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### The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits

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# The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits

*Wim van Oorschot & Femke Roosma*

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## **Abstract**

Against the background of a permanent process of welfare reform, in which a pivotal role is played by the socio-political debate on 'who should get what and why', this paper addresses the question about the social legitimacy of differently targeted welfare schemes. It aims to review what is known in the academic literature on the social legitimacy of particular types of programs and schemes that are targeted at specific needs and needy groups. The central questions addressed are 1) what factors - institutional, cultural or even evolutionary - make that some forms and aims of welfare targeting are more, or less, supported by the public than others, and 2) how these factors can be interpreted and related to each other in a more general framework? The review shows that the field needs to develop further, which is why the paper concludes with a discussion of some venues for future research on the legitimacy of differently targeted benefits.

**Keywords:** deservingness, welfare state, public opinion, welfare attitudes, social legitimacy

**JEL code:** I30

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 *'Who should get what and why?' back on the agenda*

The issue of welfare targeting, concerned with the allocation of resources between categories of needs and needy groups, has regained a central position in the social policy debate in many, if not all, of the European countries. It was central to the juvenile stage of the European welfare state in the first part of the 20th century, and seemed to have been solved more or less definitely in its mature state in the prosperous 1960s and 1970s. However, with the economic downturn following the 1979 oil crisis, a process of the restructuring of Western welfare states set in, while in the East the political turnovers of the late 1980s and early 1990s were the starting point for welfare redesign. Since these years, welfare reform has been a constant factor in the 'silver age' of the European welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 2002). And there is no foreseeable end to it, since the concept of the welfare state and its concrete manifestations in specific social policies became substantially challenged again in the past two decades. For instance, by intensified international economic competition that threatens the redistributive capacity of national welfare states (Korpi and Palme, 2003) and by demographic aging, new family arrangements and labour market developments that confront the welfare state with 'new social risks' associated with post-industrial society (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). The combination of challenges results in a precarious political context marked by intensified discussions about the scope and generosity of the welfare state, which in essence are debates about welfare targeting.

More concretely, what we witness in most European welfare states is an intensification of critical debates about the necessity and fairness of redistributive, solidaristic relationships that have been organised through existing welfare arrangements, or that, with a view on social and economic challenges, should be organised anew (Schubert et al., 2009). Debates vary across different social issues: the intense pension debate is a manifestation of changing interests and views regarding the solidarity between the generations (Kohli, 2005), debates about work-care reconciliation have solidarity between the genders at their centre (Knijn and Komter, 2004), an increasing reliance on means-tested benefits based on austerity arguments reflects a debate on redistribution from the richer to the poorer (Fraser et al., 2011), discussions about job seeking confront unemployment beneficiaries with the obligations attached to their rights (van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2014; Houtman, 1997), the inclusion of migrants in the welfare state has developed into an issue ('welfare chauvinism') of itself (van Oorschot, 2008; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006), and debates about the solidarity and related redistribution between peoples of Europe are upcoming (Ferrera, 2003; Mau, 2005). The OECD, the European commission, the World Bank and the IMF have all contributed to these debates by advocating more selective targeting of benefits at needy groups or those in 'real' need (Marx et al., 2013). Given the austerity policies as a consequence of the recent economic crisis a 'universal decline of universalism' is even discussed (Béland et al., 2014; Mkandawire, 2015), but it also seems that especially means-tested schemes are vulnerable in times of austerity (Nelson 2007). Clearly, the welfare state debate seems to have made a full circle, in the sense that the basic welfare question of 'who should get what, and why', which dominated the debate in the early times of welfare state formation, is back to the fore again, and will possibly stay there for some time to come (van Oorschot, 2013).

This longer-term perspective on the need for welfare reform and the related debates on (re-)targeting justify addressing the question about the social legitimacy of differently targeted welfare schemes.

In this paper we aim to review what is known in the academic literature on the social legitimacy of particular types of programs and schemes that are targeted at specific needs and needy groups. Our questions are 1) what factors - institutional, cultural or even evolutionary - make that some forms and aims of welfare targeting are more, or less, supported by the public than others, and 2) how these factors can be interpreted and related to each other in a more general framework? Our review will show that the field needs to develop further, which is why we conclude the paper with a discussion of some venues for future research on the legitimacy of differently targeted benefits.

However, before discussing the state of art as we perceive it we elaborate on our position regarding the two central concepts of social legitimacy and targeting. This helps the reader in understanding the conceptual perspectives from which we discuss the general issue, and it sheds light on some of the practical choices we made to delineate the possibly broad subject.

## **1.2 Social legitimacy**

With social legitimacy we refer to the degree to which the general public supports specific benefits, which degree is commonly measured with public opinion data (Ringen, 1987). In our perspective, social legitimacy cannot be measured in an absolute sense. Empirically based statements are possible only about whether in a specific context or time period a benefit X has a higher or lower public support (compared to a benefit Y). As we will see later, the literature in the field shows that support for benefits and their related legitimacy is never self-evident, but can differ quite strongly between types of benefit, target groups of social protection, categories of citizens, countries and regions, and over time.

In our view, policy-makers, interest groups and academics alike are helped with an understanding of the general public's consent with, or rejection of, social benefits. For policy-makers especially, such information is of pragmatic essence, since public opinions form a cultural context with a conditioning effect on their room for manoeuvre when rationing welfare rights and entitlements (Burstein, 2003; Brooks and Manza, 2006; van Oorschot, 2006), either by *ex-ante* agenda-setting or by *ex-post* legitimation (van Oorschot, 2007). This is not to suggest, however, that public attitudes would always have a direct effect upon policy making. The growing literature on this issue learns that there are some examples of direct effects of public opinion on social policy making, but mostly effects are indirect, through a 'median voter' mechanism, media debates, lobby group activities, etc. (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Manza et al., 2002).

We acknowledge that it is not only the general public that has opinions on the legitimacy of social benefits. Relevant other groups like politicians, policy makers, administrators, street-level bureaucrats, representatives of interest groups, experts etc. all have their ideas on the issue. Such ideas may directly influence actual policy-making and policy implementation, but also indirectly as e.g. through their influence on mass-media discussions and target group portrayals (Schneider and Jacoby, 2005). However, in this working paper we focus on social legitimacy among the general public, for no other reason than that there is very little empirical research on the opinions of individuals from the groups mentioned (De Swaan et al., 2000) (for exceptions see: Blomberg and

Kroll, 1999; Forma, 1999; George, 1996; Kallio and Kouvo, 2014). At an aggregate group level one could study the relative social legitimacy of specific benefits among e.g. political parties, unions and lobby-groups (e.g. by deriving such information from their proposals for benefit design/reform), but we do not know of such research.

Finally, our focus here is primarily on the social legitimacy of social benefits that financially substitute or add to people's incomes. This means, firstly, that we do not discuss studies on the social legitimacy of social services as e.g. health care, childcare, education and such, since we are not well acquainted with what (with the exception of health care) we feel is (still) a small literature. Secondly, it means that, while we will refer to studies and ideas on the social legitimacy of welfare systems as a whole (e.g. universal vs selective systems) where this is appropriate, our 'unit of analysis' remains however the individual social benefit since within welfare systems there can be substantial differences between the targeting and related social legitimacy of different benefits, which makes analyses at a disaggregated level more accurate (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Marx et al., 2013).

