The ambiguity of activation policies: How activation policies challenge gendered patterns of social citizenship

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1. Introduction

Social security has, since the writings of T.H. Marshall, been considered as a necessary precondition for the citizens’ social and political participation in the Western democracies. Social rights in this perspective complete the set of civil and political rights and constitute the core of what we call ‘social citizenship’. Of course, the access to full social citizenship in a given country has always been shaped in different ways for persons with different social roles and obligations, capacities and needs like e.g. men or women, migrants or natives, young or elderly and so on. Far from being universal and comprehensive, social rights may contribute to diminish inequalities but they also produce social structures in a society within a given national political context. The ‘activation turn' in social policy since the mid-90s, has brought crucial change to the systems of social security provision in most Western European countries as it emphasizes paid employment as major access condition to social security for all citizens. This change goes beyond what scholars can grasp in terms of allocation and re-distribution; it is resulting in a re-definition of the role of citizens in our societies, including the modes of state intervention.

Analysing change through the lense of ‘social citizenship' can make the scope and depth of this change visible. We need, however a more precise definition of what social citizenship might mean. Based on earlier concepts and integrating the feminist critique our paper aims at clarifying the concept of social citizenship, showing how it can be applied in empirical analysis of social policy change. We suggest using the term social citizenship regime which embraces both, aspects of substance as well as governance and we argue that both have to do with the citizen’s autonomy. As we will argue in the second section, the concept of autonomy offers a more complex and comprehensive horizon for assessing social policy outcomes, and therefore escapes the limited logic of economic utilization of a person’s capacities: Beside the citizens’ capacities and competencies, it addresses their relatedness and reflects individual, societal and political implications. And, unlike other concepts, the concept of autonomy is highly gender sensitive. In the third section we demonstrate how changes can be empirically assessed; here we derive three policy criteria from our analytical framework, namely the quality of social policy programs, the mechanisms of access and the degree of participation or commitment these programs allow for. The extract of seven country case studies (D, NL, UK, DK, N, IT, ES) allows to identify and illustrate institutional mechanisms which shape and change patterns of social citizenship for women and men respectively (section 3). On behalf of this roughly sketched illustration of national activation strategies we provide evidence that patterns of social citizenship at present undergo fundamental change in the sense that social inequalities are not attenuated but rather reinforced in many cases. This illustration
allows us to draw more general although preliminary conclusions about the way activation reforms change social citizenship regimes and affect gender relations as well.¹

2. Social Citizenship and Autonomy as a framework for interpreting welfare state change

2.1 Conceptual approach: A social citizenship regime

Quite early in the ‘golden age’ of the welfare state T. H. Marshall pointed to the very political character of social policy. The development of social rights in the twentieth century completed the set of civil and political rights that accrued to citizens within the context of the national state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since then social rights have been considered as a crucial precondition for citizens’ active participation in social and political life and, therefore, as constitutive elements of an active and democratic society (Marshall, 1963). Social citizenship may thus be defined as a set of civil, political and social rights, including all institutional devices which shape the social status of reference within a national context. In Western European capitalist societies, this has been the core worker status. The writings of T.H. Marshall still today represent a valuable starting point in our thinking about social citizenship, providing us, above all, with three basic ideas about the role of social policies which may help us today to understand ongoing change. It was firstly, pointed out most explicitly and basically that welfare state institutions represent a major source for the development of a social order. Marshall was interested in institutions, rules and regulations, but also institutionalized ‘feelings’ of affiliation and commitment. A main idea was that institutions constituted mechanisms of social integration, producing feelings of belonging or ‘membership’ but also providing different rights according to widely accepted principles, like performance or merit. Without explicitly referring to Marshall, Esping-Andersen (1990) relied on the same idea, that the Welfare State itself would be a source of social structure. The second crucial insight was that the equalizing effect social rights on market-driven distribution would not eliminate all social differences. Social rights were considered as key elements of social status, which itself integrates a bundle of rules, rights and norms (Otte 2003). Societies, structured along social statuses would allocate material goods and recognition in a more legitimate way than the market was able to do such that status differences would be considered as more just than class differences as an outcome of market processes. If the market society was based on the concept of contract, the welfare society relies on corrective state interventions into contractual relationships constructing social statuses. State intervention, thirdly, would provide itself an absolute and pre-defined basic cultural standard which enables citizens to participate in equal terms according to this collectively agreed standard. This does, in return require the commitment of the citizens’ who themselves do accept to fulfil commonly agreed duties. Committing him or herself to common values (e.g. working hard), is not equal to abdicate from one’s individual freedom but to fulfil one’s own responsibility towards ‘national plans’ in a society, as Marshall argued. Solidarity as a social bond would be based on the assessment that (a certain degree of) social equality should be a founding mechanism of welfare societies. In the first line, social citizenship deals with the substance of what a social state delivers. But the debate on social citizenship increasingly addresses the question of how the state provides its services and benefits. More recent research argues that social rights are not once-attained access mechanisms but rather parts of a complex (social) citizenship regime in which civil, political and social

¹ This article draws on the results of our collective volume "Activation and Labour Market Reforms in Europe: Challenges to Social Citizenship", published at Palgrave in 2011 (Betzel/Bothfeld 2011a). We are indebted to Jean-Claude Barbier, Bjoern Hvinden and Jane Jenson for valuable critique and comments.
rights interact with each other in governing social and political relations. Following to Jane Jenson (2007) we comprehend a social citizenship regime as a set of norms, institutional and procedural rules and regulations that shape the citizen’s life situation, her formal membership as well as her (subjective) ‘sense of belonging’ (Jenson 2007). Both are main aspects of a meaningful individual life: Formal membership embraces the access condition to (social and political) rights and status, and therefore represents the precondition for participation and the core of legitimate statehood. ‘Felt’ membership is a value in itself, and a source for developing a social and political identity. State intervention, especially in the social realm, is never neutral but expresses some normative idea about the State citizen relationship which can be more or less paternalistic or egalitarian. The degree of autonomous choice and opportunity to participate or more generally, the feeling of belonging, which the state concedes to its citizens - instead of prescribing in a general or detailed manner a specific behaviour or practices - depends very much on the form and intensity of state intervention. A particular attention should therefore be dedicated not only to the substantive policy goals but to the mode and instruments of regulation as well. In this view, the different kinds of rights appear inextricably interconnected with each other. Consequently, Marshall’s earlier conception of distinct families of rights needs to be replaced by the concept of a social citizenship regime in which solely the interaction of different kinds of rights, rules and instruments provides substantial and democratic participation. The issue is not to achieve social rights as opposed to economic, civil or political rights, but to guarantee a certain degree of autonomy which is reflected in the citizen’s well-being, social recognition and political integration.

