Moene & Willumsen 2014). When even the lowest wages are high, investing in technology is beneficial for companies, and jobs for low-skilled workers thus disappear at a

higher rate in such systems than in contexts where workers with low productivity are paid low wages. Third, discrimination in the labour market is a possible exclusionary mechanism that makes immigrants from countries outside Europe vulnerable. Such discrimination has been documented, also in Scandinavia (Quilliam et al. 2019).

## FRAMING IMMIGRATION AND WELFARE STATES

This brief literature review has revealed a number of ways in which the welfare state can be framed: as an outcome of political struggles and coalitions, as an expression of social cohesion in homogeneous (however defined) societies, as an expensive vehicle of redistribution that depends on well-functioning labour markets and high labour market participation rates. The interdependencies of welfare states and labour markets become clear in the discussion of financial challenges: the welfare state depends on high employment rates and tax incomes, thus labour markets must be both inclusive and transparent. In turn, welfare states develop programs to enhance skills and provide highly productive workers for the labour market. Each of these aspects can be highlighted or downplayed in political communication.

Similarly, immigrants can be framed as potential workers who succeed in finding jobs. Labour market success can, in turn, be framed in two ways: as increased productivity and a contribution to prosperity, or as a mechanism for labour market instability and more power to employers. Alternatively, they can be framed as potential workers who do not find jobs, either because of low skills or discrimination, or because the institutional set-up in the host country makes employment unattractive for them. Or, policy actors can tone down the 'workers' aspect and frame immigrants as aliens whose main (involuntary) function is to undermine the conditions for the grand compromises that created the welfare state, or the homogeneity that makes continued support possible.

## DATA AND THE CHOICE OF CASES

The parties included in this study are the dominant social-democratic parties in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and their main opposition party to the left. Two of the 'left-of-social-democracy' parties have 'socialist' in their names, and I refer to them as 'socialist' to distinguish them from the mainstream social democrats. The three dominant social-democratic parties are Arbeiderpartiet (the Norwegian Labour Party) in Norway, Socialdemokraterna (the Social Democratic Party) in Sweden and Socialdemokratiet (the Danish Social Democratic Party) in Denmark. These parties were all established between 1871 and 1887, and have held governmental power in their respective countries for long periods. The socialist parties included are Sosialistisk Venstreparti (the Socialist Left Party) in Norway, Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party) in Sweden and Socialistisk Folkeparti (the Socialist People's Party) in Denmark. Both the Norwegian and the Danish socialist parties have been represented in national governments after 2000, whereas Vänsterpartiet has provided stable parliamentary support for successive social-democratic governments in Sweden since 1998.

To capture the preferred frames, I have searched for the authoritative texts where the parties present their policies in full breadth. In most cases, these texts are the party programs. Such texts make up an authorised version of the party's political profile, in

a way that for instance parliamentary voting or media contributions do not. They are controlled by the party organisations themselves, and thus communicate the vision of the world that the party wants to promote. The programs are easily available, to voters and political journalists alike, and often form the basis for journalists' challenges to politicians. The programmes thus have a dual function: they are extrovert documents to be used in election campaigns and in politicians' daily work, and they are also the end product of internal processes where the party organisation develops its sense of self (Skjeie 1992: 44).

Party programs are authoritative sources and a frequently used source in political science research (Horn et al. 2021; Schumacher & Kersbergen 2016). There may nevertheless be national differences, as well as differences between nations and over time, in how party programs are developed, how comprehensive they are and how much importance is attached to them. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the deliberative processes preceding a party program and variations in the significance attached to it once a party is in office – in the discussion here, the emphasis is on the contents of the programs as they stand. It can be noted, still, that previous studies describe Norwegian party programs as 'more comprehensive' than in other European countries (Allern, Bay & Saglie 2013), whereas Danish parties do not publish electoral manifestos (Horn et al. 2021).