### **1.3 Targeting**

When talking about the targeting of social benefits we realise that semantics play a role, and conceptual misunderstandings may easily arise. Therefore, some notes on the concept of targeting are necessary to explain what we mean by it in this paper.

In the Scandinavian social policy debate, for instance, targeting tends to be equated with means-testing as a way of distinguishing between those people who are entitled to a benefit and those who are not (e.g. Palme and Wennemo, 1998). A similar view is at the base of Andries' account of Belgian social security developments (Andries, 1996). In the British debate, however, means-testing is often seen as the opposite of universalism (Gugushvili and Hirsch, 2014) and is then mostly called selectivity (Spicker, 1993). Selectivity, however, is a term used by other authors merely to indicate that benefits do not cover all, or very broad categories of, citizens (as universal benefits do), but only certain categories among them (e.g. Ferge, 1997).

To bring order in this conceptual mix-up of the related terms of targeting, universalism, selectivity and means-testing, we express as our starting point that we see targeting in social policy most generally as a term denoting that social policies and resources are directed at a delineated group of citizens. In this sense all social security benefits and social services are targeted (Miller and Tomaskovic, 1990; Saunders, 1991). Even proposals for full basic income schemes see the benefit as targeted at the adult population, excluding dependent children from it. Skocpol (1991) would see this as an example of what she calls 'targeting within universalism', which is a term also used by other authors to point at exclusionary elements within schemes that otherwise have an overall broad coverage of citizens (van Mechelen and Bradshaw, 2013; Marx et al., 2013).

We then follow the helpful idea of van Lancker et al. (In Press) that a *primary* form of delineation is on the basis of 'reference groups', which are groups that are categorized along broadly defined social needs or risks. Examples of reference groups from social policy practice are 'people of 65 or older', 'workers with an impairment/disability', 'unemployed people', 'families with dependent children', 'sick employees', 'households with lack of means', 'all adult citizens', etc.. Any further targeting within such reference groups we consider to be a *secondary* form of targeting, in which additional eligibility criteria define more detailed boundaries between those who are, and those are not



included in a scheme's target group. Criteria for secondary targeting are plentiful, and can for instance include (combinations of) age, family size, household type, gender, type of work contract, work record, payment of contributions, job seek behaviour, etc.; whatever is seen as relevant by policy-makers (and regarded measurable in an administrative sense). However, in the literature, the target criterion of financial neediness, operationalized by means-testing as an instrument to distinguish between eligible and non-eligible groups, is seen as a criterion qualitatively different from others. The reason for this is that in practice means-testing and making use of means-tested benefits often create specific problems for (potential) claimants, as e.g. a poverty and unemployment trap, stigmatization, instability of entitlements, and non-take-up (Garfinkel, 1982; van Oorschot, 2002a), which are typically problems that run counter to full social inclusion as one of the central aims of social policy. Because of this, some see an inherent contradiction in the social protection quality of means-tested schemes: People's means is mostly used as a secondary targeting criterion to (best) help the 'truly needy', but whether means-tested benefits are truly helping the needy (best) is often questionable (Titmuss, 1970; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Gugushvili and Hirsch, 2014). The fact that in the literature the term of 'means-testing' is often equated with the term 'selectivity' is understandable, since a means-test often reduces considerably the segment of a reference group that is eligible for the scheme.

In our perspective on targeting – directing benefits and services at delineated groups of citizens – the universality or selectivity of social benefits is a matter of degree, not of essence (see also: Kangas, 1995). Furthermore, it is a matter that only seems to be relevant at the level of secondary targeting, that is, within reference groups. At the level of primary targeting it is difficult to say whether a benefit focusing on elderly is more or less selective than one focusing on unemployed people. But at the level of secondary targeting, within e.g. the reference group of elderly or the unemployed, we can say that social benefits that exclude smaller segments of the primary targeted reference group are more universal, while benefits that exclude larger segments of it are more selective. In practice it may even be difficult, however, to measure and compare the degrees of universalism or selectivity of schemes that focus on the same reference group, among others since secondary target criteria applied in the one scheme may be qualitatively different from criteria applied in the other. For examples of such measuring see Saunders (1991) on selectivity and Goul Andersen (2012) on universalism.

Note that, following the literature, in this paper we focus on what we would like to call, a 'target group' perspective on targeting, as distinguished from a 'social expenditure' perspective. The first dominates the literature on the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits and sees targeting in terms of social protection coverage, that is, as defining which categories of citizens within specific reference groups are considered eligible for social benefits, and which are not. This is different from seeing targeting from a 'social expenditure' perspective, which looks at how financial resources are differently distributed over social risks and categories. This perspective is applied in studies on the outputs and outcomes of welfare provision (see e.g.: van Lancker et al., In Press), but rarely in social legitimacy studies.

## **2 The social legitimacy of differently targeted social benefits**

Early European poor laws distinguished between those categories of poor people who were seen to be deserving of relief - aged, sick and infirm people, children - and those who were regarded as

undeserving - unemployed people, idle paupers, those capable of work (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Waxman, 1983; Katz, 1989; Geremek, 1997). Still, present day welfare states, with their protection schemes and services going way beyond the early poor law systems in terms of coverage and generosity, treat different groups of needy people differently. For some groups social protection is more accessible, more generous, longer lasting, and/or less subjected to reciprocal obligations, than for other groups. Just a few examples make this clear: it is usually the case that elderly people and disabled people can rely more strongly on less stigmatizing benefits, than, for instance, unemployed people; in many countries widows are better protected by national benefit schemes, than divorced women; mostly, core workers can rely on more comprehensive social insurance schemes, than peripheral workers; and job seek obligations attached to benefit receipt are usually more relaxed for older people and single parents.

Such differential targeting of social rights and obligations may reflect various considerations of policy-makers, but what interests us here are questions about its social legitimacy. That is, to what degree does the general public consent with and support different social benefits, and the differences in welfare provision they entail for different groups of citizens? And what factors make that some social benefits are supported more by the general public than others?

Our literature review learns that there are three research approaches to these questions, situated in two main groups. A first group of studies seeks the source of differential support in institutional characteristics of benefits (and welfare systems). A second group focuses on differences in perceptions of the characteristics of the target groups of benefits. Within this group, one stream of research studies effects of general public images of target groups in terms of stereotyping and stigma, while another stream investigates differences in social support in relation to the popular deservingness of target groups, that is, to public perceptions of how different target groups score on a series of specific deservingness criteria.

As we will explain later in more detail, there are linkages between these three approaches, but we will discuss them separately first.

## **2.1 Institutional characteristics of social benefits**

Studies examining the legitimacy of targeted benefits taking an institutional approach in explaining why some welfare programs generate more solidaristic attitudes than others, seek to understand this from differences in the design of benefits, in terms of how benefits are targeted and implemented. The underlying idea is that institutional design defines opportunity structures, which has consequences for the interest individuals and groups have in a scheme (as contributors and claimants), and design may affect the degree of trust people have in the fair operation of benefits.