2.2 Autonomy, the core of social citizenship

So in what terms can we measure whether or to what extent a social citizenship regime is changing due to policy reforms? How can we assess the outcome of policy change? We claim that formal membership, feelings of belonging and the relationship between the individual and the society all reflect the degree of a person’s autonomy. According to social theory, autonomy represents a normative concept which comprises a substantial as well as a regulatory dimension. The state provides for benefits, services or infrastructure which taken together offer a certain standard of living and context to the individual. But the State also intervenes into the citizens’ every day lives and thus affects social relationships and social statuses. Including the idea that state intervention by its nature cannot be neutral (Young, 1990), the concept of autonomy helps to grasp both, the enabling as well as the constraining character of social security provision. Autonomy is reflected in at least three dimensions of the individual’s life, the individual dimension, where the ‘sense of belonging’ is expressed as ‘affiliation’, the social dimension which denotes individuals’ relationship with other citizens, and finally a political dimension, which conceives the citizens as active participants in public life (see also Ben-Ishai, 2009; Dean, 2010). All three dimensions are sensitive for social diversity, including gender, ethnicity, age and so on (cf. figure 1).

The Individual dimension: The citizen’s feeling of affiliation

This first dimensions refers to the individual’s feeling of affiliation, being part of a community and being recognised and respected in its very original identity (Bothfeld 2008); this meets the above mentioned aspect of membership or ‘feeling of belonging’. One crucial social policy objective has always been to compensate the individual’s vulnerability facing market forces, or the protection against exploitation or oppression. Accordingly, social policy research addresses concepts like social (in-)equality, patterns of redistribution or poverty within a population in order to assess the degree of social protection provided by the State. In order to make the citizen’s perspective more visible, researchers are also interested in the satisfaction of needs as a policy goal (see e.g. Dean 2010), or the citizen’s well-being, general life satisfaction, happiness or fear (see e.g. Boehnke 2006).
A more comprehensive understanding of social citizenship requires that we comprehend citizens as willful individuals. And, as feminist comparative welfare state research has taught us over the last two decades, we have to be aware of the diversity of life situations and individual capabilities. Martha Nussbaum suggests to adopt the capability approach which has been formulated by Sen (Nussbaum 2002). We share very much the basic normative idea in the writings of Amartya Sen, that people can (and shall) be enabled to fulfill social roles and tasks for which they may opt (e.g. being employed or becoming a mother), despite their different starting points and that the recognition of diversity requires the provision of minimum standards of living and infrastructure. Overall, the capability approach provides valuable insights, about the necessity to define basic goods and to individualize social provision in response to social diversity (Goerne 2010: 12). It falls short however, as it does not – besides its implicit plea for the recognition of difference - address issues like social power and hierarchy in capitalist societies (see the following sub-sections). And, from its main normative goal, to enable people, we may read a certain functionalistic bias at least if the ‘functionings’ or tasks people should be able to fulfill are limited to the citizens’ capacity to do productive (paid) work. Although this fits well with the basic idea of labour market activation, the logic of economic utilization of people’s labour force represents an unnecessary and unacceptable reduction of the conception of human potential, as aspects like creativity, emotions or morality and ethics remain unconsidered as driving factors for the development of societies. According to a democratic understanding of the concept of autonomy, as has been pointed out by feminist researchers, all citizens should be enabled to develop a willful and unique identity without primarily considering their role or task but to feel affiliated within a given social context.

The societal dimension: mutual relationships and the concept of status

Our second dimension addresses the inter-citizens relationships including aspects like mutuality and recognition. As we have argued above, the core category of social status comprises substantial as well as ideational and normative aspects and mutual recognition between the citizens might be considered as precondition for the institutionalization of specific needs and expectations others than those which are traditionally regulated in employment societies. To recognize diverse needs as equally legitimate requires ‘reflexivity’ on the individual as well as on the collective level, i.e. the capability to question generally acknowledge needs and norms as well as the willingness to establish generous and solidly mutual relationships.

Feminist research has demonstrated that reflexivity cannot be taken for granted but that recognition of needs would reflect social relations of power and hierarchy. Nancy Fraser (1997) was one of the first authors in social policy research who emphasized – beside questions of redistributions – the need for recognition of social activities like caring for dependants. She argued that interdependence between people was a general human condition and that the fight for recognition resulted from a cultural understanding of justice. Lister (2007) pointed out the principal tension between citizenship’s inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of a social citizenship regime and explored the developments of an inclusive version of citizenship that would be based on certain values like justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity (ibid., 50). Arguing against a merely economic (redistributive) view of citizenship she draws on cultural understandings of citizenship, that emphasize recognition and identity

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2 Very roughly spoken the capability approach distinguishes the individual’s resources (commodities), her potential or competences (capabilities, in Sen’s terms) and the roles and tasks an individual fulfills within a social context (functionings). For a detailed analysis and possible applications in social policy analysis see Goerne 2010.

