



## Targeting Benefits Governance and Eligibility Criteria for Work Protection and Poverty Reduction Policy Process in COVID-19 era

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyses eligibility criteria in der realms of public and social assistance programs under targeting benefits governance to enable third-country immigrants work protection and poverty reduction in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic's COVID-19 era. Existing research pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic social disorder that confronts policymakers under intense budgetary pressure and increasing out-of-work population to shift on assisting the unemployed from universal to selective targeting benefits that stress public resources distribution on a measure of financial need to the poor instead of unlimited transfer to the entire population as social rights. However, targeting governance is imperative to challenges in terms of equity and efficiency. Based on a qualitative cross-national case-oriented research approach, documents are collected and analyzed with documents and content analysis techniques to fill the gap. The findings indicate that conditional age segmentation, legislative behavioral requirement, and functional impairment regulative tools influence targeting welfare benefits eligibility governance with a lack of solidarity and transparency that may impair public and social assistance to manage third-country immigrants' work protection and poverty reduction in COVID-19 era settings. However, the comparative entities' determination of targeting benefits level differs in Austria (regional), Finland (national), and Czechia (national). The outcome indicates a new paternalism and reciprocity approach in times of austere redistributive politics. It is relevant because it reflects enabling state neo-liberal social protection system, which not only heightens means-tested selectivity and targets individual responsibilities but tactfully raises the eligibility threshold that may undermine minority group's belongings and social cohesion, participatory democracy, and equitable development in COVID-19 era.

**Keywords:** Targeting benefits, eligibility criteria, immigrants, poverty reduction, public and social assistance



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## INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed the economic security and job prospects of many millions, governments have become under intense budgetary pressure and increasing welfare dependency to targeting public assistance benefits. Several studies have explored targeting benefits that ensure the distribution of public resources on a measure of financial need to the poor instead of universal transfer to the entire population as social rights ([Bitrán & Giedion, 2003](#); [Devereux et al., 2015](#); [García-Jaramillo & Miranti, 2015](#); [Jhabvala & Standing, 2010](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Spicker, 2005](#); [White, 2017](#)). On the one hand, targeting benefits reduces overall spending and ensures efficient limited resources for citizens in the direst circumstances ([Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Slater & Farrington, 2009](#)). On the other hand, targeting based on income-test always leads to withdrawal of benefits as income rises, which creates disincentives that can discourage people from going to work ([Devereux, 2016](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). The limitation of all these interpretations is that there is still little investigation in Central Eastern European (CEE) and other European countries explaining eligibility criteria under targeting public assistance benefits to interpret third-country immigrants (TCIs) work protection and poverty reduction in the policy studying process. Moreover, eligibility criteria in public assistance under targeting benefit and its implication for third-country national heterogeneous subgroups work protection and poverty reduction in the COVID-19 pandemic era requires clarification. Thus, this paper will deliver a careful investigation of targeting benefits governance and its application to analyze eligibility criteria for work promotion and poverty protection in the COVID-19 pandemic era.

This paper analyses eligibility criteria in public assistance programs under targeting benefits model to understand third-country immigrant work protection and poverty reduction in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic COVID-19 era. Unemployed third-country immigrants in this study are non-EU nationals who voluntarily and legally move to one of the European Union Member State with visa and residence permits ([EUR-Lex, 2006](#)). They are people who face several barriers to entering employment and need public assistance ([Esien, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022](#)). The main research question of this study is: How do eligibility criteria in the realm of public assistance programs under targeting benefits governance enable third-country immigrant work protection and poverty reduction in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic COVID-19 era? The sub-questions are: (a) how do the eligibility criteria contrast and (b) what is the implication to immigrant?

Based on the documents, this qualitative cross-country comparative case-oriented study takes stock of Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic eligibility criteria under targeting benefits and sheds light on this seemingly complex phenomenon. The research data analysis methods include document and thematic content analysis techniques. The remainder of this paper is as follows. Section two develops a targeting benefit model in reductive eligibility governance. Section three presents the methods and material of the study. Section four presents the findings. This section also identifies the implication of eligibility criteria to understand third-country immigrants' work protection and poverty reduction. Finally, section five discusses some general remarks related to the eligibility dialogue on targeting benefits and offers a conclusion.

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## TARGETING BENEFITS IN CATEGORICAL REDUCTIVE ELIGIBILITY GOVERNANCE FOR WORK PROTECTION AND POVERTY REDUCTION

The Research in targeting represents one of the oldest modes of policy intervention in industrialized democracies' policymaking ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). It revolves around the redesign of social safety nets ([Spicker, 2005](#)) from universalism<sup>1</sup> toward means-tested selective targeting<sup>2</sup> ([Fiszbein et al., 2009](#); [Gugushvili & Hirsch, 2014](#); [Jacques & Noël, 2021](#); [Kangas, 1995](#); [Maquet et al., 2016](#); [Mitra, 2005](#); [Mkandawire, 2005](#); [Nelson, 2007](#); [Saikkonen & Ylikännö, 2020](#); [Spicker, 2005](#); [Whiteford, 2003](#)) for poverty alleviation ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Khumalo, 2013](#); [Lavallée et al., 2010](#); [United Nations, 2004](#)). Otto von Bismark (German Chancellor 1862-1890) in 1884 first denounced targeting more than 100 years to the initial design of the old-age pension program ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Social Security History, 2022](#)). Targeting benefits governance centres on the notion that public resources are distributed on a measure of financial need to the poor instead of universal transfer to the entire population as social rights ([Bitrán & Giedion, 2003](#); [Coady et al., 2004](#); [Devereux et al., 2015](#); [García-Jaramillo & Miranti, 2015](#); [Jhabvala & Standing, 2010](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)).

Nevertheless, targeted governance is imperative to challenges in terms of equity and efficiency with complex, costly, and uncoordinated programs that may not accurately reach all intended beneficiaries, which infringe social solidarity and reinforce a divisive society ([Atkinson, 1987](#); [Desai, 2017](#); [Devereux, 2016](#); [Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Jhabvala & Standing, 2010](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). The government manages these irregularities in the welfare protection system through regulatory categorical reductive instruments that guide the selection of people eligible for public and social benefits (i.e., setting the policy decision and eligibility criteria<sup>3</sup>) ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). Hence, a targeting benefits eligibility categorical reductive model is relevant in this study to capture the dimensions, causes and consequences, and thus offers an empirical lens to understand the reductive categorical discourse governance. In the next subsections, I discussed the three interrelated dimensions grounded on targeting benefits reductive conceptual framework- age, behavior, and impairment as targeting benefits eligibility institutional governance- followed by the consequences and causes of targeting benefits interventions.