In the absence of electoral manifestos in Denmark, I rely on the principle program for the Social Democratic Party, and topical texts on the website of the Danish Socialist Party. Moreover, both the Norwegian and the Danish social democrats have published separate manifestos on immigration. These manifestos are also included in the analysis. All the documents are written between 2016 and 2019, that is, after the 2015 refugee crisis and before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The analysis started by identifying the relevant texts. These were downloaded in full from the parties' websites. I used the search function to identify the most relevant passages (search terms: immigration, integration, welfare states, benefit export, labour migration, EU migration, welfare state, welfare model etc.), and also read all the documents in full to get a better grasp of the general rhetoric and overall framing of policies. The next step was to assemble the most relevant sections in a separate word document, and to code each excerpt according to which frames were used. The coding was two phased: first, the excerpts were coded by topic or key concern: 'financial sustainability', 'political support', 'social cohesion' and so on. Second, they were coded by mechanism: 'low employment rates', 'insufficient willingness to integrate', 'discrimination', 'structures in capitalist markets' and so on.

The empirical section contains a number of quotes from the relevant documents. These are translated by the author. The exception are the quotes from the Swedish Social Democratic Party's program, which has been translated to English by the party organisation.

The aim of the analysis was to identify how the parties frame the relationship between immigration and welfare states. This has meant that concrete policies on welfare state reform, integration measures and regulation of immigration are not included. The analysis does not aim to present the parties' policies on these issues, but strictly to analyse how they manage the 'progressive dilemma'.

## FINDINGS: IMMIGRATION AND THE WELFARE STATE IN THE PARTY PROGRAMS

### WHAT IS A WELFARE STATE?

Social-democratic parties in Scandinavia see themselves as the main architects of the Scandinavian welfare model, and the manifestos show that the Norwegian and Danish parties take great pride in this model. The Danish social democrats are particularly sanguine:

Since 1871, our party has fought to create the Denmark we see today. A rich country of freedom, equality and security for most. A country with social cohesion, where we trust each other. A good country, that creates good conditions for happy lives. In our opinion, the best country in the world. [...]. (DK-SD manifesto, p. 7)

Similarly, the Norwegian social democrats state:

The Labour movement has won the struggle for a society that ensures the population access to knowledge, welfare, and ownership to the country's rich natural resources. A well-organised working life and a society with small social and economic inequalities has been decisive for Norwegians' high level of trust in each other and in the government. (NW-SD manifesto, p. 4)

In both these quotes, the parties emphasise how they have 'fought' and 'won' for the countries that exist today – the Scandinavian welfare state did not materialise of its own. Both quotes highlight equality as a key feature of the model, together with social cohesion/trust. The main difference between the quotes is that the Norwegian party also emphasises the importance of a well-regulated working life.

The opening line of the Swedish social democrats' manifesto reads 'Sweden has a strong economy, but our social cohesion is too weak. Too many people in our country do not have a share in the prosperity our economic development has created' (SW-SD manifesto, p. 3). Unlike the Nordic neighbours, the Swedish social democrats do not flag their ownership to the model and its superior qualities in their manifesto. The success of the model is conditional:

'If everyone does their duty and demands their rights, we will be able to build a cohesive, sustainable and free country, leading the world as we know Sweden can. In these troubled times, we need more cohesion than ever before. It is not possible to create this through tax reductions or salary cuts, or by appointing scapegoats and stoking hatred between people.' (SW-SD manifesto, p. 3)

The enemies of the model, then, are those who demand tax cuts and stoke hatred.

Both the Norwegian and the Danish social democrats have presented manifestos on immigration policy, where they explicitly confront the idea that diversity undermines social cohesion. The Danish party maintains that 'Too many have entered Denmark without becoming a part of Denmark. This places social cohesion under pressure' (DK-SD document on immigration policies, p. 11). The Norwegian Social Democratic Party applies a different frame: 'It takes political will to avoid that increased immigration leads to economic inequality and value conflicts and cultural antagonism [...] There are forces who play groups against each other' (NW-SD document on immigration policies pp. 3, 21).