as essential, embracing “the right to be ‘different’, to re-value stigmatised identities” (Pakulski 1997; ibid., 51) and “the demand for cultural respect” (Stevenson 2003; ibid., 52). Whereas this strand of debate is largely rooted in international development studies, the (earlier) feminist contribution to the citizenship debate is strongly linked to the argument of recognizing diversity, claiming “an ethos of pluralization” (Young 2000, ibid., 52; see also Hobson/Lister 2002). This mainly refers to the issue of women’s unpaid caring work and the gendered division of domestic labour and time which poses a challenge to the universalist idea of citizenship. Lister thus proposes the idea of a “differentiated universalism in which the achievement of the universal is contingent upon attention to difference” (Lister 1997/2003; ibid., 52). Such a “universal promise” (ibid., 53) comprises dignity and respect, equal rights and voice of people living in poverty, going much beyond redistributive politics. Sevenhuijsen’s (1998) ‘Ethics of Care’ approach asks more profoundly what the exact nature of the relationship between care and citizenship is. Unpaid care work may be obstacle as well as resource for women’s citizenship, thus emerging as a source of tension and ambivalence. Hence a dominant strand of the feminist debate “contends that care should be acknowledged as an expression of social citizenship responsibilities and should be accorded equal value with paid work” (Lister, 2007, 56).

If support for care work was more institutionalized, i.e. by regulating the access to services or benefits, extending full social security coverage to persons who do care work etc., those persons would gain a status which could be comparable to the status of paid work. Consequently, the inequality between the status of reference (the core worker) and persons without a status (carers mainly count as ‘non-employed’) would be reduced.

*The political dimension: Realising Participation and Commitment*

Our third dimension, a person’s role as social and political citizen and an active participant in ‘public affairs’ corresponds very nicely with the main idea of activation which conceives citizens as co-producers of welfare in the processes of implementation of public measures and programs. Basing on a political understanding of democracy, the concept autonomy takes a much broader perspective. We assume that the very relationship between the state and its citizens is marked by some form of commitment to common values and the acceptance of duties toward the community. We agree with Marshall that the commitment to a common ‘national plan’ is not equal to the abdication of personal freedom but with the acceptance of a common binding moral and institutional structure. It is true that some form of conditionality (to take duties, to respect rules, to be responsible for oneself) exists in every welfare state (Dean 2010: 148) but it may differ in terms of extent, currency and timing of mutual debt (Goodin 2002). The State-citizen-relationship, in any case, is bilateral, and a fine balance between each sphere of responsibility is not easy to define. A typical gender issue in this dimension is that women are unilaterally bound - by morally founded expectations - to provide care work, without rights or entitlements being allotted to them in return. In many countries activation policies have changed the rules for how to deal with persons who care for small children, but they mostly impose duties or introduce exemption rules for these groups; they rarely institutionalise options of choice or specific programs for them. The crucial question in this dimension is whether State intervention follows a paternalistic mode imposing a specific behaviour (e.g. to return to employment as quickly as possible) or whether the State – basing on the insight that needs and capabilities are diverse - aims at providing options and choice proceeding from the goal to enhance the citizens’ every-day life.

More than in the other two dimensions, it depends on the mode of how the programs are implemented and the instruments and techniques being applied, which determine whether people feel respected and encouraged to participate or constrained and dominated by public authority. The comprehensibility and transparency of rules and processes may be equally important as the citizen’s opportunity of co-
decision. And further, participation and commitment needs to be realised on all levels, on the individual (micro-) level as well as on the political (macro-) level, where policy reforms are debated and negotiated publicly. More than in the individual or social dimension these are the procedural rules and regulations which are at stake.

### 2.3 Assessing outcomes of policy reforms: The policy principles

Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual framework and gives examples for the respective institutional mechanisms and tools used in activation policies that may have an impact on autonomy and gender relations.\(^4\)

Figure 1: The threefold concept of the citizen’s autonomy – a taxonomy – with reference to gender implications of activation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTONOMY</th>
<th>Individual dimension</th>
<th>Social dimension</th>
<th>Political dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The individual’s disposition</td>
<td>Identity/ Affiliation (‘sense of belonging’)</td>
<td>Mutuality/ Reflexivity</td>
<td>Commitment and Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective of public intervention</td>
<td>Protection from humiliation/ oppression/ poverty (justice)</td>
<td>Protection from non-respect, unfair treatment (equality)</td>
<td>Protection from social exclusion and marginalisation (integration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Policy criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaping the QUALITY of benefits and services</th>
<th>Regulating ACCESS and social STATUS</th>
<th>Encouraging PARTICIPATION and COMMITMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing ‘generous’/poor social security benefits and services (e.g. care infrastructure)</td>
<td>Opening/constraining access to universal benefits and services, requiring more/less family subsidiarity and allowing for an independent household</td>
<td>Enforcement, hierarchical attribution or (implicit/explicit) contracts, providing for co-determination (e.g. programmes targeting immigrant women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting high/low quality of labour market integration (more or less gender-stereotypical)</td>
<td>Constrained access for certain groups (e.g. mothers of young children) according to client-segmentation procedures</td>
<td>Governance modes of activation, granting more or less transparency &amp; comprehensibility of rules and reliability of expectable support (e.g. discretion of frontline-staff allows for gender-stereotypical practices)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own depiction.

We argue that the increase or reduction of autonomy in all three dimensions might be affected by social policies which may change according to three policy criteria, the quality of benefits and services, the rules which define the access conditions to benefits and services and therefore contribute to institutionalise statuses and finally the rules concerning the mode of participation which all shape the specific activation regime.

We cannot identify and measure of course, a complete set of factors which affect the citizen’s autonomy what would need to integrate normative and moral change (which may produce stigmatising effects) as well as changes in other domains of the persons’ every day life (e.g. individual misfortune or other context conditions). But we can make the attempt to assess the contribution of policy change on the basis of this differentiated and analytical approach as we consider that policies do affect individuals in all these three dimensions. In the following section we provide an empirical illustration of the impact of activation policies might unfold on the (gendered) patterns of social citizenship. Our hypothesis is, of

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\(^4\) More examples drawn from our empirical case studies are provided in Table 1 in the Annex.
course, that activation policies have an ambiguous, if not detrimental effect on the citizen’s autonomy in all three dimensions.