### *Opportunity structures*

As for the role of opportunity structures and related interests, the main premise in many studies about welfare support is that people more endorse those benefits they are benefiting from, or are likely to benefit from. This generally means that more universally targeted benefits, which by our definition exclude smaller segments of reference groups, tend to have a higher social legitimacy (Goodin and LeGrand, 1987; Wilson, 1987; Skocpol, 1991; Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003). In line with this argument it is found that usually the middle and higher income classes support more universal programs, like old age pensions and health care from which they benefit themselves, more

than they do highly selective means-tested programs, like social assistance or housing allowances from which do not benefit themselves (Coughlin, 1980; Taylor-Gooby, 1985; Forma and Kangas, 1997; De Donder and Hindriks, 1998; Rothstein, 2002; Gelbach and Pritchett, 2002; Moene and Wallerstein, 2003). That also contributory social insurance programs tend to have higher social legitimacy than means-tested tax-financed assistance programs may be understood as well from a difference in numbers of (potential) claimants, but it is suggested that this may also be because paying contributions is associated more strongly with building up a personal entitlement to benefits, than paying general taxes (Hasenfeld and Rafferty, 1989; Coleman, 1982; Ullrich, 2002a).

We are careful to note that the commonly lower social legitimacy of narrowly targeted benefits does not mean that means-testing as an instrument for targeting in itself is unpopular among the wider public<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps on the contrary, as Kangas (1995) showed for the Finnish public: A majority was in favour of 'tougher means-testing' in various schemes generally, but typically, higher and middle classes preferred more means-testing in more selective programs, while lower classes preferred more means-testing in more universal programs (Kangas, 1995; Ervasti and Kangas, 1995). We also want to note that, although in opinion surveys it is consistently found that indicators of people's interest in specific programs (indirectly measured by e.g. their actual work status, income level, age and such like) do have an expected effect on their support for programs, such effects are usually not very strong (Ploug, 1996; van Oorschot, 2002b). This may be because the personal interest people perceive to have in a program may extend beyond their present situation (they have benefitted from it in the past, they may expect to need it in future), and beyond their own person as well (family members, or close friends using the program) (van Oorschot, 2013).

#### *Trust in government institutions and fellow citizens*

The social legitimacy of a benefit may not only lie in opportunity structures and substantive (group) interests in certain social programs, but it may also be determined by trust in government institutions that redistribute benefits and in fellow citizens that are part of this redistribution process. This is important to recognise, as Rothstein (2001) points out, because a benefit that is in the interest of persons, but mistrusted by them in the impartiality and fairness of its practical operation, may still not have high support. Rothstein (1998) argues that support for redistribution depends on perceiving a just distribution of burdens, meaning that support is undermined if people do not perceive that everybody contributes a fair share, and it depends on the believe that there is procedural justice, meaning that the benefit is implemented in a fair and effective manner (i.e. cheap, easy, without cheating). In the case of more selective, and especially means-tested benefits, both aspects are more problematic.

The first aspect implies that relative support for a scheme may depend upon people's perceptions of the fiscal burden of the scheme, which is related to perceptions of the scheme's generosity and its numbers of claimants, compared to that of other schemes. People are conditional co-operators: they will pay their fair share only if they believe others will pay their share as well (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2005; Gintis et al., 2005; Kahan, 2005; Rothstein, 1998). As more selective benefits often rely more strongly upon the contributions of middle and higher-class groups, while they distribute more to

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<sup>1</sup> Marx et al. (2013) argue that for that reason nowadays policymakers apply the instrument of means-testing to a larger segment of the target population, including not only the poor and unemployed but also working families with low incomes. Examples are the Revenue de Solidarité Active (RSA) in France which makes work for people on social assistance more lucrative and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the US, a tax exemption from employees' social security benefits for working households.

lower class groups, the unequal division of burdens could be seen as unfair and detract from the scheme's support (Hills, 2002; Kuklinski and Quirk, 1997).

As for the second aspect, selective benefits do also not excel in procedural justice, because they are typically more complex. More monitoring and screening leads to higher administrative costs and more bureaucracy (Mkandawire, 2005; Lindert, 2004; van Oorschot, 2002a), which is an important aspect of welfare state critique (Roosma et al., 2013; Ervasti, 2012; Rothstein, 1998). Screening also sets up higher barriers, leading to non-take up of benefits ( van Oorschot, 2001) and public disapproval of this underuse of benefits (Roosma et al., 2014; Ervasti, 2012). Finally, in applying discriminating criteria for the eligible and non-eligible people in the wider reference group, highly selective schemes tend to give more opportunity for (perceived) abuse (Alston and Dean, 1972; Overbye, 1999; Ullrich, 2002a; Roosma et al. 2014), since such benefits entail more rules that can be broken. Rothstein (2001) suggests that mass media commonly pay more attention to potential fraud of highly selective benefits, which may give rise to a general distrust in the fair operation of these schemes.

#### *Universal and selective welfare regimes*

While we explained to focus our paper on the social legitimacy of benefits, especially in the institutionalist approach to understanding differences in welfare legitimacy there is attention paid to the social legitimacy of entire welfare systems, more precisely of 'universal' versus 'selective' welfare states. Although in this literature it is often not specified what is exactly meant by these terms, suggestions are mostly that more universal are considered to be the social-democratic and, to a lesser extent, the corporatist welfare states of respectively Nordic and Continental Europe where social benefits are more organised by way of non-means-tested social provisions and contributory social insurances, while as selective are seen the Liberal welfare states of the Anglo-Saxon world where means-testing is a much more common part of social protection policies. It is generally argued in the literature that more universal welfare states (and perhaps also insurance system based welfare states (Ullrich, 2002b; Coleman, 1982)) can rely on broader and stronger social and political support, than welfare states that are characterized by a selectivistic (means-tested) approach (Rothstein, 1998; Rothstein, 2001; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Goodin and LeGrand, 1987; Korpi, 1980; Skocpol, 1991). Selective welfare states create a strong demarcation line between those who contribute (the rich and the middle class) and those who benefit (the poor), and are seen as socially divisive, rather than as integrative (Rothstein, 1998).<sup>2</sup> This gap between contributors and recipients is believed to undermine support for the welfare state among the middle and higher classed (Kangas, 1995; Rothstein, 1998). Therefore, highly selective welfare systems as a whole, which rely to a large degree on means-tested benefits and services, seem to be subjected to what could be called the 'selectivity trap'. That is, once such a system is established, as in the USA, it might prove to be very difficult to extend welfare coverage beyond the group of the poorest citizens. In other words, to the extent that the public at large sees welfare exclusively as something for the poor only, it will be problematic to achieve sufficient levels of social legitimacy and for welfare advocates to motivate the middle masses

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<sup>2</sup> This socially divisive character also explains why "programs for the poor become poor programs" (Titmuss, 1970; Rainwater, 1982). That is, their lesser societal legitimacy makes them more vulnerable to a less benign and more reserved treatment by policy makers and administrators, leading in practice to lesser quality of services and benefits, and of their delivery.

for welfare extension (Hills, 2015; van Oorschot, 2013; Korpi and Palme, 1998). In the case of more universal welfare states, social legitimacy is easier achieved since more people have a stake in the benefits provided, and in case of contributory social insurances it is easier to perceive social protection as earned because contributions have been paid. As a result, more universal welfare systems are less divisive because they are able to form class alliances between the poor and the middle class and generate the political support for a generous welfare state (Korpi, 1980). However, according to Rothstein, shared interests is not the whole story, since, as we have seen, contributions and support also depend on whether people have trust in the just and fair operation of the welfare system (Rothstein, 2001). With others, he stresses that there is less opportunity for fraudulent benefit reciprocity in more universal systems.