Later in the same document, it states: 'The social model is the most important tool we have for succeeding even better with integration policies in Norway'. Given 'political will' and the 'social model', the Norwegian social democrats will diffuse the tension between immigration and the welfare state. This is unlike their Danish comrades, who are concerned about the lack of willingness to integrate in some immigrant communities.

None of the socialist parties claim ownership to the Scandinavian welfare model in the way social democrats do. The Swedish Socialist Party is openly sceptical:

[The state's] basic function is to maintain the economic, social and political power relations in society. [...] In Sweden, the labour movement has been a driving force in the development of a comprehensive public sector in the economy [which] evens out class- and gender differences. [...].

(SW-S manifesto, p. 29)

In this quote, there is no hint of the just institutions that will maintain social cohesion. The state can be a force of discrimination and oppression, or a force for equality, depending on the power relations that shape it. The Norwegian sister party appears to be torn. On the one hand, they maintain: 'The welfare state is a pillar in productivity [...] good welfare arrangements produce high employment rates and productivity' (NW-S manifesto, p. 16). On the other hand, 'since the 1980s, capital in Norway and Europe has been on the offensive to weaken labour rights and the welfare state' (p. 4). The welfare state can thus be framed as a handmaiden to productive markets, and as the outcome of political victory that 'capital' is trying to weaken. As for the Danish party, they do not have a separate entry called 'welfare' or 'welfare state' on their web page, suggesting that the welfare model as such is not essential to their rhetoric.

To sum up, it seems that the Danish Social Democratic Party has largely adopted the progressive dilemma as a frame. This is particularly striking in the manifesto on immigration, where the core argument is that immigration places social cohesion under pressure, and this is a threat to the social model. Interestingly, the Danish party highlights the (sociological) issue of social cohesion, while downplaying the potential financial challenges to the Danish welfare state. The Norwegian Labour Party, by contrast, places more emphasis on economic equality and the well-organised working life, and hence on the welfare model as an important tool for integration. Also, the Norwegian party confronts the political argument: if there is 'political will', diversity will not undermine cohesion and political support for redistribution. Similar thinking is seen in the Swedish Social Democratic Party's manifesto, with its warning against forces 'stoking hatred'. In the key documents of the Norwegian and Swedish social democrats, populists – not immigrants – are the ones who threaten social cohesion.

Both the Norwegian and the Swedish Socialist parties frame the welfare state as an outcome of class struggle, embodying important working class victories. Both suggest that the welfare state is useful for capital, but in different ways ('maintaining power relations' in Sweden, 'producing high productivity' in Norway). Within this frame, the question of whether there is a tension between immigration and welfare policies appears irrelevant – the struggle is between labour and capital.

## WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE OF MIGRATION?

All the three social democratic parties acknowledge low employment rates among immigrants from non-EU countries as a challenge. The ways they frame this issue are

however strikingly different. The Swedish social democrats point out that Sweden has accepted a higher influx of asylum seekers per capital than any other OECD country, and that this is a source of pride. Nevertheless,

‘Many people with limited education, who are a long way away from the labour market become concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, increasing segregation. We have to work to design a housing policy that integrates, an education policy for greater equality and a labour market that takes advantage of everyone’s skills as well as a vital civil society that builds social contact networks. A society with high unemployment rates will always be difficult to hold together.’ (SW-SD manifesto, p. 12)

The Norwegian Social Democratic Party maintains: ‘The key to integration is work, and the road to work goes via education and qualification. Our welfare model requires high levels of labour market participation, with wages one can live on’ (NW-SD document on immigration policies, p. 21). The Norwegian party thus explicitly frames low employment rates as incompatible with the welfare model, whereas the Swedish party more vaguely suggest a link between unemployment and faltering social cohesion. Also, the Swedish Social Democratic Party frames employment rates as part of a broader image where housing, inclusive education policies and civil society also play a role.