3. Challenges to the (gendered) social citizenship patterns

We have argued above, that our three dimensions of individual autonomy translate into three policy criteria, the quality principle, the regulation of access and the principle of participation. In this section we summarize some essential empirical findings of the country case studies of Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and United Kingdom along our three policy criteria and point out the ambiguity of activation policies for the citizen’s autonomy.5

3.1 Quality of provision

We considered the quality dimension as being close to the very substance of social rights in the sense of T.H. Marshall as well as Esping-Andersen, de-commodifying workers from the labour market. Activation strategies are ambiguous as they strengthen work incentives by lowering benefits or narrowing the access to them, but may also introduce new opportunities and instruments of support for unemployed or non-employed people.

The main normative idea concerning labour market deregulation which was usually reinforced with the implementation of activation policies was to make labour markets more flexible in order to lower the entry barriers for non-employed persons and to reduce long-term unemployment. It was partly (for instance in Germany), explicitly pointed out that the aim was to expand the low-wage sector. In many countries, governments supported the expansion of atypical employment such as fixed-term work (especially Spain), marginal work exempted from social security contributions (especially Germany) or temporary and temporary agency work (especially Italy and Spain). Dismissal protection has largely remained untouched, except in Spain. Consequently, the quality of working conditions for atypical workers has deteriorated, causing higher shares of in-work poverty and cumulated risks such as discontinuous employment, limited career prospects and diminished access to social security coverage. However, the negative effects are not limited to the atypical workers alone but also affect the general standard of protection. In Germany, for instance, this strategy is causing an increasing pressure upon overall working conditions in terms of wage levels and growing insecurity for the core force. It therefore appears consistent that many EU member states have introduced minimum wage regulation (as, for example, the UK, France, Spain).

The deregulation of labour law is complemented by a more indirect deregulation strategy – e.g. by the redefinition of standards for ‘acceptable’ employment or activities the unemployed have to fulfill. Unemployed in most countries have – after a certain period of time – to accept working conditions below the once-attained level of pay, educational attainment or commuting times. The protection of the educational level has been dismissed in all our countries, even in the originally status-preserving ‘conservative’ states like Germany and France. On the contrary, mechanisms to control active job search and sanctioning rules as well as working obligations have been reinforced. For certain groups (lone mothers in the UK, spouses and elderly unemployed in Germany, immigrant women in Denmark) exemption rules have been gradually dismissed so that the pressure to take up any form of paid employment has been increased. Jobs that are characterized by low pay and high instability are even

5 Empirical findings are extracted from Graziano (2011) for Italy, Perez and Laparra (2011) for Spain, Wright (2011) for the UK, Breidahl (2011) for Denmark, Van Berkel (2011) for the Netherlands, Beraud and Eydoux (2011) for France, Kildal and Nilssen (2011) for Norway and Betzelt and Bothfeld (2011) for Germany. Gender implications are discussed in more depth in Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt (2011) as well as in Betzelt and Bothfeld (2011b).
subsidized or promoted by active labour policy in some countries. This is true for marginal employment or non-waged work opportunities in Germany or subsidized contracts, mostly fixed-term, part-time and low-paid in France. All these mechanisms institutionalize new (lower) standards, which in the long run might lead to a levelling of the regular employment standards and to increase the pressure on regular employment.

It is also in the area of active labour promotion policies that we find a partial decrease of quality. Instead of offering social assistance recipients in the Netherlands and Germany a set of instruments or programs that support a more sustainable labour market integration, rather ineffective training programs were installed. For those groups categorized as ‘hard-to-place’ on the labour market the situation is often particularly unsatisfying, as more targeted education and training, or sufficient and affordable childcare infrastructure are missing. This is particularly detrimental for the employment of mothers. And, sometimes physical or psychological limitations are not taken into account in the activation process.

The provision of a more individualized support responding to individual and diverse needs (see also van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007) would indicate a good-quality level of support. In many cases mechanisms of ‘client segmentation’ organized according to the logic of cost-efficiency reveal rather contrary effects (as observed in Germany, the Netherlands, and France). The selectiveness of allocating activation measures according to these mechanisms may be gendered, as the German case shows, when combined with stereotypical activation practices along traditional lines of labour division in the household: Here, women, especially when they are unemployed non-beneficiaries or carers for young children (younger than 3) are excluded from activation measures as they are perceived as too distant from the labour market and therewith the cost-benefit ratio of activation measures is seen as not efficient. Thus, exemption rules, although they shall ‘protect’ certain groups may lead to discrimination and exclusion.

Concerning the present level of protection secured by income maintenance schemes, we find a uniform tendency in all the countries studied. The level of benefits provided by the insurance schemes has remained stable, but the access to benefit reception has been narrowed (cf. the following section) and the benefit duration has been shortened in many cases so that larger portions of the unemployed or non-employed have to rely on means-tested tax-financed schemes. Due to existing gender inequalities of both volume and quality of labour market participation and pay, this shift particularly affects women as their access to contributions-based insurance schemes has thus become even narrower than it had been before. Women now have to rely more often on means-tested schemes which increases economic family dependency and results in benefit losses of women cohabiting with a wage-earning spouse. The sub-protective welfare states of Italy and Spain still lack of any kind of sufficient public security provision, which means that those unemployed or non-employed without insurance entitlements, in particular young people, have no source of social security provision except from their family.

Considering activation from the angle of quality demonstrates that activation strategies, due to the priority they attribute to (any kind of) paid employment, are basically conflicting with the social protection of citizens in terms of providing options and free choice. How could the protection of the individual’s autonomy, i.e. providing some leeway for planning one’s own labour market reintegration, be guaranteed if unemployment periods are supposed to be as short as possible also if a quick reintegration might be not sustainable such that economic independence cannot be significantly enhanced? In any case, the shift from individual entitlements to contributions-based unemployment benefits towards means-tested basic income schemes which can be observed in a couple of countries entails a strong control of employment behaviour. In many cases, activation policies determine a specific model of participation, understood as full-time paid employment for all adult members of society,
irrespective of their individual preferences, needs or other responsibilities, like care duties e.g. Such strategies ignore the empirical diversity of individual identities and needs.