## **2.2 Public images of target groups**

Stereotypical images of benefit target groups have an important role in studies about the legitimacy of social benefits. A general finding is that programs, that are targeted at groups with a (more) negative public image, are less supported by the public. These stereotypical images are of various kinds and socio-psychological research shows that they can be strong and hard to change (Fiske et al., 1999; Allport, 1954; Billig, 1985). Traditionally, in the literature, most attention has been paid to negative images the public has of the poor (and especially the 'black' poor in the US) and the unemployed, but more recently there is a growing focus on negative images of migrants as benefits recipients as well.

### *The undeserving poor*

As for the poor, in many industrialized societies poverty is a discrediting attribute, and often the poor are stigmatized (Titmuss, 1970; Waxman, 1983), where the term stigma refers to 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' (Goffman, 1974, p 3). Stigmatisation of individuals and groups is part of a socio-cultural process of 'othering' (Lister, 2014) in which they are withheld social respect and a negative social identity is attached to them. Stigmatization implies 'discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his [the stigmatised person's] life chances' (Goffman, 1974, p 5). Selective benefits, and especially, means-tested benefits, are highly intertwined with the problem of stigmatisation. Means-testing itself often contains several discrediting elements, adding to the stigma of poverty as such. Claiming a means-tested benefit makes it evident that a person is not able to provide sufficient economic welfare on his or her own, which runs counter to the (increasingly) valued ethic of self-responsibility. Claiming a means-tested benefit is thus likely to be seen as deviance from prevailing norms, which in turn can be a basis for stigmatisation. Also, as suggested by Rothstein (2001), means-tested benefits are often associated with fraudulent behaviour. In addition, the discretion exerted by administrators in assessing eligibility to means-tested benefits may reduce the extent to which they are perceived as being given 'as of right'. Not seeing a benefit as given as of right, but as a form of charity, is believed to invoke feelings of shame and inferiority (Simmel, 1908).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As Simmel already noted in 1908, "...die Gedrücktheit, die Beschämung, die Deklassierung durch das Almosen hebt sich für ihn [der Arme] in dem Maße auf, in dem es ihm nicht aus Barmherzigkeit, Pflichtgefühl oder Zweckmäßigkeit gewährt wird, sondern er es fordern darf." (Simmel, 1908, p 4562). [...the humiliation, shame and loss of status ['declasserment'] brought about by the acceptance of charity are alleviated for him [the poor man] to the extent that it [the benefit] is not granted out of compassion or a sense of duty or even expediency but rather because he has a valid claim to it.']

More broadly, in addition to their dealing with public agencies, people in poverty are repeatedly exposed to shaming by the attitudes and behaviour of the people they meet, and by the tenor of public debate that either dismisses them or labels them as lazy and in their dealings with public agencies (Walker, 2014).

### *The black welfare queen*

In the USA various empirical studies have provided evidence that normative images of categories of poor people play an important role in the support for welfare. Quadagno (1994) even argues that the American welfare state is designed to exclude racial minorities and that racism is embedded in the welfare programs. In his influential work Gilens (1999) convincingly shows that indeed there is a strong racial element in 'why Americans hate welfare': Americans tend to think that black people are more lazy and less responsible than white people, and that therefore welfare is taken up mostly by black people (see also: Feagin, 1975; Nelson, 1999). Racial contexts trigger opposition against welfare: in areas with large proportions of African-Americans, prejudice and opposition against welfare is stronger (Luttmer, 2001; Fullerton and Dixon, 2009). Neubeck and Cazenave (2001) argue that it is racism which ties together stigmatized welfare policies and racial stereotypes of the poor. They find that public discourses are full of stereotypes of welfare claimants that often have racist underpinnings. It is not a surprise, then, that there is very low support for the highly selective American welfare scheme 'temporary assistance to needy families' (TANF). An additional element in these discourse is gender (Monnat, 2008), since TANF is perceived to be mainly used by teen and single mothers ('welfare queens') who are morally looked down upon in American society generally, and who are assumed to be lazy, unreliable, and/or addicted to drugs and alcohol (Gordon, 2001; Rein, 2001). It was argued that the 1996 welfare reform in the US legitimized large cuts by actually creating stereotypes of black single mothers in the social debates leading up to the reform (Schram et al., 2009). The reform introduced strong sanctions to control the "alleged sexual immorality and supposed preference for welfare over work of one group: African-American females" (Neubeck and Cazenave, 2001: 4). In practice this racial stereotyping is reflected in sanction policies: black and Latina women are at greater risk of being sanctioned (Monnat, 2010) and in local areas in which the non-white population increases sanction rates increase (Keiser et al., 2004). But also after these reforms, American welfare attitudes remained racialized (Dyck and Hussey, 2008). In stark contrast with this stands the common finding that in the US programs in which the targeted groups do not suffer from stereotyping, like widows, elderly people, and physically disabled, are supported well by the American public (Williamson, 1974; Katz, 1989; Appelbaum, 2001; Huddy et al., 2001).

### *The lazy unemployed*

Where racial stereotyping is a central element in American public images of social policy target groups (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004), European studies on the social legitimacy of benefits have traditionally concentrated on public images of unemployed people instead.<sup>4</sup> What is consistently found is that images tend to be negative. There is rather widespread doubt about unemployed people's willingness to work and about proper use of benefits (Furnham, 1982; Golding and Middleton, 1982; Albrekt Larsen, 2002; Roosma et al., 2014), even in a universalistic welfare state as Sweden (Furaker and Blomsterberg, 2003). And when people are asked to compare unemployed

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<sup>4</sup> Which may reflect the different outcomes of the American versus the European social model: the first generates more poverty, the second more unemployment.

people to disabled people (Maassen and De Goede, 1989), or to employed people (Ester and Dekker, 1986), the unemployed (especially the younger unemployed (see for instance: Albrekt Larsen, 2008)) are more seen as having less character, less self-responsibility, less perseverance, and they are seen as less trustworthy. Among those who have more negative images of unemployed people support for unemployment benefits is usually lower (van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2014; Lødemel and Trickey, 2001).

### *Immigrants*

In recent years in Europe, however, images that people have of migrants in their society, and how such images affect support for benefits, have entered research agenda's. This discussion originates from the puzzle how to combine inclusive welfare policies with equal access for diverse groups, which is known as 'The New Liberal Dilemma' or 'The Progressive Dilemma' (Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Goodhart, 2004; Newton, 2007; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006). Following the American experience that it is difficult to build up an inclusive and comprehensive welfare system in a context of strong racial and ethnical diversity (Alesian and Glaeser, 2004), the suggestion is that in more heterogeneous societies support for redistribution is lower, and more specifically, that immigration undermines solidarity and the legitimacy of the welfare state (Mau and Burkhardt, 2009; Brady and Finnigan, 2013; Alesina and Glaeser, 2004). Although in the European case the negative effect of increasing diversity on (support for) welfare redistribution is contested (van Oorschot, 2008; Taylor-Gooby, 2005), in many European societies there is indeed a rather high level of what is called 'welfare chauvinism': support for a strong welfare state for 'us' (natives), but less support for welfare for 'them' (migrants) (Wright and Reeskens, 2013; van der Waal et al., 2010; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012). In a strict interpretation of the term, welfare chauvinism means that immigrants should be excluded from welfare provisions (Koning, 2011), while in less strict interpretations immigrants are perceived as less eligible for benefits (Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014; van der Waal et al., 2010). In a recent Dutch survey vignette experiment Reeskens and van der Meer (2014) show that the difference between the preferred level of unemployment benefits for immigrants and for natives remains the same for varying scores on other attributes of the unemployed like work ethos or need: that is, people want lower unemployment benefits for immigrants despite their other favourable or unfavourable attributes (Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014). This suggests that stereotypes of immigrants may be hard to change and that immigrants in European societies may be seen as 'the new undeserving poor' (Bommes and Geddes, 2000). An important note on this is that in a recent vignette study using both UK and Dutch data, Kootstra (2014) also found higher support for benefits targeted at natives instead of immigrants. Yet, when in the vignette the note was included that 'immigrants' were having a job and paid their fare in taxes, the effect diminished.