The Danish social democrats frame these issues in a very different way. Their document on immigration frames the integration challenge squarely in terms of segregation and ‘parallel societies’. The work-oriented approach is explicitly written off as insufficient: ‘As a society, we have long believed that if only the newcomers learned the language and got a job, they would also share our values. And fortunately, many do. But unfortunately there are also too many who ideologically oppose our democracy and shared values, and undermine it whenever they can’ (DK-SD document on immigration policies, p. 30). The proposed measures are of an entirely different nature than those promoted by the Swedish and Norwegian sister parties: area planning to combat segregation, reduced benefits, easier procedures for revoking Danish citizenship, more support for those who opt to return to their countries of origin and increased efforts to fight gang crime.

The Swedish Socialist Party differs radically from the Social Democratic Party in that it frames immigration solely in terms of capitalist exploitation and racism in its manifesto: ‘The way immigration is treated in law typically implies that immigrants are forced to sell their labour at a lower price, and for poorer working conditions, than others. In Sweden, as in many other European countries, racist structures have given class society a racialized form’ (SW-S manifesto, p. 16). Unlike the sister parties, the Swedish Socialist Party does not discuss integration in its manifesto. The Norwegian Socialist Party’s manifesto reads: ‘The immigrant population in Norway has, on average, lower education and lower incomes, and is more often affected by unemployment than the general population’ (NW-S manifesto, p. 12). The Danish Socialist Party does not mention employment at all in their entry on integration, but vows to fight welfare chauvinist initiatives, as these ‘contribute to increased inequality in society and hinder integration’ (DK-S web entry ‘Udlændinge og integration’).

Judging from the rhetoric on immigration, it seems that the Norwegian social democrats place more faith in social investment than their Swedish comrades do. The Swedish Social Democratic Party emphasises a broader redistributive program for

improved levels of living where housing and civil society also play a part. The Danish social democrats stand out with their emphasis on regulation and punitive measures.

The socialist parties lean heavily on their tradition for redistribution and equality. They leave no doubt that newcomers to the country should be included in these policies. This includes the Danish Socialist Party, which explicitly rejects welfare chauvinism. Discrimination in the labour market is arguably between the lines in the Swedish party talk about ‘racialized class society’ and the Norwegian party notion of how newcomers are disproportionately ‘affected’ by unemployment, but discrimination is not strongly emphasised. The socialist parties end up noting that immigrants more often than others are outside the labour force or unemployed, but they do not commit to one particular explanation regarding why this may be.

## LABOUR MIGRATION—OUTSIDE THE FRAME?

The social democratic parties typically downplay concerns for EU labour migration. The Swedish and Danish parties do not mention the issue in their manifestos at all. The Norwegian social democrats merely hint at it in their discussion of labour standards, measures against ‘social dumping’ and labour market crime. This discussion culminates in 19 action points. Only 1 of the 19 explicitly mentions labour migrants and posted workers, and then only as one in many ‘particularly vulnerable groups’ in need of more information about Norwegian labour standards (NW-SD manifesto, p. 15).

The socialist parties bring up labour migration more explicitly, framing it as a matter of labour market standards and the balance of power between labour and capital. Thus, the Swedish Socialist Party declares ‘We will never accept that labour migrants are exploited by poorer working conditions or stripped-down agreements’ (SW-S manifesto, p. 46). The Danish sister party says ‘no thanks to social dumping’ (DK-S, web entry *Arbejdsliv*), and commits to fighting ‘unacceptable and greedy employer behaviour that exploits eastern European workers and offers them miserable conditions.’ (op. cit.). The Norwegian Socialist Party maintains that ‘Norway must be in control of all the laws and regulations that influence the balance of power in the labour market, including the rules for labour migration, even if this might come into conflict with the Schengen-and EEA-agreements’ (op. cit.). None of the parties mention intra-EU benefit export as a concern – labour migration is framed solely in terms of its effect on labour standards and the balance of power in the labour market.