### Age Dimension

Targeting based on age represents different population segmentation through class and minority status in welfare systems ([Gilbert, 2002](#)). Class segmentation refers to decision-making based on needs with a broad division under different people age bases ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). Classification of benefits recipients in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic public and or

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<sup>1</sup> Universalism proposes that everyone receive the same publicly provided benefits.

<sup>2</sup> Targeting proponents argue for the use of mechanisms to identify and distribute the bulk of resources to the poor

<sup>3</sup> This paper's targeting conceptual approaches set the eligibility criteria. It is about whom we decide to target and why, i.e., the policy decision and criteria regarding which people should or should not receive a particular benefit – in this case, social transfers.

social assistance program, for instance, under 15-24, 25-29, and 50-59 target specific unemployed young and old age groups segment access to minimum income benefits ([Matsaganis et al., 2014](#)). However, class segmentation can cause variance in distributive policies regarding specific age (in-group favoritism ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Hill & Leighley, 1992](#)). In contrast, minority status pertains to a category of racial and ethnic minority people in targeting policymaking. Racial/ethnicity diversity category, for instance, in social welfare redistribution targets migrant and other ethnic minority group access to benefits ([Hero & Tolbert, 1996](#)). However, minority status in regulatory targeting policy influences racism and unequal treatment in disfavor of minority groups in redistributive politics ([Fellowes & Rowe, 2004](#); [Song, 2020](#)). Racial/ethnicity diversifies targeting limits and censors the scope and coverage on welfare rolls when governments become less generous in their welfare policies to avoid directing resources to minority citizens ([Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Spicker, 2005](#)). In short, age segmentation plays a key role in class and racial/ethnic minority subdivisions that shrink specific categories of people eligible for benefits. Despite ethnic segmentation, there are other reductive targeting categories to shrink the people eligible for benefits.

### **Behavioral Requirement Dimension**

Behavioral requirements strive for attitudinal features conditioned under contractual obligations and individual responsibilities to activate recipients ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Martín, 2008](#); [Serrano-Pascual, 2007](#)). Contractual obligations refer to effectively pre-specify reproductive moral behavior ([Mead, 1986](#)) to remain eligible for social protection ([Gilbert, 2002](#)). Public spending, for instance, in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic finance active labor market programs that oblige welfare beneficiaries to perform work activities as a prerequisite to remain eligible for public assistance (Act Governing the Employment of Foreign Nationals (AUSIBG), 2017; Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010), 2010; 435/2004 Col. Act of 13 May 2004 on Employment, 2004). However, noncompliance implies punishment and sanctions ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#)) for welfare beneficiaries. In contrast, individual responsibilities embody claimants autonomous targeted decision to make the right choice ([Mead, 1986](#)). Labour office activation plan (325; 435/2004 Coll. Act on Employment), for instance, conditions welfare beneficiary rights and responsibilities for socially approved behavior to remain eligible ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Heise & Meyer, 2004](#); [Serrano-Pascual, 2007](#)). However, “immoral behavior” ([Murray, 1984](#)) not behaving in economically rational ways ([Ariely, 2010](#)) increases chauvinistic policy approach, less generosity ([Fellowes & Rowe, 2004](#)) and loss of autonomy ([Murray, 1984](#)). The government also faces challenges to balance rights over responsibilities on obligations in the disfavor of poor people ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#)). This contravenes the broad philosophical and ethical principle of functional gains from conditional benefits ([Standing, 2011](#)). This endorses a more “austere” and “paternalistic” role in redistributive policymaking and activation governance that constraints and takes away benefits from the poor ([Maynard, 1997](#)). In short, behavioral requirements reproduce morale attitude that governs welfare claimant actions to remain eligible. Despite conditional pre-specify obligations, rights, and responsibilities,

the government still face challenges to effectively manage job seekers performance that further target claimants' access to benefits based on impairment categorical reductive tool.

In the next subsection, I discuss impairment regulatory instruments in targeting benefits.

### **Impairment Dimension**

“...those who are disabled from work by age and invalidity have a well-grounded claim to care from the state (German Chancellor Otto Bismarck in 1881 to the German Parliament)

Impairment (in this paper, impairment and disability are interchangeable) refers to people with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder social inclusion ([Banks et al., 2019](#); [United Nations Human Rights, 2022](#)). Disability policy targets people with disabilities (PWDs) through need-based and rights-based conditions to access benefits ([Banks et al., 2019](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#); [Rohwerder, 2014](#)). Need-based conditions refers to targeting benefits through PWDs individual needs and circumstances for poverty protection ([Banks et al., 2019](#); [Kidd, 2017](#); [Mitchell, 1999](#); [Mitra, 2005](#); [Mitra et al., 2013, 2017](#); [Schneider et al., 2011](#)). Test of disability-related costs<sup>4</sup> and disability-specific needs<sup>5</sup>, for instance, determine PWDs access to benefits ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Hume-Nixon & Kuper, 2018](#); [Mitra, 2018](#); [Mitra et al., 2013](#); [Rohwerder, 2014](#)). However, policymakers face challenges with the design and definition of a proper test that evaluates claimants' degree of incapacity performance ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Kidd, 2017](#); [Rohwerder, 2014](#)). In contrast, rights-based condition represents PWDs rights to social protection as established in international treaties and legislation ([Banks et al., 2019](#); [United Nations, 2004](#)). Finland Disability Benefits Acts, for instance, protects PWDs rights to equitable access benefits and mainstream social protection programs<sup>6</sup> ([Banks et al., 2019](#); [Rohwerder, 2014](#); [United Nations, 2015](#)). Further, disability-targeted programs may be required to address disability-specific concern such as the need for rehabilitation and assistive devices, workplace support or special education ([Banks et al., 2019](#)). However, aligning programs to ensure accessible application procedures<sup>7</sup>, for instance, in disability-inclusive targeted programs, is below the scope of coverage as in any other area ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Kidd, 2017](#); [Mitra, 2005](#);

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<sup>4</sup> Extra disability-related costs are high out-of-pocket spending on disability-related items (e.g., personal assistance, rehabilitation, and assistive devices) ([Banks et al., 2019](#))

<sup>5</sup> Disability-specific assets and disability-targeted programs address disability-specific concerns such as the need for rehabilitation and assistive devices, workplace support or specialist education ([Banks et al., 2019](#)). People with disabilities also face frequent additional costs, such as extra transportation or medical expenses, which can increase PWDs inequalities more than people without disabilities ([Mitra et al., 2017](#)) ([Devandas, 2017](#)) Considering this and government expenditure of additional costs and promoting access to services and support required for full and equal participation addresses the main aim of disability-targeted programs to reduce social exclusion ([United Nation, 2015](#))

<sup>6</sup> Mainstream social protection programs include health insurance, pensions, and other social and public assistance benefits where eligibility is not dependent on disability status ([Devandas, 2017](#); [United Nations, 2015](#)).