### **2.3 Deservingness perceptions**

An increasing stream of literature addresses differences in the deservingness of target groups as a source of differences in the social legitimacy of benefits. Compared to the 'public images' literature, which is concerned with stigmatised and stereotyped social identities that overshadow other characteristics of target groups, the deservingness approach is more detailed, in that it distinguishes a series of characteristics of target group (members) (and not just 'identity') that may influence the social legitimacy of a benefit. The general claim is that people support more those benefit schemes that target at groups that are seen as more deserving. Coughlin's (1980) international review of

public opinion studies on welfare support in modern, Western welfare states in the 1960s and 1970s, plays a seminal role in deservingness studies, since it was the first to show that other target groups characteristics than identity seemed to produce differences in support for benefits. His review showed that generally the public was most in favour of social protection targeted at old people, closely followed by protection for the sick and disabled, while the support of schemes for needy families with children was less, for schemes for unemployed people even more less, and support was usually least for social assistance schemes for the poor. Later studies corroborate Coughlin's 'universal dimension of support', whether they regard cross-sectional data from different European countries (Pettersen, 1995; Ullrich, 2000; van Oorschot, 2000; Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003; van Oorschot, 2006), or (time-series) data from single countries, as for instance, the UK (Taylor-Gooby, 1985; Hills, 2002), Finland and Denmark (Forma, 1997; Albrekt Larsen, 2002), The Netherlands (van Oorschot, 1998), Belgium (Debusscher and Elchardus, 2003) and the Czech Republic (Rabusic and Sirovatka, 1999). As mentioned before, in recent studies support for social protection of immigrants is also analysed, and found to be at the bottom end of the support dimension (van Oorschot, 2006; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014).

#### *Five deservingness criteria*

Apparently, support for social benefits targeted at different groups depend on other factors than strong stigma and stereotypes as well. There were several clues for these in the literature, suggesting that people have perceptions of the general welfare deservingness of target groups which are formed by their ideas about how groups 'score' on a series of deservingness criteria. van Oorschot (2000) developed a framework of five central deservingness criteria based on the findings of several studies on the issue (Cook and Barrett, 1992; Cook, 1979; De Swaan, 1988). A first criterion is *control* over neediness, that is, people who are seen as being personally responsible for their neediness are seen as less deserving (if at all). This criterion is argued to be specifically important in determining deservingness and is in the literature also known as 'disability' (De Swaan, 1988) or 'locus of responsibility' (Cook, 1979). In more recent studies the application of the control criterion on the deservingness of target groups is linked towards the degree of job opportunities in a country (Albrekt Larsen, 2006); in times of unemployment people claiming benefits are less to blame for their situation (Fridberg and Ploug, 2000; Hills, 2002; Jeene, et al. 2014; Bryson 1997). A second criterion is the level of *need*, that is, people with greater need are seen as more deserving. This criterion can also be extended to dependent children in need (Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014; Jeene and van Oorschot, 2015) which are seen as the 'innocent third party' involved (Houtman, 1994). Third, there is *identity*: needy people who are closer to 'us' are seen as more deserving. This criterion can be applied to different scales and areas, by kinship relations, place of residence or to identity groups (De Swaan, 1988). In more recent studies this deservingness criteria is specifically linked to ethnicity or immigrants (van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014; van Oorschot, 2008). A fourth criterion is *attitude*: more deserving are those needy people who are likeable, compliant and conforming to our standards. Cook (1979) refers to 'gratefulness' and 'pleasantness', where De Swaan (1988) refers to 'docility'. And finally, van Oorschot (2000) distinguishes the criterion of *reciprocity*: more deserving are those needy people who have contributed to our group before (who have 'earned' our support), or who may be expected to be able to contribute in future. Reciprocity is seen as one of the essential features of the 'moral economy' of welfare states (Mau, 2003) or even the foundations of cooperation in general (Gintis et al., 2005). In modern context reciprocity can also be interpreted as the willingness to 'do something



in return' for a benefit or actively looking for a job or participate in training programs or experience jobs. Marx et al. (2013) argue that the American welfare program Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) enjoys greater overall legitimacy because it is perceived to encourage and reward work. Recent studies apply the deservingness theory more generally towards (work) obligations attached to benefits for different target groups. See our suggestions for further research.

Assuming that people apply the five criteria to form deservingness opinions, the universal dimension of support can be understood as an outcome of such deservingness thinking. For example, migrants can be expected to score particularly badly on the criteria of identity and reciprocity, while in the public's eye most migrants may also be accused of having put themselves in a situation of welfare dependency. Although the public usually has some doubts about whether unemployed people are themselves to blame for their unemployment or not, unemployed people as a group will score better on the criteria of identity and reciprocity (the latter especially in countries with contributory unemployment insurance schemes). Compared with unemployed people, sick and disabled people will usually be seen as more deserving, because in their case there will be much less doubt about the involuntariness of their neediness. The most deserving group, however, will usually be the elderly. They cannot be blamed for their age, they are close to 'us' (they are our parents and grandparents, we ourselves hope to live to an old age), they have extra age-related needs, they have earned their share in their productive life stage, and they are not seen as an ungrateful and demanding group.

These five deservingness criteria seem to predict a universal rank order in the deservingness of needy groups, which is comparable across European welfare states (van Oorschot, 2006). Yet, there are differences within the relative deservingness of target groups across countries. Taking into account the effects of cultural bias in expressing support for deserving groups, Meier Jaeger (2007) shows that support for the old and the sick is universal high, while support for the poor and the unemployed is not only lower but also more differentiated across countries.