### 3.2 Regulation of access and status

Changes to the structure of social statuses indicate a shift between different social groups as well as a change of social power relations within a society. As the access to a social status predetermines the citizen’s ‘corridor’ for her individual action in terms of life planning, those changes may hurt the autonomy of individuals and social groups. They might be considered as welcome and legitimate however if they enlarge the formerly privileged access to a status to larger parts of the population. Social structure and changes of the status order might be caused by a) mechanisms that redefine the core worker status, b) mechanisms that shift the boundaries between different categories of unemployed and non-employed persons, and c) mechanisms that define new (administrative) categories and groups that eventually may result in the establishment of new social statuses.

One intention of direct or indirect strategies of labour market deregulation was, apart from promoting more flexible and less costly labour supply for firms, to open access to some kind of employment status for the growing number of (long-term) unemployed in order to make them economically independent from benefits. However, these strategies had obvious drawbacks as the growing number of atypical workers now experience far lower employment standards than core workers. As transitions into ‘regular’ employment (with a professional status, a permanent full-time contract with appropriate pay) are rare in many countries, the chance to attain a higher employment status is rather limited. The German, and particularly the Spanish, case studies illustrate the extremely detrimental effects for atypical workers, as there is an increase of segmentation rather than an equalizing effect. The Italian and Spanish employment systems clearly experience a further ‘dualization’ of their employment regimes. In these countries, a growing gap can be observed between those groups characterized as ‘insiders’ (male core workers, pensioners) on the one hand, and ‘outsiders’ (women, youth, migrants) who are neither included in welfare provisions nor in regular and self-sustainable employment, on the other. The problem is aggravated by the sub-protective unemployment security schemes in these countries – as social assistance schemes are lacking in Spain and in Italy at least on the national level – such that the share of unemployed who are not covered at all continuously increases. Moreover, the lack of public social services (especially care facilities for children and the elderly), as well as education and training for ‘outsider’ groups, constitute considerable barriers to labour market participation that would allow upward mobility towards a higher employment status. Hence, activation strategies in these countries resulted in a deterioration of the status of ‘outsider’ groups, which was additionally reinforced by the fact that the economic crisis disproportionately affected atypical workers.

The polarization between two kinds of employment statuses is, however, just one side of the story; the other regards the erosion of the core worker status itself. Even in the conservative welfare states like Germany or France, where the definition of ‘acceptable’ work is no longer status-securing, and where ‘making work pay’ strategies subsidize atypical jobs, the core worker status is increasingly exposed to erosion. Enlarging the definition of ‘acceptable work’ or shortening the duration periods of insurance benefits, accelerates the transitions to tax-financed systems, erodes general wage conditions by lowering the reservation wage, and decreases long-term income security and career perspectives for employees. On the individual level this may cause a downward spiral and an irreversible loss of professional and social status. The fear of unemployment is not solely due to an eventual loss of income, but it is associated with the menace of a once-attained social status, including qualification, income and

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6 For the concept of dualization see Palier/Thelen 2010.
social protection within the lifetime perspective. On the collective level, it becomes increasingly difficult for workers and their representatives to defend a decent level of pay and protection.

The already mentioned redesign of social security schemes, as well as certain mechanisms of active labour promotion, also affect the distinction between different categories of unemployed and non-employed. In nearly all countries (except the sub-protective southern states) the formerly distinct statuses of registered unemployed and non-employed groups such as lone mothers, non-employed spouses, the elderly and people with health troubles, are now blurring. One mechanism causing this is that the formerly distinct statuses of registered unemployed and non-employed groups have been merged, that is, they are no longer distinct administrative categories but are all seen as ‘employable’ citizens. Being the object of activation efforts does not follow from the person’s own action or demand (e.g. declaring herself/himself as available for employment) but from a hierarchical and authoritarian act of declaring (or not) someone as principally ‘employable’. The previously recognized social status of the non-employed groups – like, for example, lone parents in the UK or in France – has been abandoned by introducing work obligations or withdrawing group-specific social benefits.

In Germany the levelling of status differences mainly resulted from the abolishment of the unemployment assistance scheme that preserved the former employment status on the one hand, and the merger of long-term unemployment assistance and social assistance for employable persons on the other. Instead, a new means-tested social security regime, the basic allowance scheme, was introduced. Unlike in Germany, in France the second-tier scheme for insured employed has been maintained. But in general it is true that tax-financed benefit schemes have become more important in relation to insurance schemes, which goes along with the enhancement of the principle of subsidiarity realized by stricter means-tests, strengthened family maintenance obligations (Germany) or household-related employment subsidies (France). All of these changes are clearly deepening existing gender inequalities due to gender pay gaps – as the man mostly earns more than the woman, the unemployed woman cohabiting with an earning spouse more often than in the contrary constellation fails the means-test and is denied social benefits (see section 3.1). The same is true in the case of household-related employment subsidies of which men stand to benefit more than women due to their higher wages. Another side effect in the new German regulation is that the newly introduced legal construct of the ‘community of needs’ in the means-tested unemployment benefit scheme connects spouses’ employment status (and behaviour) to each other, increasing mutual dependence between partners.

While the boundaries between the labour market and those most distant from it have been removed due to a re-categorisation of the status of being unemployed the distinction between these groups and the ‘upper end’ of the unemployed has rather been reinforced, as the access to unemployment insurance schemes and the maintenance of this status over time have been made more difficult. This status-segmentation comes with different forms of income benefits, different rules of access to active labour promotion schemes and different requirements of what kind of employment has to be accepted. While, in Germany, former social assistance recipients have at least formally gained access to nearly all types of active labour promotion measures, insured and non-insured unemployed remain institutionally separated from each other. Unlike in Germany, the French government (as earlier, the UK and Denmark) has introduced a new single agency, which is responsible for the attribution of employment programmes to all unemployed in order to end the double structure of employment services. However, these institutional innovations (‘pooling’ not-employed persons, fusion of relevant agencies) are undermined by allocation practices such as client-segmentation techniques (see above).