<sup>7</sup> The procedure requires certification for invalidity benefits, evaluation of incapacity, and the individual functional assessment to access disability benefits ([Gilbert, 2002](#))

[Saloojee et al., 2007](#); [Schneider et al., 2011](#)). Briefly, disability regulatory reform targets people with disabilities (PWDs) needs and rights to access benefits. Despite the reductive mechanism, the governments cannot sustain costs and fully administer the beneficiary's rational behavior that results in consequences and causes of targeting benefits. In the next paragraphs, I will discuss the consequences, followed by the causes of targeting benefits reductive eligibility criteria governance for work protection and poverty reduction.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the consequences of targeting benefits reductive categorical governance. There are following consequences: (a) Targeted program is imperative to inaccuracy because the information needed to identify the poor is often imprecise to resolve this issue; (b) Targeted programs' design is sometimes too complex and uncoordinated; (c) Targeting benefits play burdens on state administrators which may not be cost-effective and efficient. The programs are usually designed for short term perspective to reduce current poverty and inequalities, but may fail to focus on the subsequent efforts to ensure the long term alleviation of poverty; (d) Targeting benefits involve the tendency of politicians to abuse these programs by converting them into instruments of patronage; and (e) Targeting benefits generate ethical reasons as it can lead to social divisiveness and perceptions that excluding others from benefits are socially unjust ([Coady et al., 2004](#); [Desai, 2017](#); [Devereux, 2016](#); [Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004](#); [García-Jaramillo & Miranti, 2015](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Slater & Farrington, 2009](#); [UNDP, 2019](#); [United Nations, 2015](#)). That means, it can potentially increase social tension and exacerbate social division and inequalities by including specific groups and leaving out others. Despite consequences, there are different causes behind targeting benefits institutional agenda settings that play a crucial role in shrinking the categories of people eligible for public and or social assistance benefits.

Data from several studies have identified the causes<sup>8</sup> of targeting benefits in the policy studying process. The following causes are behind the proliferation of policies design to targeting benefit in redistributive policy decisions: (a) Targeting benefits focus on the group who are most in need or to give the poor a higher amount of transfers, but income raise the threshold of eligibility; (b) Targeting benefits are influenced by constituency pressure through public liberalism with an increase on government spending to welfare dependent families and children when citizens' opinion towards welfare becomes more liberal, less racist, or less bias, but reduces when state becomes diverse because of racial/ethnic diversity and class differences to pass welfare programs that are less generous; (c) Targeting benefits are influenced through the paternalistic role of the government to actively endorse more austere and a moral agenda of reproductive citizen's behavior that may influence policymakers decision about redistribution policies, but they may act to make welfare increasingly less attractive when "immoral" behaviors grow, since welfare may be seen as a viable source of funds for "immoral" behavior; (d) Targeting benefits are influenced

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<sup>8</sup> The causes as entities influences government redistributing of wealth to the indigent. The unique political dynamic of these policies in studying policy processes explain the development of targeting benefits in redistributive politics concentrate on the influence exerted by constituencies, institutions, paternalistic goals, or state resources.

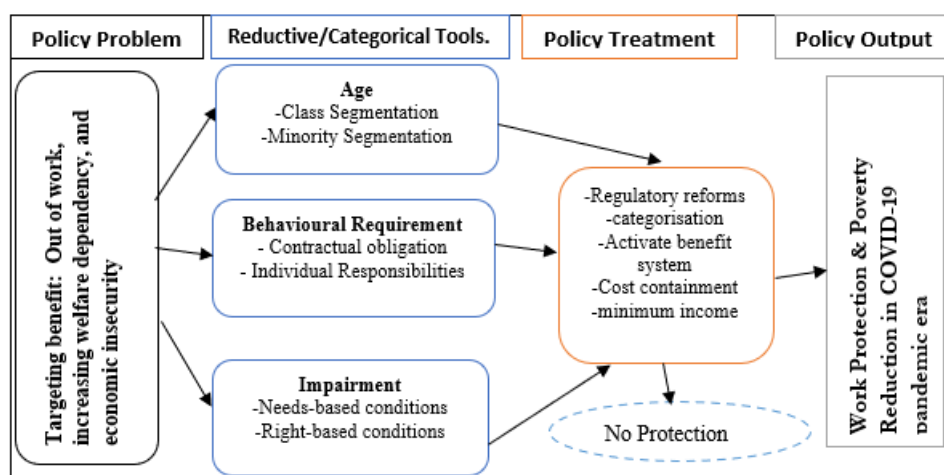
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through welfare dependency to decrease welfare generosity. As the proportion of the population receiving assistance increases, policymakers may act to make welfare less generous to discourage further enrolment; and (e) Targeting is influenced through state financial resources pressure on welfare budgets (Coady et al., 2004; Fellowes & Rowe, 2004; Fung & Wright, 2001; García-Jaramillo & Miranti, 2015; Gilbert, 2002; Hero & Tolbert, 1996; Maynard, 1997; Mead, 1986; Murray, 1984; Slater & Farrington, 2009; Tweedie, 1994). State with more resources provides more generous benefits than a less wealthy state since wealthier states may have more slack resources to afford more generous welfare expenditure than less wealthy states. In addition, state competition over resources also influences targeting benefits because when neighboring states reduce benefits, a state will reduce their own benefits as to avoid becoming a “welfare magnet” for enterprising welfare clients that influence the pattern of targeting benefits programs.

Overall, the targeting benefits model shows the reductive approach of age, behavioral requirement, and impairment criteria to shrink the categories of people eligible for public and/or social assistance benefits for work protection and poverty reduction in COVID-19 pandemic era agenda setting (see figure 1). This state conditional reductive categorical regulatory tool serves as policymakers’ compass to the uphold eligibility threshold and shrink the people eligible for benefits in the public/social protection system, target labor market performance and individual responsibility. Although most researchers in the field agreed that targeting benefit policy process face challenges in terms of equity and efficiency (Devereux, 2016; Spicker, 2005). There is still little investigation explaining CEE countries and other European countries explaining eligibility criteria in social and/or public assistance programs under targeting benefits to interpret third country immigrants’ work protection and poverty reduction in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic COVID-19 pandemic era. Thus, targeting benefit in categorial reductive governance is imperative to analyze the implication of eligibility criteria and understand TCIs’ work protection and poverty reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

Figure 1: Targeting benefits governance conceptual framework with the three interrelated public and or social protection reductive eligibility of age, behavioral requirement, and impairment categories for work protection and poverty reduction in Covid-19 pandemic era.



In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological and materials part to investigating the phenomenon and derive findings to answer the research questions.