#### *A gradual deservingness dimension*

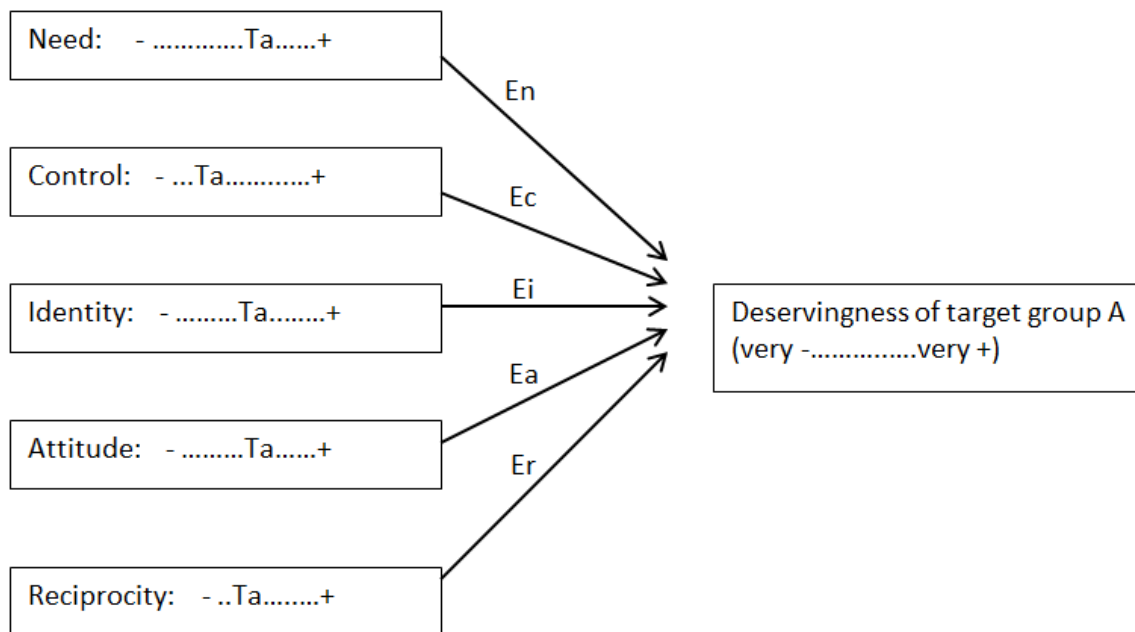
It should be stressed that deservingness is a relative concept, that is, the difference between deserving or undeserving is gradual, with most target groups falling somewhere in between both extremes. Kolemen (2010) emphasizes in this respect that if a group is regarded as 'not clearly deserving' this does not mean that it is 'clearly undeserving', and vice versa. Groups take in different positions on the dimension because perceptions of their deservingness may be formed on the basis of a different selection of criteria, that is, not each criterion may be seen as equally important for each group. An example of this is when migrant status dominates a group's popular deservingness ruling out the possible influences of other characteristics, which was found in the vignette study of Reeskens and van der Meer (2014). While in case of non-migrant status other characteristics, as for instance control or reciprocity, may come to play a decisive role. A second reason for the gradualness of deservingness perceptions lies in the fact that target groups may combine different relevant group characteristics. For instance, as was found in a Dutch study, while elderly as a generic group have high deservingness generally, this may be less so for rich elderly (who score lower on the criterion of 'need'), or while unemployed tend to have a lesser deservingness, this may be higher for disabled unemployed (who score higher on the criterion of 'control') (van Oorschot, 1998). Nevertheless, the literature, as we discussed it above, suggests that in present day US and Europe the generic groups of 'black people', respectively 'migrants' are close to the undeserving extreme, while 'elderly people' are close to the deserving extreme.

*The relative weight of deservingness criteria*

An issue addressed in the literature is whether all deservingness criteria have the same weight, or whether some are usually more important in forming deservingness perceptions, than others. Several scholars have made suggestions that point in different directions. For instance, De Swaan (1988) regards 'disability', or lack of control, most important, acting even as a necessary condition for deservingness. This would imply that once the public feels that a person can be blamed for his or her neediness fully, other criteria become irrelevant. A fact is that in many empirical deservingness studies perceived personal responsibility or control stands out as an important determinant of people's perceptions of the deservingness of the poor (e.g. Cook and Barrett, 1992; Cook, 1979; van Oorschot, 2000). However, the literature on the poor deservingness of migrants in European societies and the racial stereotype based undeservingness of the US poor suggests that the identity of the targeted group is quite relevant as well. Being seen as 'one of them' rather than 'one of us', seems to draw a strong demarcation line in deservingness of benefits (De Swaan, 1988; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014; Kootstra, 2014). Finally, there are studies that argue that reciprocity is at the heart of deservingness perceptions, since reciprocity forms the foundation for solidaristic cooperation (Mau, 2003; Gintis et al., 2005). Rather than appointing one of the deservingness criteria as 'the most important' it is more likely that the weights of criteria differ in different contexts.

The following model sketches our conception of how a target group's overall deservingness is a joint result of the positive or negative scores of the group on the five deservingness criteria.

**Figure 1. A model of the deservingness of a target group**



Ta = position Target group A on 'negative - positive' dimension of a deservingness criterion

En/c/i/a/r = relative effect of a position on a criterion on the total deservingness of target group A

The figure 1 suggests that the relative deservingness of a specific target group positions itself on a dimension ranging from 'very undeserving' to 'very deserving', and results from a combination of scores of the target group on the five separate criteria. These scores  $T_a$  may be more or less positive/negative and can have a different weight (effect) in the overall deservingness outcome. It is important to realise that the  $T_a$  scores and weights, and therefore the overall outcome, can be different across individuals, and that the deservingness of target group A in the general public's eye is an aggregate of such individual perceptions. Important as well is that at individual and aggregate level  $T_a$  scores, weights and overall outcomes can change over time, as a result of changes at individual level (e.g. when a person gets older his or her perception of the blamefulness of unemployment may change), and at context level (e.g. citizen's may perceive unemployment as less blameful in times of high unemployment).

### **3 A heuristic model for understanding the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits**

#### ***3.1 Three approaches to legitimacy***

We have seen that there are three approaches in the existing literature on the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits. The 'institutional' approach seeks to understand such differences from differences in institutional design of benefits (and by extension: of welfare systems). It is suggested that design characteristics create specific incentive structures and have consequences for the trust people (can) put in the just and fair operation of a benefit. Related to these factors, in the institutional approach more selective benefits are assumed to have lower legitimacy than more universal benefits, while it is especially means-tested benefits that generally score lowest. In the 'public images' approach differences in legitimacy are seen as being related to general images the public has about the target group of schemes. Typical for this approach is that it focuses on groups to which strongly negative images exist, which are stigmatised and stereotyped, leading to (very) low legitimacy for benefits that address their needs. In the 'deservingness' approach differences in legitimacy are related to people's perceptions of the deservingness of target groups, which can take in a position in between positive (deserving) or negative (undeserving). As in the public images approach, in this approach the social identity of target groups plays a role, but in addition to that it recognizes a series of criteria that people may apply when forming their deservingness opinions (need, control, attitude, reciprocity, and identity). The essence of this approach is the idea that people judge the deservingness of a target group against a number of criteria, and that the benefit that addresses this group is more legitimate to the degree that the overall judgment turns out positive.

In many cases of differences in the social legitimacy of benefits it may be difficult (if at all possible) to assess which of the three approaches will be 'best' in understanding them. This is because often there are many more variables involved (like aspects of scheme coverage, generosity, claimant numbers, institutional character, target group images, perceptions of deservingness etc.), than there

are benefit cases to compare (Gilens, 1999). But a central issue seems to be as well that the factors that are seen as important from each approach may be interrelated.

### 3.2 Interrelations

That such interrelations exist between public images and deservingness perceptions seems self-evident. A strongly negative image will almost by definition lead to a negative score on the criterion of identity, while the reasons for a negative image may be a negative score on an important deservingness criterion. For example, American blacks are a negatively stigmatized group, and are therefore seen as less deserving, but the stigma centres on the perception that they particularly score low on the criterion of 'responsibility' or 'control', that is, that they are lazier than whites (Gilens, 1999) and can therefore be blamed for their neediness. While in Europe the relatively negative image of unemployed people is also connected to the criterion of 'control', that is, to doubts about whether they cannot be blamed for being unemployed (e.g. Furnham, 1982; Halvorsen, 2002).