This desire to downplay intra-EU immigration should be seen in light of the fact that all the social democratic parties in Scandinavia are pro-EU. The socialist parties are more ambivalent, but neither of them have promoted withdrawal from the EU (in Norway: EEA) as a relevant policy option at the moment. Curbing EU migration and leaving the EU (EEA) are thus not political options, thus EU migration has to be managed. Leaving such migration out of the picture when immigration is discussed is the easiest way to avoid this tension.

## DISCUSSION

This brief review of six party programs and two manifestos on immigration has revealed a wide variety in how left-of-centre parties in Scandinavia frame immigration and welfare policies and weave the two together. Table 1 sums up the findings.

	THE WELFARE STATE IS...	IMMIGRANTS ARE...	LABOUR MIGRANTS ARE...
Norway Labour Party	Ambitious model dependent on high employment rates in regulated labour markets. Important tool for integration.	Workers with low/ undocumented skills.	Potentially in need of more information about their rights in the Norwegian labour market.
Sweden Labour Party	A still incomplete and contested model, which can and should do more to promote equality and social cohesion.	Newcomers who risk social exclusion and low levels of living unless inequality is combatted.	–
Denmark Labour Party	Integral part of the Danish way of life, promoting freedom, prosperity and productivity. Dependent on social cohesion.	Newcomers who too often reject Danish society and core values, establish parallel societies.	–
Norway Socialist Party	Historic victory for the left, threatened by capital, a key productive factor.	Newcomers who should be welcomed. Vulnerable to labour market exclusion.	Potentially excluded from access to Norwegian rights and labour market regulations.
Sweden Socialist Party	A product of class struggle, potentially a tool to maintain existing power relations.	Workers vulnerable to exploitation in labour markets characterised by racist structures	Exploited by poorer working conditions and stripped-down agreements.
Denmark Socialist Party	–	Victims of welfare chauvinist policies that deepen inequality, possible issues with social control and patriarchy.	Likely victims of unacceptable and greedy employer behaviour.

**Table 1** Stylised overview of images of immigration and the welfare state found in the key documents of Scandinavian social democratic and socialist parties.

As [Table 1](#) illustrates, we are left essentially with six separate cases. Within each country, the differences between social democratic and socialist parties are as striking as the similarities, and parties with the same ideational traditions also differ from each other. Although there are obvious links between the observations presented here and the country profiles suggested by [Brochmann and Hagelund \(2012\)](#), there is also nuance and indications of struggle over frames within each country.

Abstracting from these empirical findings, we can discern three distinct frames that diagnose, make moral judgements (pointing to protagonists and antagonists), and suggest remedies ([Entman 1993: 52](#)) for the putative progressive dilemma in the Scandinavian context ([Table 2](#)).

	<b>SOCIAL INVESTMENT FRAME</b>	<b>REDISTRIBUTION FRAME</b>	<b>SOCIAL COHESION FRAME</b>
Core story and key concerns	Low-skilled workers immigrate to countries with skills-demanding labour markets. They must be helped to qualify for full integration in the key institutions.	Poor, often racialized individuals immigrate to capitalist societies. They must be shielded from exploitation and poverty.	Outsiders from distant cultures migrate to a nation state with strong social cohesion. They must adopt values and customs of the new country.
Protagonist	Integrating institutions of the host country	The redistributive state	Ordinary people in the host country
Antagonists	Anyone undermining the investment project	Racists, populists (capitalism)	Immigrants resisting full integration
Main mechanisms	Education, qualification	Redistribution	Insistence on shared values, welfare chauvinism
The welfare state is vulnerable when...	Immigrants become net beneficiaries of welfare benefits, undermining long-term financial sustainability.	Historical foes of state welfare manage to exploit tensions within the working class.	The sense of social cohesion is undermined and the welfare state project loses electoral support.
The 'progressive dilemma' is dissolved when...	Immigrants participate fully in national labour markets, pay taxes and increase revenues.	Workers of all background recognise their shared interests and work together in solidarity.	Immigrants fully adopt core values, become valued neighbours, friends and colleagues.
Social democrats always have, and must continue to...	Create inclusive institutions, work to get 'all onboard'	Fight for redistribution, promote from-rich-to-poor-policies	Side with 'ordinary (native) working people'