## **METHODS**

The study design relies on a comparative cross-national case-oriented research approach with a fewer-country comparison ([Lor, 2014](#)). The methodology has several advantages, such as the notion that it relies on a constructivist philosophical position about how the complexities of a socio-cultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a context (Atteslander, 1971). The limitation of the study includes the notion that fewer countries may have different data sets for the same category ([Hantrais, 2009](#)). In addition, the study is limited to Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic that indicate selectivity, universalism, and mixed targeting benefits approaches respectively. Moreover, a suitable and exact countries' choice is critical ([Lor, 2014](#)) with low external validity making the generalization of the phenomenon difficult to countries not included in the study ([Ragin, 1987](#)). However, the findings may generalize a theory in the way social scientists' theory-generate findings from one case study to the other ([Yin, 2012](#)).

Data were gathered from a triangulation of Employment, Public, and Social Assistant Acts on the protection of immigrant integration and poverty protection, authorized official immigrant employment reports and an overview of published and unpublished scholastic literature to offer corroboration and/or supportive evidence ([Maynard, 1997](#)) from Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic. The use of a multiple-purpose sample ([Yin, 2012](#)) is applied to select the documents that have a long history and physical evidence to explain human behavior on the protection of third-country nationals' employment-related integration and poverty reduction. The documents are investigated during the author's time in Prague, Tampere, and Linz between 2018–2021. The documents were in German, English, Finnish, and Czech. The researcher asked colleagues to translate and use online official English versions in databases such as OECD, ILO, European Union, and selected country's websites. For the online search and choice, the researcher inserted, for instance, "Targeting benefits and eligibility criteria", "Public and Social Assistance Act", "Employment Act", "Third-country Nationals", "Poverty Reduction Programs", "COVID-19 pandemic era", "Ethnic Minorities" in the search machine rubric. This generated a diversity of documents and materials that mark a major advantage of this research plan with a source that is less subject to error.

Furthermore, the passages are extracted with themes derived from targeting benefits conceptualized deductive categories (*ibid*) for third-country immigrants' work protection and poverty reduction in the COVID-19 pandemic era. In the initial round of the coding process, the author reviewed phrases, sentences, and paragraph segments from the documents and other sources to code the data. In the first round of the coding process, the researcher developed the following suitable categories to enable the analysis: (I) Decision-making– Conditional Age Segmentation: This code represents targeting benefits of age segmentation. How is the segmentation of the age



group's category regulated? How are the age groups classified for specific public and social assistance minimum income benefits eligibility? How are social assistance beneficiaries negotiated by age for work protection and poverty reduction (II) Standardize Individual - Legal Behavioral Requirement: This code offers targeting aspects that link eligibility for public and social welfare benefits to behavioral requisites for work protection and poverty reduction. How are the individual responsibilities of claimants conditioned for work protection and poverty reduction? What is the behavioral responsibility of beneficiaries' families and household conditions in social welfare eligibility governance? How are the behaviors regulated for "immoral" behaviors? And the fines, for instance, that punish claimants' misconduct? and (III) Disability-inclusive Protection – Functional Impairment: This code offers information about targeting based on impairment and scope of coverage for PWDs' work protection and poverty reduction. How is the definition of functional impairment regulated? How is disability benefits entitlement negotiated? How is the assessment of incapacity certificate arranged to access benefits regulated? And the test, for instance, that evaluates claimants' range of disabilities?

After several rounds of code deduction and all the evidence from the legal documents ([Lamnek, 2016](#)), authorized reports, and scholarly texts created a big picture how the implication of eligibility criteria under targeting public and /or social assistance benefits in COVID-19 pandemic era developed, interrelated, and implicated TCIs work protection and poverty reduction, the processes of data collection and analysis were completed and arrived saturation to answer the research question.

In the next chapter, the author of this study presents findings to understand the phenomenon and answer the research question.

## **THE IMPLICATION OF ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA UNDER TARGETING BENEFITS FOR TCI WORK PROTECTION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN COVID-19 ERA**

The previous chapter examined the document and content analysis. This chapter will look at the findings. It consists of three themes that emerged in the previous data analysis chapter, namely (I) conditional age segmentation, (II) legal behavioral requirements, and (III) functional impairment to shrink eligibility criteria in the targeting reductive categorial governance and answer the research question.

### **Conditional Age Segmentation for Means-Tested Redistributive Politics Decision-Making**

In the study, firstly, it may be useful to consider the notion of how conditional age segmentation evolves redistributive politics decision-making in the public and social protection system to investigate and analyze the notion of targeting benefits eligibility criteria in public and/or social benefits programs for work protection and poverty reduction. This section looks at the issue and

discusses the findings surrounding eligibility criteria under targeting benefits to shrink the category of people eligible for employment and poverty-related public and/or social benefits<sup>9</sup> in the COVID-19 pandemic era and its implications for TCIs work protection and poverty reduction with a conclusive remark.

For each of the comparative entities (Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic), there is a centralized reductive targeting benefits regulatory governance institutional framework that manages and administers age segmentation for third country immigrant's employment and poverty-related public and/or social assistance program access in any of the intended social assistance last resort safety-net programs ([Maquet et al., 2016](#); [Mitra, 2005](#)). In Austria, the social assistance last resort safety-net scheme is known as a need-oriented guarantee minimum<sup>10</sup> ([Maquet et al., 2016](#)). The regional determines benefits levels in minimum income as the central entitlement condition (*ibid*). Benefits calculation is non-taxable, means-tested, and generally non-contributory for the entire population regarding residency. Benefit provision is unlimited and varies with age groups ([Maquet et al., 2016](#); [Matsaganis et al., 2014](#)).

In Finland, the social assistance last resort scheme is known as social assistance<sup>11</sup>. The national determines benefit levels in minimum income as the central entitlement condition. Benefit calculation is non-taxable, non-contributory, and means-tested with 20 % of net earnings up to EUR 150 per family per month (4% of AW). Benefit provision varies with age and is generous with higher rates for older children ([Maquet et al., 2016](#); [Matsaganis et al., 2014](#)).

In Czechia, the social assistance program is “allowance for living”<sup>12</sup>. The national determines benefit levels in minimum income benefits as the central entitlement condition (Social Service Act No. 108/2006 Coll of March 14, 2006, Part 1; Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on Social). Benefits calculation is non-taxable, non-contributory, earning disregarded, means-tested and includes assets in the means test for social assistance (Act on Employment, 435/2004 Coll. Dated 13th May 2004, Section 104 (1). Benefit provision is unlimited and granted to everyone who fulfils income criteria ([Kalužná, 2008](#)) and varies with age ([Matsaganis et al., 2014](#)).

In a study in 2014, for instance, the authors found that access to social assistance benefits is more likely with age in Austria, Finland, and Czechia (Matsagnis et al 2014) (see Table 1). The evidence indicates a larger proportion of the unemployed aged 50-59 received benefits than in the case of those aged 25-49, who in turn were more likely to be in receipt than those younger (15-29 aged) ([Matsaganis et al., 2014](#)). On average in Austria, Finland and Czechia, the proportion of men receiving benefits is larger than for women to improve their labour market entrance, dependency, and poverty situation.