Strikingly, the definition of new distinctive target groups for activation – like young unemployed (in France, Germany or the Netherlands) or immigrant women (in the Danish case) or long-term social assistance recipients or incapacitated persons in Norway – is ambiguous. Targeted active labour
promotion, such as specific supportive measures and mechanisms like individual agreements or contracts, might indeed be helpful to assist non-employed people to enter the labour market. But they often include much stricter sanctioning rules and hence constrain individual personal living conditions. For instance, in Denmark have been introduced specific rules which indirectly target at immigrant women, requiring a certain volume of paid employment in order to maintain social assistance; this has had a highly ambiguous effects as both, the number of female homemakers retiring from the labour market (at the cost of losing benefits) and of those actually entering the labour market, have increased. To summarize, activation policies have affected the status order in different ways. Firstly, the upward mobility could not be increased, as the (gendered) segmentation of labour markets has rather increased and the single segments display a low degree of permeability. For those workers at the lower end, this strategy did not enhance their individual or social autonomy at all, on the contrary, atypical workers found themselves often trapped in precarious dead-end employment. Secondly, the ‘pooling’ of all non-employed persons not entitled to insurance benefits, their declaration as unemployed, as well as the new definition of subgroups of unemployed (young, migrants, persons with physical constraints) and their attribution to some kind of special ‘treatment’ may have inclusive effects in the best case scenario. But the abrogation of previously legitimate statuses (for example, non-employed lone mothers) and the strengthening of work obligations clearly constrain the room for individual choice.

The administrative and statistical definition of employment statuses is not necessarily the stepping stone to the construction of a new social status, but the de-legitimization of social statuses outside gainful employment, and the rising stigmatization of groups dependent on means-tested benefits possibly indicate the emergence of new inferior social statuses. Together with the increasing pressure on the individual job-seekers and existing employment standards this creates a ‘structural dilemma’: The resulting levelling of wages and employment stability undermines the overall goal of activation, namely to achieve economic independence, and deepens the (gendered) labour market segmentation instead of broadening social inclusion through paid employment.

3.3 Participation and commitment

The main objective of activation policies was to enhance the individual responsibility, the citizens’ ability to cooperate in the implementation processes of public support and to include the whole adult population into this strategy. This policy objective implies a tension between the need to standardize the ‘treatment’ of a growing number of people to be activated, normally categorized into certain ‘match groups’, on the one hand, and the necessity to meet individual needs according to the citizens’ personal circumstances and preferences.\(^7\) How can individual choice and participation in the activation process actually be realized, and to what extent the quality of activation services meets individual needs – even more under the condition of always restricted public resources? New Public Management instruments were introduced to attain more efficiency by changing the individuals’ behaviour. Due to the declared necessity of cost containment, the introduction of such new governance modes and instruments are changing the very objective and substance of state intervention: Instead of compensating for social disadvantages the major objective has become to bring people into employment. The norm of efficiency overrules other goals bringing the cost-benefit ratio as major allocation mechanism for activation measures to the fore. Those new governance modes often result into problematic outcomes for the

\(^7\) For instance, earlier research has emphasized the need to develop ‘reflexive’ strategies, which respond to the people’s needs and wishes (van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007).
citizen’s autonomy in terms of participation and commitment, arising on the micro-, meso- and macro-level of the State-citizen-relationship:

The dimension of participation and commitment on the individual, micro-level indicates, first, how the addressees of policies can choose and co-decide about their contribution to get re-employed, for example, by opting for participation in specific programs or by actively searching for jobs. But in many cases, the relevant rules regarding the individual’s rights and duties are not sufficiently transparent or comprehensible. The fact that people are informed about their rights and entitlements as well as about their duties is an indispensable precondition for cooperation. Particularly those groups that previously were not targeted by active labour market programmes - lone parents, immigrants, incapacitated people or not insured persons – are concerned by this. Intransparency and lack of comprehensibility is due to several reasons; on the one hand legal rules might be unclear and too complicated, even for those administrating them (for example, the many rules regulating the means-tested unemployment benefits in Germany). On the other hand, the shift of responsibilities for the implementation of activation programmes to the local (or regional) level and the increase of discretionary space for frontline staff results in a low degree of certainty and reliability; thus citizens do not know what to expect from the agencies. This phenomenon is explicitly addressed in the Dutch case study, but observable also in Denmark (with regard to immigrants), the United Kingdom, Germany and France. The large discretionary space of the frontline staff raises another particular risk as it allows for gender-stereotypical practices of counseling and job-placements, as German evaluation research reveals (IAB et al. 2009; Betzelt/Bothfeld 2011b).

Second, problems may arise on the meso-level between the ‘activating’ institution’s frontline staff and the citizen: Due to de-centralization and ‘localization’ of activation policies there is a great variance of how they are specifically spelled out and how exactly the individuals’ rights and duties are implemented; this may vary between regions, even municipalities, and single frontline workers whose discretionary space has considerably been widened. The contractualization of the relationship between state agencies and unemployed citizens (mostly long-term unemployed or ‘hard-to-place’), which is a typical feature of the new governance modes, might provide more transparency and reliability. But the findings from Norway indicate that even within relatively focused and comprehensive contractual arrangements, the citizens’ wishes and preferences are not necessarily met – due to the standardization of offered programs, the latent menace of losing benefits and the still structural asymmetric power relation. Similarly critical assessments of such contractual instruments are reported from France and Germany.