**Table 2** Three main frames for dissolving the progressive dilemma.

First, there is the social investment frame. In this frame, the problem is diagnosed as one of low-skilled workers immigrating to countries where there are few menial jobs available. Newcomers thus need qualification and training. The need to choose between immigration and ambitious welfare policies only arises if immigrants are permanently excluded from the labour market and become a drain on the public purse. This will undermine the financial, and probably also political, sustainability of the welfare state. If immigrants are fully included, however, there is no progressive dilemma – in fact, in a situation with ageing European populations, hard-working and tax-paying immigrants may be the saviours of the welfare state.

Second, the redistribution frame highlights the inherent tensions in capitalist societies between workers and capitalists. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation because they do not know their rights, and because they often are racialized. The welfare state has an obligation to make sure their basic needs are met. Progressives should never be fooled into believing that there is some kind of tension between immigration and welfare policies – politicians saying that are merely out to sow distrust and build artificial walls between workers. The tension is, and always has

been, between labour and capital. If ordinary people just maintain this belief, there is no progressive dilemma.

The third frame emphasises social cohesion. Here, the diagnosis pictures immigrants as outsiders with values, beliefs and behaviours that differ from those that dominate in the host country. This influx of aliens may undermine the sense of social solidarity that the welfare state depends on. The welfare state must therefore be redesigned to shore up the widely accepted values, and this may include restricting benefits to claimants who refuse to act in the desired way. If the welfare state is seen as an enabler of bad behaviour, natives may withdraw their support. If immigrants behave in socially desirable ways, however, and become fully integrated in work places, schools and neighbourhoods, the dilemma is dissolved.

Notably, all three frames build on deep-seated traditions within the labour movement. The social investment frame highlights inclusion and the development of institutions that allow everybody to fulfil their potential. It is related to third-way social democracy, but arguably has much deeper roots in the Scandinavian countries (Morel, Palier & Palme 2012). The redistribution frame echoes classical Marxist class analysis and the social-democratic ideal of reforming capitalism. The social cohesion frame plays on the sense of unity and dignity among 'ordinary working people', and the Social Democratic Party's ambition of being their voice.

## CONCLUSION

A number of academic contributions have suggested that there are fundamental tensions between inclusive welfare policies and high levels of immigration, which create a dilemma for 'progressive' policy actors who historically have championed both. Above, I have sketched different arguments for why such a dilemma can exist: the sociological literature on trust and social cohesion, the political literature highlighting stable pro-welfare coalitions and economic accounts highlighting long-term financial sustainability. My main interest here has, however, not been to expand this argument or assess to what extent it is merited, but rather to map how a selection of 'progressive' parties work to dissolve the 'dilemma'. The analysis here has highlighted how six social-democratic parties in three countries present and frame the relevant issues, and noted the variety between them. This fills a gap in the literature, as previous contributions on the 'progressive dilemma' has either not been concerned with responses at all, or it has focussed on the extent to which social democrats have 'adapted to' (Schumacher & van Keesbergen 2016) or 'joined' (Bale et al. 2010) the populist right. I have identified three ideal-typical frames social democrats can draw on – the social investment frame, the redistribution frame and the social cohesion frame – and argued that each frame is rooted in the social democratic tradition. This shows that 'progressives' have a variety of ways to grapple with the putative dilemma.

These three frames are not the only possible frames left-of-centre parties can apply, indeed we do not know to what extent these findings will be relevant outside Scandinavia. Moreover, an empirical approach that used different source material, such as media archives, parliamentary debates or expert surveys, might have produced somewhat different results even within these three countries. As a final limitation, it should be noted that all the documents studied here were written before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic shook the world, including Scandinavia, and led to dramatic changes in the ways both international migration and national welfare states operated. How this shock will influence future politics, including those relating to the progressive dilemma, will be an issue for future research.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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