**Table 1:** Proportion (%) of those unemployed for 3 months or more in receipts of benefits by age groups, 2011

<sup>9</sup> Social assistance is a benefit in cash or in-kind, financed by the state (national or local) and usually provided based on a means or income test (Howel, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> The social assistance program is known in the local language as “Bedarfsorientiert Mindestsicherung”.

<sup>11</sup> the social assistance program name in the local language is “Toimeentulotuki”

<sup>12</sup> The social assistance program name in local language is “Pomoc v hmotne nouzi”

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country	Male age group				Female age groups			
	15-24	25-29	30-34	Total	15-24	25-49	50-59	Total
<b>Austria</b>	35.1	64.5	80.7	58.8	23.5	60.1	55.2	50.1
<b>Finland</b>	26.6	81.4	83.7	69.7	23.8	78.7	86.3	67.3
<b>Czechia</b>	17.4	18.7	39.4	23.6	7.9	22.6	26.7	21.2
<b>EU-28</b>	16.7	41.5	52	38.1	15.5	34.6	43.8	32.4

Source: Eurostat LFS adapted and modified ([Matsaganis et al., 2014](#))

However, other studies found that stricter conditions to access minimum income make the social assistance last safety net less effective in protecting employment and fighting poverty, especially among young people than adults ([Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#)) (OECD, 2016). Even more studies since then reported evidence that suggests that shrinking the pool of recipients by age has several implications that often affect unemployed people with a migration background than their national peers to access public and social benefits ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#)).

In short, there is centralized targeting public and social assistance institutional framework with a different determination of benefits levels in Austria (regional), Finland (national), and the Czech Republic (nationals). In Austria, the benefit calculation is non-taxable, means-tested, and generally non-contributory for the entire population regarding residence. In Finland, the benefit calculation is non-taxable, non-contributory, and means-tested with 20% of net earnings up to EUR 150 per family per month (4% of AW). In the Czech Republic, the benefit calculation is non-taxable, non-contributory, earning disregard, and means-tested for public and social assistance. In Austria, the benefit provision is unlimited and varies with age group, whereas in Finland, it varies with age and is generous with higher rates for older children. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic, the provision of benefits is unlimited, varies with age, and the entitlement depends on income-test criteria. However, young unemployed people between 15-25 years of age, especially with a migration background face frequent challenges to access welfare benefits inaccessibility on residency or citizenship conditionality.

These findings suggest that in general these countries provide unlimited public and social assistance benefits to different unemployed age groups of people but are conditioned on residence and citizenship tests ([Maquet et al., 2016](#)). These conditions indicate influence from constituency pressure through public liberalism for government decrease spending to aid-dependent families and children when the state becomes diverse because of racial/ethnic diversity and class to pass welfare policies program that is less generous ([Fellowes & Rowe, 2004](#); [Hero & Tolbert, 1996](#); [Slater & Farrington, 2009](#)) (McCord, 2008). The reason for this may have something to do with the notion that globalization of the economy with labor mobility heightens demand and competition for jobs and social provision as new immigrant families of all ages arrive make welfare reforms legislation to impose stringent limits on legal immigrants' eligibility for public and social assistance. The savings could stimulate the "bubble effect"<sup>13</sup> and would

<sup>13</sup> The "bubble effects" of targeting measures show that social assistance, sickness and disability benefits, unemployment payments, and old-age pensions form an interconnected package that resembles a balloon of welfare expenditures. That one bubbles up on one side when squeezed down on the other. In this case, targeting policies that constrain eligibility in one of these programs frequently shift beneficiaries and public expenses to

appear to affect most heavily the proportional return on social security of households in low-income and ethnic minority groups that may impair claimant's access to benefits when looking at issues such as work protection and poverty reduction in COVID-19 pandemic era of TCIs and disadvantaged group of people in targeting benefits eligibility criteria setting.

This subsection has argued that targeting through age conditionality reductive device has several regulatory implications that may heavily affect the last resort safety-net of TCIs and racial/ethnic minority groups' work protection and poverty reduction. The next subsections will look at legal behavioral requirements for responsibility management.

### **Legal Behavioral Requirement as Catalyst for Individual Moral Obligation**

The previous subsection examined targeting by age. This subsection looks at another aspect with legal behavioral requirements regulatory tool to shrink the category of people eligible for social assistance benefits for work promotion and poverty reduction.

These countries reforms of public and social assistance programs embody extensive use of regulatory devices to couple benefits with socially approved legal behavioral requirements ([Gilbert, 2002](#)). In Austria, registered unemployed (TCIs) beneficiaries must fulfil work requirements- job search, apply for job vacancies and accept suitable jobs etcetera- (Hofer and Helmut 2003; BMASGK, 2018). Labour Office does not require other conditions for beneficiaries, which include conditional cash transfer (CCTs). Targeting behavior depends on the unit of individual claimants (Regional Hunger and Vulnerable Program- RHVP (no date); Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2020; Law Gazette, LGBL No. 41/2008). No legal behavioral requirement exists for other household members (Labour, Social Affairs, Health, and Consumer Protection, 2018; Regional Hunger and Vulnerable Program- RHVP (no date).

In Finland, conditions in activation programs oblige registered unemployed social assistance beneficiaries fulfil work requirements. There are no other conditions for registered unemployed social assistance beneficiaries in public assistance programs, which include conditional cash transfers (CCTs) (RHVP (no date)). Targeting social assistance beneficiaries depends on the unit of households (RHVP (no date)). There may be a legal behavioral requirement applied to other adults living in the same household as the social assistance claimants (Act on public employment and business service).

In Czechia, conditional work requirements constraint (TCIs) social assistance beneficiary's behavior (Act No 435/2004 Coll. On Employment). There is no other condition for welfare claimants, which include conditional cash transfers (CCTs). Targeting is based on the unit of the household to remain eligible for benefits (RHVP (no date)). Legal behavioral requirements for work and job search availability apply to all members of the claimant household (Act No 435/2004 Coll on Employment). Beneficiaries in activation programs are jointly assessed with

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the other. These eventualities indicate that savings achieved by shrinking the age of people in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic eligible for social assistance may emerge as additional costs in other programs, particularly healthcare and social assistance (Gilbert, 2002) (Esien, 2019, 2020).

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their families and people living in the same household<sup>14</sup> (Kalužná, 2008). The Labour Office may also request that long-term<sup>15</sup> job seekers claimants participate in specific targeted Public Employment Service (PES) programs (Act No. 435/2004 Coll. on Employment; Kalunza, 2008).