Interrelations may as well exist between institutional factors and deservingness perceptions (Albrekt Larsen, 2006). This can be illustrated by two extreme examples of a strongly selective benefit, a means-tested benefit directed at the poor only, and a strongly universal scheme, an unconditional universal basic income for all citizens. As we have seen, means-tested benefit schemes directed at the poor tend to have a low legitimacy. From the institutional dimension this is understandable since in such schemes there is usually a strong demarcation between the group of contributors (the non-poor), who themselves have a low chance of ever profiting from the scheme, and the recipients (the poor), which may lead to perceptions of an unjust division of burdens. The relative expensive administration of means-tested schemes may add to the high cost perception among the non-poor. The complexity of means-testing offers more opportunities for fraud and fraud perception, which from the deservingness perspective enforces negative perceptions of benefit claimants since fraud and misuse can be seen as an unwillingness to take responsibility for one's own life (criterion of 'control') and/or as a manifestation of a despised moral (criterion of 'attitude'). The general undeservingness of the target group of a means-tested benefit may trigger policy makers to make the scheme even more selective and to implement stricter criteria to demarcate more 'fairly' the deserving from the undeserving poor. In turn, this institutional adaptation may generate more bureaucracy, higher perceived abuse, and decrease the legitimacy of the benefit scheme even further. Thus, a stronger focus on discriminating deserving from undeserving target groups may lead to an institutional 'selectivity' reflex, which makes the scheme less legitimate instead of more legitimate. This is a *paradox of means-tested benefits*.<sup>5</sup> In case of universal benefits, which usually have a high social legitimacy, there may be an interplay between institutional and deservingness factors as well. Take the example of a most universal benefit scheme, an unconditional basic income

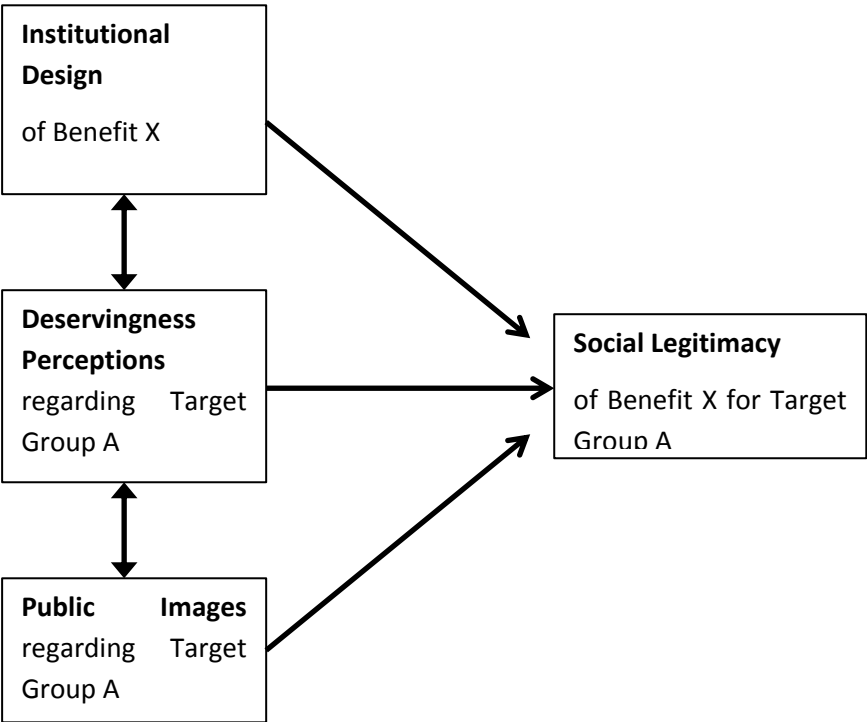
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<sup>5</sup> Which paradox underlies the often recognized observation that 'programs for the poor tend to be poor programs', as quoted above, but it also underlies the so-called 'paradox of re-distribution', which points to the observation that the degree of poverty relief tend to be lower in welfare systems that are designed from a selective perspective, compared to those that are designed from a more universal approach (Korpi and Palme, 1998). This paradox has been the subject of several empirical studies, with sometimes contradicting conclusions about its existence. However, a most recent study with better, time-series data corroborated it (McKnight, 2015). This suggests that focusing welfare protection on the poor only is generally not in the best interest of the poor (van Oorschot, 2013).

for all citizens. From the institutional perspective on legitimacy such a scheme has many favourable characteristics: bureaucratic costs are low, everyone is included so there is no demarcation between contributors and recipients, and fraud or abuse is not possible. Survey studies in the Netherlands (TNS-NIPO, 2014; van Oorschot, 1998), however, indicate that only minorities of about 20%-30% are in favour (with most of them arguing that it would mean the end of benefit fraud), while majorities of about 50% are against. The most important reasons given by them refer to deservingness criteria, that is: they feel that many people might not need the basic income (criterion of 'need'), that it is not fair that those who do not want to work would get an unconditional benefit (criterion of 'reciprocity'), and that the incentive to do paid work and care for one's own may be lost (criterion of 'control') (van Oorschot, 1998). So, determining the separate influence of factors from the institutional perspective and from the deservingness perspective may be rather complex, that is, the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits might be the result of interplay between the two.

In Figure 2 we summarise the main factors that may influence the social legitimacy of a benefit X that is targeted at a group A, as well as their interrelationships. The model suggests that in case one would be interested in the relative social legitimacy of a specific benefit scheme, one would need to have information about the incentive structures and trust relationships created by its institutional design, about whether there are rather strong positive or negative public images of its target group, and how the general public feels that the target groups scores on a series of deservingness criteria.

**Figure 2. A heuristic model for understanding the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits**



### **3.3 A pivotal role for deservingness perceptions?**

Notwithstanding the conclusion that there are three types of approaches to understanding differences in the social legitimacy of benefits, and that factors from each may be interrelated, there are arguments why deservingness perceptions could be seen as pivotal in producing differences in legitimacy.

Firstly, institutional characteristics (and their related legitimacy) of present-day schemes may be affected by deservingness opinions during the schemes' formative years. Where it is generally accepted that target group images and underlying deservingness opinions play a role in the formation of present-day policies (e.g. Burstein, 2003; Brooks and Manza; Rein, 2001), it seems justified to assume that they have played a role in the past as well. There are no studies that have explicitly looked into this, but it is hinted upon in the literature in several ways. An interesting finding from a study by Kangas (2000) on the historical beginnings of various social security benefits in European welfare states is the particular chronology of their introduction: from the end of the 19th century onwards first the schemes for the commonly most deserving categories of old, sick and disabled people were introduced, than family benefits and unemployment compensation, and lastly (if at all) social assistance for the least deserving category of poor people. Another hint comes from a study by Kahl (2005) on the religious roots of social assistance schemes in European countries, in which she suggests that social assistance arrangements in the Catholic European countries differs from those in Calvinistic countries based on different perceptions of the poor: in the Catholic perspective the poor are more seen in a traditional Christian way as a pitiful and deserving group of 'children of God', while in the Calvinistic perspective poverty is associated with the laziness and immorality of an irresponsible and therefore undeserving 'underclass'. These arguments suggest that perceptions of deservingness of target groups (and related stigma's) were underlying the choices in the previous development of benefit schemes.

