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## **Opinionated Family Migration Policies?**

### ***Public opinion and resistance to EU harmonization of family reunification policies in Europe***

*Johanne Søndergaard*

Despite the harmonizing efforts of the European Union [EU], family reunification policies remain diverse across its member states in terms of, among many other aspects, income requirements for sponsors and the requirements for the reuniting family member obtaining an autonomous residence permit. This thesis examines whether member states' resistance to the harmonization of family migration policies can be partly explained by divergent public opinion about gender roles and/or about immigration/immigrants across the EU. Using data from the European Social Survey (2002-2012), the European Value Study (1990-2008) and the Migrant Integration Policy Index database (2007 and 2010), this thesis examines whether changes in policies in 27 European countries are influenced by these two types of public opinion, as suggested by previous authors.

The thesis first finds circumstantial evidence for the relationship between family migration policies and public opinion. Specifically, it finds that family migration policies diverged in the EU between 2007 and 2010 and at the same time support for both immigration and sharing the childcare role in the family also diverged across EU member states. When directly testing the relationship, however, the results do not show any influence of public opinion about immigration on changes to these family migration policies. In contrast, the thesis does find a direct negative effect of public opinion about gender roles in the family: European countries with more conservative views on sharing care in the home have more open family migration policies. This latter finding supports the hypothesis of previous studies suggesting that as gender egalitarianism in a country increases, traditional gender role norms of dependency are projected on the migrant 'other', manifesting in restrictive family migration policies, for example, in the form of strict income requirements for sponsors. The finding of an overall negative direct effect of public support for shared caring on family migration policies across countries suggests that divergent public opinion across European countries on gender norms could be one reason for the lack of strict EU harmonization of family migration policies.