For registered unemployed TCIs and other social assistant beneficiaries to participate in activation programs and aid-related schemes, the government spent on needy families' work protection and poverty reduction schemes. In 2018, for instance, the total government expenditure on social protection in % of GDP accounted for 20.1% in Austria, 24.1% in Finland and 12.0% in Czechia (Eurostat 2020) to assist citizens in need (see Table 2), which include (TCIs) work protection and poverty reduction schemes. The overall government expenditure on social protection in % GDP for families and children in these countries accounted for 2.1 % (Austria), 3.0 (Finland), and 1.7% (Czech Republic). This public spending assists disadvantaged families in need with temporary programs, which include activation measures and financial assistance schemes to encourage TCIs engage in more active traditional social behaviors with individual responsibility for work entrance and poverty reduction.

**Table 2:** Total general government expenditure in Austria, Finland, and Czechia on social protection, 2018, % GDP

	Total government expenditure in % GDP			
	Austria	Finland	Czechia	EU-27
<b>Social protection</b>	20.1	24.1	12.0	19.2
<b>Family and Children</b>	2.1	3.0	1.1	1.7

Source: Author's own calculation adapted from Eurostat, 2020

Other studies, however, emphasize that to influence families to refrain from misconduct while on public and social assistance activation programs, Austria, Finland, and Czechia initiated a noncompliance policy which impose denial or limitation of benefits for parents and children already on the welfare (Gilbert, 2002) (Act No 111/2006 Coll; Kalunza, 2008; Kotýnková, 2007). Some studies confirmed that Finland and Czechia also initiated behavioural requirements that impose parental responsibility to ensure that they also search for jobs and receive standardized immunizations (Kalužná, 2008) (Kotýnková, 2007; Sirovátka & Kulhavý, 2008). In addition, there is a consensus that the social and labour offices face administrative capacity with limited staff and time capacities to consider individual cases in line with the requirements (Večerník, 2004, 2005). Moreover, (Kalužná, 2008) stressed that beneficiaries in Czechia also carefully watch their behaviors and try to adhere to their obligation.

In short, reforms in the comparative entities approved socially legal morale requirements with work-obligations for employment protection and poverty reduction. Unlike Finland and Czechia, Austria's registered unemployed TCI public and/or social assistance claimants' commitment to employment and poverty-related activation programs depend on the individual. Whereas in Finland and the Czech Republic it depends on the unit of the household where there

<sup>14</sup> There are claimant's parents, minor dependent children, adult children if the shared same household, the spouse, and other people living together with the beneficiaries unless they prove not living together and do not share expenses on their needs (Kalunza, 2008)

<sup>15</sup> PES registered social assistance beneficiaries for more than 12 months (Kalunza, 2008)

may be a legal behavioral criterion imposed on other adults living in the same household as claimants. These findings suggest that in general the government spent for people in need to promote employment and reduce poverty, but the policy design and administration are based on power asymmetry, pressure, moralize punitive measures, and punishing the poor ([Serrano-Pascual, 2003, 2007](#)) (Schram, 2010, 2020; Wacquant, 2009; Salais et al, 1986; Topalov 1994; Foucault, 1975, 1991). These procedures and policy processes deemphasized rights to the universal allocation of income and emphasizes selective targeting of compulsory individual responsibilities ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Mead, 1986](#)) (Bauman, 2001; Franssen, 2003; Holden, 2003) as the treatment of poverty in terms of managing behavior based on a moral issue, reciprocity norm and the creation of standardized individual ([Serrano-Pascual, 2003, 2007](#)) (Schram, 2000, Večerník, 2004). One possible reason could be the emphasis on recipients to behave like responsible citizens might be the result of a shift in the nature of the problem being tackled where rather than being a fight against poverty, it is, now above all a fight against (welfare) dependency. This policy outcome may impair TCIs and socio-economically ethnic minority groups' eligibility for public and social benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic era in targeting benefit settings for work protection and poverty reduction.

This section has discussed the legal behavioral requirement model in the reductive approach to targeting benefit governance that shrinks the categories of TCIs eligible for benefits in the COVID-19 pandemic era for work promotion and poverty reduction. The next subsection will look at targeting based on impairment for the scope of coverage and definition on disability programs.

### **Functional Impairment for People with Disability-inclusive Long-term Care**

The previous subsection examined legal behavioral requirements emphasizing individual and parental responsibility as the basis of TCIs eligible for social benefits eligibility in the COVID-19 pandemic era for work protection and poverty reduction. This subsection looks at another aspect of targeting benefit eligibility governance based on impairment regulatory administrative reform.

Targeting impairment in the comparative entities reveals that disability benefits maintain the appearance of constancy while diminishing the scope of coverage ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Rohwerder, 2014](#)). In Austria, a medical officer of the relevant social minister service provincial office performs assess the degree of disability (BMASGK, 2018; Sozial Ministerium. 2012, 2014). The medical officer estimates and evaluates the degree of disability as prescribed with the assessment regulation based on test results or experts' reports ([Fink & Valkova, 2018](#)) (Sozialministeriumservice, 2020). Entitlement to access long-term cash benefits (Pflegegeld) depends on residence in Austria ([Fink & Valkova, 2018](#)) (Sozialministeriumservice, 2020). The measurement of benefits amount is in hours per month. Different benefits levels exist, which depend on seven category levels of individual care requirements/health status of a person in need of care ([Fink & Valkova, 2018](#)) (Lipszyc, Sail, and Xavier, 2012).

In Finland, disability benefits include allowance for people with disability under 16 of age, over 16 years and other care allowances for elderly people (Disability Benefits Act § 2). Entitlement

depends on residence time requirement when people have lived in Finland for at least three years after reaching 16 years (ibid). People are entitled without fulfilling the residence time requirement if the person's disability began while living in Finland and before 19 years old (Disability Benefits Acts § 6). Government grants three types of disability benefits allowances based on individual service needs assessment<sup>16</sup> (ibid § 8). For the assessment procedures and evaluation, applicants must submit a "medical report" to the Social Insurance Institution. The Social Insurance Institution describes applicants state of health in need of assistance, guidance, and supervision (ibid: § 19) for long-term care. Although these indicators measure a client's dependency and autonomy, the legislation emphasizes an assessment should not build solely on those but an overall assessment (Kallioma and Kanga, 2018).

In Czechia, social assistance benefits for people with disabilities (PWDs) are regulated through Act No 108/2006 Coll on Social Service (MPSV, 2020). The government provides benefits to PWDs according to their long-term unfavorable health condition when dealing with 10 basic living needs<sup>17</sup> (MPSV, 2020). The amount of care allowance corresponds to the degree of "dependence on care"<sup>18</sup> and on an assessment of the applicant's ability to manage the 10 basic living needs (MPSV, 2020) as a measurement of the client's dependency and autonomy. The assessment and evaluation are through a medical doctor of the Medical Assessment Service (ibid, 2020). As one of the complete assessment prerequisites, the Labour Office of the Czech Republic Social Worker visit applicants to evaluate their dependency on care in the person's real social environment (MPSV, 2020). Children under one year of age are not entitled to the allowance (MPSV, 2020). Allowances are provided to people below 18 years of age and people over 18 years old. The benefit allowance can be used for professional or informal care. The application of care allowances and benefits for PWDs and certificates<sup>19</sup> are handled at the contact points of the Regional Branches of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic (MPSV 2020). Application and entitlement to care allowance are submitted based on the (permanent) residence (MPSV, 2020) and residence in the Czech Republic territory.