On the societal, macro-level, participation and commitment refer to the degree of acceptance of policies and political and social consensus, or alternatively ‘defection’ which may come along with political protest and opposition in the process of decision-making and implementation. Certainly, the normative idea that paid employment represents the main access to social and political participation might be widely shared, as well as the recognition that activating strategies require a high degree of commitment and cooperation from the addressees. But what is often seen critical by the citizens is that activation strategies operate largely supply-side oriented by de-regulating the labour market, individualising the problem and overburdening the individuals with responsibility for the fact of being unemployed. Deregulation of the labour markets is additionally problematic, as it contributes to undermine industrial relations in general as the increase of the numbers of atypical workers diminishes the potential for unionized workers like it is the case in Italy and Germany. In Spain trade unions have been alerted by such trends and political conflict has welled up, with several general strikes against these labour market reforms, resulting in ‘softening’ some of them. In France, also, political conflict has arisen concerning labour market flexibilization through fixed-term contracts for young employees, which resulted in the withdrawal of the reform project. In Germany, the labour market reforms raised political conflict and
have resulted in the scission of the leftist party from the social democratic party and, hence, a fundamental change of the German party system. At the present we can observe a huge wave of protest of those mainly young people in Spain, France the UK and elsewhere, who feel not solely excluded but de-coupled from any chance of labour market participation and status attainment. Those present issues overlay a structural gender bias, which consist in the fact that alternative forms of societal participation or contribution – providing care for children or elderly parents e.g. – are not yet sufficiently recognized. In fact, at least in Germany the pattern of reciprocity is still redefined on the basis unilaterally, without being sufficiently based on political consensus or being accompanied by substantial citizens’ agreement. This misrecognition is in contrast to the objectives of activation as the lack of affordable and good public care infrastructure keep women from fully participating in the labour market. Activation strategies are often not sufficiently coordinated with related policy fields like family policies.

Concerning the issue of participation and commitment, an ‘implementation dilemma’ emerges in several respects. First, the need for tailor-made services and benefits on the one hand may conflict with the maintenance of more reliable and transparent standardized programs on the other, which would help to avoid the risk of arbitrary and discriminating practices. Second, the universalisation of the Adult Worker norm entails a range of (costly) ‘enabling’ services to increase individual employability and to remove obstacles that hinder people to take up a job. The fiscal burden which would result from this, conflicts with the declared necessity of cost-containment. Related to this is, third, the need to coordinate the activation strategy with other policy fields in order to achieve an institutional framework that sets consistent and not contradictory incentives. In short, activation strategies are complex and costly. The biased emphasis on the constraining character of activation policies may have quite reverse effects of decreasing rather than increasing the individuals’ autonomy.

This empirical sketch of a activation policies in eight Western European countries demonstrates that activation policies are per se ambiguous as they always have the potential to both enhance or constrain individual autonomy. This is true also with regard to ambiguous, and partly clearly negative, effects on the gendered patterns of State-citizen relationships. We have substantiated that institutional mechanisms introduced with activation policies tend to:

- reduce the quality and generosity of benefits, thereby often strengthening family subsidiarity and becoming neo-paternalistic as they attempt to regulate individual behaviour;
- undermine existing structures of social relations, like the labour market status, but often without enhancing gender equality, rather strengthening old and creating new social divides through expanded work obligations according to the Adult Worker norm but at the same eroding the employment standards in terms of pay, dismissal protection, social security etc.; they may also undermine social relations between the adult members of households by increasing mutual economic dependencies through required family subsidiarity;
- apply new governance modes and instruments, attempting to steer individual behaviour, but realizing this according to the logic of cost-efficiency as major allocation mechanism for activation measures; this mechanism tends to further disadvantage vulnerable groups (such as, e.g. lone mothers) as they needed more and specific support.

4. Conclusions

Activation policies are to be interpreted as part of a deeper welfare state change in which the role of citizens is redefined according to the Adult Worker Norm. The concept of social citizenship regime
allows examining the change of substance as well as the governance modes in labour market policies. The observable changes induced by activation policies are reflected in three typical dilemmas:

- **the paternalism dilemma**: activation in labour market policies constrains individual choice, if the required full employment as a one-fits-all solution ignores individual preferences and choices. This is particularly true for persons with care responsibilities which cannot be completely defamilialized.

- **the structural dilemma**: supply-side oriented, strictly individualised activation approaches ignore structural labour market problems and often result in eroding employment standards and low job quality. Deregulation policies rather reduce than enhance the chances for (sustainable) economic independence of workers, for job-holders.

- **the implementation dilemma**: activation is a complex and costly policy strategy if it is consistently applied on the whole adult population, if high-quality individualized services to enhance individual employability are implemented and if it is consistently coordinated with other policy fields, esp. related to families, to avoid inconsistent incentive structures. For reasons of cost-containment policy makers usually agree on partial reforms and standardized programs or the introduction of managerial instruments which in return bring efficiency in the fore instead of good integration results.

These tensions and dilemmas are answered in different ways by governments according to path-dependent contextual settings in each country. However, as a preliminary result we can point out that the impact of labour market activation on the citizen’s autonomy tends to be more detrimental than enhancing it – indeed a paradox that stands in sharp contrast to the promise of activation policies. Accordingly, their implications for gender relations are not necessarily positive either, as activation policies undermine quality standards and affect social security provision for all and make the realization of individual life courses more difficult. Activation policies further affect the given social status structure but without leading to more inclusiveness or equality; instead, there is a growing diversity of employment forms that are not equally recognised, prolonging old social divides (e.g. along gender) as well as creating new ones and, possibly even increasing familialising effects. And finally, new governance modes aim at steering the individual behaviour of individuals instead of increasing their freedom of choice.

The concept of social citizenship as it has been formulated by T.H. Marshall advocated social rights as a necessary complement to civil and political rights, which both had become main pillars in Western democratic industrial states. Today, the debate about social rights has become strangely de-politicized, detached from the political and civil character of public policy; social policy making rather appears as a technical question of how to re-distribute increasingly scarce resources. To keep in mind that social policy intervention has an effect on the social structure, status order and power relations, leads us to redefine civil and political rights as indispensable elements of social policy programs.

Thinking about how to encourage citizens to participate more actively and to avoid paternalistic treatment requires a more fundamental reform of our policy toolkit: Increasing transparency, enhancing information policies, inventing mechanisms of participation in implementation and decision-making processes, formulating new rights to objection, or introducing new entitlements appear to be small measures but could unfold significant effects.

