Rethinking universalism: Older-age international migrants and social pensions in Latin America and the Caribbean

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This article criticises the social policy literature for equating universalism to the universal coverage of citizens. The current so-called ?universal? social protection systems guarantee social citizen rights, while the revisited truly universalism guarantees social human rights for everyone. Crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) is used to map and track the level of exclusiveness or inclusiveness into social pensions in the existing 30 social pension programmes on 28 Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. The article examines the various paths of eligibility requirements in social pensions conditioning three specific outcomes: (1) access for every older-age individual (truly universal), (2) access for every category of immigrant (no targeting by citizenship or residency) and (3) access for older-age immigrants with legal resident status (targeting by residency but not by citizenship). The research makes several contributions. First, it offers a useful inventory of the eligibility requirements for access to the 30 social pensions in LAC. Second, it proposes an analytical framework to redefine universalism after considering the migration-social policy nexus. Contrary to what the literature claims, there are no universal social pensions in the region. Third, the analysis indicates that only in two countries, Cuba and Jamaica, social pensions have immigrant-friendly targeting rules, requiring neither citizenship nor any length of residency to become a beneficiary. A total of 12 countries require citizenship and 24 of them a certain number of years of residency. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of social pensions are means tested. Finally, the csQCA allows identifying patterns of targeting mechanisms and is used to propose five exploratory regimes of inclusionary social pensions. The article calls for protected international mobility of the older-age population in the form of a truly universalistic system in which the entire aged population has the right to a social pension. Only then, countries would truly adhere to Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. © The Author(s) 2019.

Migration

non-contributory pensions

QCA

social policy

social protection

targeting

age determination

human rights

pension system

policy approach

policy implementation

social policy

welfare provision

article

Caribbean

citizenship

Cuba

human

human experiment

immigrant

insurance

Jamaica

pension

policy

resident

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Caribbean Islands

Latin America