Analyzing the disability function reveals that in 2017, for instance, the average share of disability benefits within the total expenditure on social protection benefits was 6.2 % in Austria, 9.6 % in Finland, and 6.4% in Czechia (Eurostat 2019) to support people with disabilities on assistance programs, which include work protection and poverty reduction schemes.

However, various developments observed over time regarding expenditure on social protection function reflect a level of reductions. During the period 2008-2017 Austria (down 0.5% per year), Finland (0.7% per year), and Czechia (0.6% per year) recorded a reduction in their level of

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<sup>16</sup> There are "basic disability allowance" if the attachment is demanding and at least weekly, an "increase disability allowance" if the attachment is demanding or takes a considerable amount of time daily, and a "maximum disability allowance" where the attachment is demanding 24 hours a day (ibid, § 8).

<sup>17</sup> The dependent basic living needs: mobility, orientation, communication, self-feeding, putting on clothes and footwear, washing oneself, toileting, looking after one's health, personal activities, and household tasks (MPSV, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> The degree of dependence on care depends on four levels of dependence. There are as follows: (i) Grade I (slight dependence. (ii) Grade II (medium-heavy dependence. (iii) Grade III (heavy dependence). (iv) Grade IV (total dependence).

<sup>19</sup> There are three types (TP, ZIP, and ZIP/P) of certificates that depend on the seriousness of the disability.

expenditure on social benefits for disability (Eurostat, 2019) programs. Other studies emphasize that targeting based on disability remains constant while the scope of coverage diminishes to serve the original category of social need ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#)). Moreover, several authors found out that long-term care for PWDs programs face challenges with complicated procedures, accessibility, and adequacy, as well as quality and financial sustainability ([Fink & Valkova, 2018](#); [Kangas, 1995](#)) ([Kalliomaa-Puha and Kangas, 2018](#); [Holub and Nemeč, 2014](#); [Maly 2018](#); [The Austrian Federal Government's Disability Concept, 1992](#); [NCPTSS/NCSSTS, 2012](#); [Lipszyc, Sail, and Xavier, 2012](#)) that impair the progress in disability policy

In short, targeting based on impairment in the comparative entities maintains the appearance of constancy with a diminished scope of coverage. In Austria, the social minister service provides long-term cash benefits (pflagegeld), whereas in Finland the municipalities provide long-term care. Moreover, the assessment of the degree of disability in Austria is through a medical officer based on test results or expert's results assessment. In Finland, applicants must submit their "medical reports" of health status and need to go to the Social Insurance Institute for assessment and evaluation. Meanwhile, in Czechia, the procedure and assessment of the degree of dependence is through a medical doctor of the Medical Assessment Service and report after the home visit of the Labour Office social worker. Entitlement to cash benefits in Austria is based on residence in Austria and 50% incapacity to work. In Finland entitlement to long-term care is based on residence time requirement. In Czechia, entitlement to care allowance depends on age (children under one year are not entitled to the allowance) and on the (permanent) residence as well as residence in the territory. These findings suggest that in general disability benefits maintain the appearance of constancy ([Devereux et al., 2015](#); [United Nations Human Rights, 2022](#)) to serve the original category of social need for work protection and poverty reduction, but the threshold of eligibility is raised on several need tests (age, residence, age, dependence etc.) ([Esien, 2019, 2020](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#)) that has tightened the degree to benefits and diminishes the scope of coverage. This indication might suggest the immense fiscal pressure in response to the interaction of the social security system with socio-demographic trends, which increase public spending with severe pressure influence the government's needs-tested approach that targets benefits that target individual responsibilities and labor market performance ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Whiteford, 2003](#)). This may not reach all intended beneficiaries especially the most vulnerable people with disabilities in targeting benefits governance ([Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#)). The reason for this may have something to do with legislator's ineffectiveness to lower costs and selective target comprehensive disabilities programs on fewer households with a high level of impairment, which may jeopardize claimants' access to benefits when looking at issues such as employment-related protection and poverty reduction of TCIs and ethnic minority group of people with disabilities (PWDs) in COVID-19 pandemic era targeting benefits eligibility setting.

To repeat, government in the comparative entities provides public and/ or social assistance last tier and shrinks the category of people through selective targeting benefits governance. The reforms embody an extensive use of conditionality with rights and obligations attached to pre-specify behaviors, legislative requirements, and punishment/sanction in case of beneficiary's noncompliance. The tendency to condition registered unemployed TCIs and disadvantaged



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citizens' welfare benefits eligibility might suggest raising the threshold of eligibility and targeting benefits to those most in need that may stigmatize and impair beneficiaries' development and belongings when looking at issues such as employment-related protection and poverty reduction of third-country immigrants and disadvantaged people in targeting benefit's eligibility setting.

Despite similarities in convergence towards selective targeting based on conditionality and means-tested needs, the comparative cases are dissimilar in their targeting benefit eligibility governance institutional setting for TCI work protection and poverty reduction (see table 3). Unlike Finland and the Czech Republic, targeting benefit provision in Austria is unlimited and varies with age groups. In Finland, it varies with age and is generous with higher rates for older children, Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic targeting benefit provision is unlimited, varies with age, and granted to everyone who fulfils income criteria (i.e., income-tested). In addition, unlike in the Czech Republic and Finland, there is no targeting legal behavioral requirement for claimants' other members of the household. In Finland, there may be targeting legal behavioral requirements applied also to other adults in the same household as the social assistance beneficiaries. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic, there is a targeting legal behavioral requirement for work availability to all members of the claimant's household. Moreover, unlike in Finland and the Czech Republic, entitlement to access long-term cash benefits in Austria is based on residence in Austria and 50% incapacity to work. Meanwhile, in Finland, it is based on residence time requirements when people live in Finland for at least 3 years after reaching 18 years, but without if the person's disability began while in Finland or before the age of 19 years old. In the Czech Republic, targeting benefit entitlement depends on the (permanent) residence and residence in the territory. This conditionality residence and citizenship test models reduces welfare dependency for ethnic minority groups of foreign-born and provides discretion in the design of eligibility criteria. This is a problem with transparency, ethical standard, public value accountability, and effective functioning of the comparative entities targeting the benefits regime (Gilbert, 2002). The result makes the trend towards more restrictive targeting governance politically delicate and divisive since it involves fracturing society along income lines that separate donors from welfare beneficiaries and take benefits away from the poor (Gilbert, 2002). This policy outcome may jeopardize third-country immigrants' employment-related transition in the COVID-19 pandemic era.