**References:**


Annex: Table: Exemplary findings from the country case studies on the impact of activation on social citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General policy trends and instruments / mechanisms (output)</th>
<th>Examples for institutional mechanisms introduced with activation policies</th>
<th>Impact on social citizenship (outcome)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour market regulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>QUALITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deregulation of labour markets</td>
<td>Germany: de- and re-regulation of rules for atypical employment (marginal work, temporary agency work, fixed-term, part-time work) Re-definition of ‘acceptable’ jobs’ (no protection of pay level or occupational status; mobility)</td>
<td>increasing share of unstable working careers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>pressure on general working conditions</td>
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<td>rising problem of in-work poverty of some forms of ‘atypical’ employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain: promotion of temporary contracts; deregulation of dismissal protection re-regulation policies to promote stable contracts</td>
<td>high incidence of unstable working careers and in-work poverty</td>
<td>more pronounced distinction between different categories of migrants</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>increasing precariousness for atypical workers (pay, unemployment risks)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>growing gap between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (dualization)</td>
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<td>ALMP (labour promotion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restraint of general access, targeting and shift in profile of instruments, specific employment subsidies, decentralisation</td>
<td>Denmark requirement for (female) immigrants to fulfil a minimum hours of paid work</td>
<td>lack of quality criteria leads to unclear employment effects</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>improvements of gender equality doubtful as many women become homemakers</td>
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<td>UK incremental increase of work obligations for lone mothers, but still high costs of childcare</td>
<td>persisting barriers to employment leads to financial hardship among lone mothers</td>
<td>loss of recognized social status for carers (misrecognition, stigmatising effect)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>pressure and constraints undermine working conditions</td>
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<td>NL: broader definition of ‘acceptable’ work and abolition of national regulation on activation but autonomy of municipalities result in budget cuts of activation services</td>
<td>unclear effects, but probably less quality-oriented activation services (cost-efficiency, standardisation)</td>
<td>selection according to employability causes creaming effect for hard-to-place unemployed</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>hard-to-place clients are served the least</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>France</strong></td>
<td>Increase of employment subsidies to stimulate labour demand (targeting young, low-skilled, long-term unemployed) and reinforced jobseeker programs by contractualisation</td>
<td>- Low quality of subsidised employment, increase of atypical jobs&lt;br&gt;- Reinforcement of labour market segmentation, esp. along sex&lt;br&gt;- Lowering of employment status&lt;br&gt;- Blurred status between unemployed and non-employed&lt;br&gt;- Protest movement of (young) unemployed, but not yet politically recognized / solicited to contribute to policy deliberation&lt;br&gt;- Contractual relationships with unclear effects on true participation</td>
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<td><strong>Norway</strong></td>
<td>Use of contracts as a tool for long-term social assistance recipients and incapacitated people, tightening job search obligations</td>
<td>- Low quality of activation &amp; training measures due to high caseloads and lack of resources in local agencies&lt;br&gt;- Effect of lacking resources: frontline workers concentrate on most demanding clients&lt;br&gt;- Definition of new target groups ambiguous: recognition of need to support but delegitimising status of non-employed&lt;br&gt;- Asymmetrical relationships without effective participation though officially recognized as important&lt;br&gt;- Participation more seen as a training method than to enhance autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Denmark</strong></td>
<td>‘Start assistance’ targeting immigrants providing lower benefits for this delimited group</td>
<td>- Financial hardship, increased poverty risk&lt;br&gt;- Strong constraint on individual behaviour according to Danish idea of gender equality&lt;br&gt;- Defining specific new group status (indirect discrimination)&lt;br&gt;- Labour market integration or retirement into private life</td>
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<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td>Restraint of access conditions and shortening of benefit duration in the insurance scheme, strengthening of access conditions (community of needs, means-test, individual behaviour of beneficiaries of Unemployment Benefit II)</td>
<td>- Principle of poverty avoidance becomes dominating rationality for majority of unemployed instead of status protection&lt;br&gt;- Increase of poverty risk for unemployed in the means-tested scheme&lt;br&gt;- Accelerated loss of once attained income and educational status when long-term unemployed&lt;br&gt;- In means-tested scheme: loss of individual entitlements to social security (gendered effect)&lt;br&gt;- Loss of independence for non-needy persons due to increased maintenance obligations for needy spouses &amp; their children&lt;br&gt;- Low participation in social life due to low standard of living for UB II beneficiaries&lt;br&gt;- Lack of transparency, reliability and comprehensibility of rules especially concerning sanctioning practices</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Italy</strong></td>
<td>Extremely subprotective UE protection in respect to replacement rates &amp; coverage; esp. no benefits for atypical workers (‘outsiders’); lack of social services to enable female labour market participation</td>
<td>- No social security for increasing portion of workforce (atypical workers, mostly youth and women)&lt;br&gt;- High incidence of in-work poverty&lt;br&gt;- Low social status of ‘outsiders’ (youth, women) thus widening the gap between insiders and outsiders&lt;br&gt;- Low female labour market participation, high overall gender gaps&lt;br&gt;- Decreasing share of unionized workers and weakening of labour unions’ power</td>
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</table>

**Income Maintenance**

- Levelling of social security by narrowing general access conditions subject to individual behaviour and fragmentation of benefit schemes by lowering standard or withdrawal of benefits for certain groups; undermining social insurance by increasing shift to means-tested schemes
- **Denmark**: ‘start assistance’ targeting immigrants providing lower benefits for this delimited group
- **Germany**: Restraint of access conditions and shortening of benefit duration in the insurance scheme, strengthening of access conditions (community of needs, means-test, individual behaviour of beneficiaries of Unemployment Benefit II)
- **Italy**: Extremely subprotective UE protection in respect to replacement rates & coverage; esp. no benefits for atypical workers (‘outsiders’); lack of social services to enable female labour market participation