**Table 3:** Eligibility criteria in targeting public and social assistance benefits governance to manage and administer unemployed third-country immigrants' work protection and poverty reduction in the Covid-19 pandemic era in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic

Targeting benefits eligibility criteria governance institutional setting				
	Determinants	Benefit provisions	Behavioral requirements	Entitlements
<b>A</b>	Regional	Unlimited provision, but varies with age groups	No legal behavioral requirement for others of the HH	Long-term cash benefits based on residence in Austria and 50% incapacity to work
<b>F</b>	National	Unlimited provision,	There may be legal	Entitlement depends on

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	but varies with age and generous with higher rates for older children	behavioral requirements applied also to other adults living in the same HH as the SA claimants	resident time requirement, but without if the person's disability began while in Finland or before the age of 19 years old.
<b>CZ</b> National	Unlimited provision, and varies with age, but granted to everyone who fulfils income criteria	Legal behavioral requirements for work availability apply to all members of the claimant HH	Entitlement to care allowance is submitted based on age (children under 1 year are not entitled to allowances) and on the (permanent) residence and residence in the Czech Republic

A=Austria, F= Finland, and CZ= Czech Republic, HH= Household, SA= Social Assistance  
Source: Author

### CONCLUSION

This study investigated eligibility criteria under targeting benefits to enable work protection and poverty reduction. The research design consisted of a qualitative cross-country case-oriented study design with a fewer-country comparison between Austria (corporate welfare state), Finland (Nordic welfare state), and Czechia (a mixed welfare state method). The focus was on targeting benefit eligibility criteria in public and/or social assistance programs to interpret third-country immigrants' work protection and poverty reduction.

The study has shown that conditional age segmentation, legal behavioral requirement, and functional impairment administrative devices were major perceived influences in targeting public and social assistance benefits regulatory strategic governance. An important finding to emerge in this study is the lack of solidarity and stigmatization (Gilbert, 2002) (Dunn, 2004) with the government's power asymmetry and chauvinistic policy approach that has encouraged opaque eligibility criteria and moral agenda of reproductive citizen's behavior which influence policy makers redistributive politics (Fellowes & Rowe, 2004; Gilbert, 2002; Maynard, 1997; Mead, 1986; Serrano-Pascual, 2007) (Dunn 2004). These uncertainties are challenges to public administrators' capacities to contain costs and manage targeting benefits eligibility policy processes (Desai, 2017; Gilbert, 2002). Despite similarities in the comparative entities' moral agenda in redistributive politics and punitive models (Serrano-Pascual, 2007), the assessment and evaluation of applicants' dependence in Czechia on care for benefits eligibility procedure is dissimilar to those of Austria and Finland because it is assessed and evaluated by the medical doctors and social worker employed from the Czech's Labour Office. Meanwhile, it is the Medical Officer in Austria. In Finland, evaluators are not applicable, but the applicants must submit a medical report for the procedure and assessment that describes the applicants' state of health in need of assistance. In addition, unlike Finland and Czechia, Austria's entitlement to a long-term cash benefits regime is based on residency. Meanwhile, in Finland, it is based on residence time requirements. In Czechia, it is based on the (permanent) residence and residence

in Czech territory. Furthermore, Czechia and Finland often target units of household, where beneficiaries in activation programs are jointly assessed with their families and people living in the same household. This research confirms previous findings and contributes to our understanding that targeting benefits eligibility generates ethical issues, enables power asymmetry, creates political and/or social inequalities, and endorses austerity, class differences, and divisiveness in the means-tested regulatory administrative strategic governance ([Devereux, 2016](#); [Devereux et al., 2015](#); [Fellowes & Rowe, 2004](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#); [Hero & Tolbert, 1996](#)) ([Feszbein et al., 2009](#); [Salais et al., 1986](#); [Topalove, 1994](#); [Foucault, 1975](#)). These procedures and policy process suggests deemphasized rights to universal access to income maintenance and emphasizes on selective compulsory, moralize, and individualized punitive model ([Fellowes & Rowe, 2004](#); [Gilbert, 2002](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#)) ([Jill, 2001](#)) as treatment of poverty in terms of correcting people personal problem that may be ineffective to reach all intended beneficiaries and exclude the most vulnerable in targeting benefits governance ([Gilbert, 2002](#); [Jhabvala & Standing, 2010](#); [Kidd & Athias, 2020](#); [Mkandawire, 2005](#); [Serrano-Pascual, 2007](#)) ([Marinis, 2009](#); [Ribar, 2014](#); [Bauman, 1998](#); [Franssen, 2003](#); [Holden, 2003](#); [Schram, 2000](#)). One possible reason could be the result of a shift in the nature of the problem being tackled where rather than being a fight against poverty, it is, now above all government fight against (welfare) dependency with a lack of transparency and solidarity, ethical standard, public value accountability and ineffective complex targeted programs, which may impair recipients of welfare, disabilities, and public/social assistance access to benefits, when looking at issues such as work protection and poverty reduction of third-country immigrants and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in targeting benefits eligibility governance institutional settings

However, several limitations need to be considered. The study, for instance, has been primarily concerned with Austria, Finland, and Czechia, which indicates a “whole-nation bias” ([Lijphart, 1971,1975](#)) and cannot be generalized to explain other countries leading to low external validity ([Lor, 2014](#); [Ragin, 1987](#)). Nevertheless, it may be generalized to a theory in the way scholars’ theory-generate findings from one case study to the other ([Yin, 2012](#)). And to some extent, the researcher faced a language barrier, as some of the documents were in Czech and Finnish languages but could use authorized official English translations and support from colleagues. The study appears to support the argument for a marginal adjustment and improvement in targeting benefits eligibility means-tested regulatory strategic governance in the ramification of the public and social assistance policy process and implementation, especially to regulate vulnerable people’s work protection and poverty reduction. Further research should concentrate on third-country immigrants’ and disadvantaged citizens’ personal experiences in the realm of targeting public and social assistance benefits eligibility policy ramifications for employment-related integration and poverty reduction policy decision-making and implementation.

In short, targeting benefits eligibility governance indicate a new form of paternalism and reciprocity with an administrative regulatory means-tested tool to target benefits that target autonomous responsibilities and labor market performance in times of neoliberal market-oriented approach to allocate scarce resources and administer third-country immigrants’ work protection and poverty reduction. If a lack of solidarity, transparency, and ethical standard in the design of eligibility criteria and effective functioning of targeting eligibility regimes persists,

problem of stigmatization, divisiveness, and political/social inequalities may prevail not only to hinder disadvantaged citizens' participation and inclusion but impair belongings, democratic values, economic prosperity, and equitable development in times of contemporary COVID-19 crisis-related resilience-building society.

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