A second argument why deservingness perceptions may be pivotal is based on empirical findings that in all European countries, and among all social categories, the rank order of deservingness of the groups of 'the elderly', 'the sick and disabled', 'the unemployed' and 'migrants' are the same (van Oorschot 2006). This suggests that deservingness opinions and attitudes are apparently deeply rooted in popular culture. van Oorschot (2006) speculates that this may be an example of a cultural pattern that finds its origin in its functionality for the survival of social groups. For instance, the deservingness criterion of identity may protect the group against burdensome support claims from outside the group, while the criterion of control may protect against such claims from inside the group. Petersen (2012) takes this issue further by arguing that determining the deservingness of individuals is a heuristic rooted in human psychology as it evolved during evolution.<sup>6</sup> The idea is that in pre-historical, small-scaled societies we developed the skills to detect reciprocators who contribute to reciprocal food sharing, and cheaters who violated the rules of cooperation by taking advantage of the collective gains. Dealing with these reciprocators and cheaters is assumed to have structured cognitive categories and created judgmental shortcuts, called 'deservingness heuristics'

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<sup>6</sup> See Fiske et al. (2006) for an alternative evolutionary perspective on stereotypical images of welfare recipients and the poor, which suggests that people judge groups on universal, evolutionary generated perceptions of warmth (trustworthiness) and competence (respect). In social surveys on the attribution of warmth and competence welfare recipients and poor in particular score low on both dimensions, which explains their negative public image.

(Petersen, 2012). Today we still apply these heuristics, which allows us to make more or less instant judgements about deservingness, also in relation to deservingness of social benefits. In these deservingness heuristics emotions play an important role. Petersen et al. (2012) found that both anger and compassion with the needy person are essential. Anger is important in social cooperation since it has the function to recalibrate cheaters to contribute in the future, while compassion easily allows to reward reciprocators. This was necessary in small-scaled societies that relied on a limited number of potential contributors (Petersen, 2012). What is essential for reciprocators is that others show an effort to contribute or have cooperative intentions, more than what people actually contribute. Therefore, perceptions of welfare recipients as being lazy and not putting in any or enough effort to provide for themselves, is strongly affecting their deservingness : it triggers the emotion of anger, and thus generates a more or less automatic and immediate perception of low deservingness. On the other hand, feelings of compassion with a needy person lead to an instant decision to support that individual (Petersen et al., 2012). Empirical experiments (Petersen et al. , 2012) and social surveys (Aarøe and Petersen, 2014) show that Danes as well as Americans apply the deservingness heuristic as conceived by Petersen: people support allocating benefits to 'reciprocators' and oppose benefits for 'cheaters' . (With the differences between the two populations being that Americans tend to perceive more cheaters in their society ('lazy black people'), than Danes). The studies suggest that 'reciprocity' and 'control' are essential deservingness criteria: as long as welfare recipients show effort to improve their situation, or indicate that they want to cooperate or are not lazy in any sense, people are willing to include individuals in the redistribution system, but also a cooperative 'attitude' is important. Furthermore interesting is that Petersen (2012) shows that these psychological roots of deservingness heuristics operate independent of ideological stances of people (Skitka and Tetlock, 1993), of cultural differences (Gilens, 1999), or of institutional differences (Rothstein, 1998). That is, these perspectives believe that deservingness heuristics can be 'learned' in the sense that being exposed to a certain ideology, culture of institutional setting leads to the development of certain deservingness logics (Petersen, 2012). Petersen (2012) suggest that deservingness heuristic are at the very heart of social cooperation and therefore essential in explaining the social legitimacy of our institutional arrangements, specifically redistributive benefit schemes.

#### **4 Suggestions for future research**

Research on the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits is at present mostly confined to analysis of public opinion surveys that contain relevant questions. There are, however, few of them, on national as well as a cross-national level, and often they only address a small number of target groups or deservingness criteria. This is a serious obstacle in developing the field further, theoretically as well as empirically. However, in the context of more or less permanent welfare reform in European welfare states, the interest in legitimacy questions is growing, which is why we aim in the remainder of this paper to contribute to further development of the field by discussing some suggestions for future research. We focus primarily on the deservingness perspective, since as we explained, there are arguments why deservingness is at the heart of the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits.

#### **4.1 *Changing deservingness perceptions and welfare reform***

From the perspective that deservingness opinions play a central role in the formation of institutional features of social benefits, an interesting window opens regarding our understanding of the social legitimacy of welfare reform. That is, the perspective suggests that for such understanding we should look into changes in public perceptions of deservingness, and how these may lead to changes in the social legitimacy of existing welfare arrangements, and thus produce social pressure for reform, or how they strengthen the legitimacy of existing arrangements and create greater resilience against reform. With reference to figure 1, such changes can be twofold. Firstly, a target group's 'score' on a specific deservingness criterion may change, leading to a change in the group's overall degree of deservingness. An example would be if the general public starts seeing the elderly less as a needy category, when pensioners on average have become richer due to the maturation of pension systems in European countries and the general growth in wealth over the past decades. In this case, elderly would score less 'positive' on the criterion of need, with lower total deservingness as a consequence. Secondly, the relative importance or weight that people attach to specific deservingness criteria may change over time e.g. under the influence of social processes or contexts. For example, the criterion of control may gain more weight in overall deservingness in case liberal ideology gets more dominant. And finally, it is possible that these two changes happen at the same time. For example, if control becomes a more important deservingness criterion in a society and, for instance, the elderly are seen as more responsible for their income or care on an old age ('they should have saved money when they could in the past'), the deservingness of the elderly for pensions or elderly home care might drop significantly. Unfortunately, at present there is a lack of data to study these kinds of relationships.

However, as a reviewer of this paper rightly suggested, it may also be the case that deservingness opinions change in reaction to welfare reform. That is, if the 'paradox of redistribution' argument is right, one would expect that in countries where social spending in recent decades has increasingly been targeted at the poor and people with low incomes, the deservingness of recipients of benefits should have decreased. Again, at present we lack data for this kind of analysis.

#### **4.2 *Contextual effects on the social legitimacy of targeted benefits***

In the literature there are different arguments why contextual factors would affect perceptions in deservingness of different target groups, yet studies that examine these effects directly are scarce. Most studies focus on the effects of economic downturn and rising unemployment on the deservingness of the unemployed or support for unemployment benefits. One argument is that economic downfall lowers the deservingness of the unemployed because people care for themselves first (Durr, 1993; Alt, 1979; Goul Andersen, 1992). But a contrary one says that economic downfall will strengthen support for the unemployed because then people feel that benefit claimants are less to blame for their situation (Fridberg and Ploug, 2000; Hills, 2002; Jeene, et al. 2014; Bryson 1997). Jeene, van Oorschot and Uunk (2014) find evidence for the latter, by examining Dutch longitudinal data. Other contextual effects that are examined are cultural, political and institutional factors. For instance, Rein (2001) shows for the US that cultural ideas of lone mothering changed the perceptions of the single mother from the deserving widow to the undeserving unmarried single parent or



'welfare queen'. Changes in political climate are suggested to change the ideas about personal responsibilities of welfare recipients as well (Jeene et al., 2014; Pettersen, 1995; Weaver et al., 1995).

However, the influence of different contextual effects, including the effects of institutional (Albrekt Larsen, 2006) and policy changes (Jeene, et al. 2014), on the deservingness of different target groups should be examined in more detail and for more countries. Until now the literature shows evidence for Western countries only, while there is a rather strong Anglo-Saxon bias in this. The suggestion that deservingness perceptions have a universal character (Coughlin 1980) and seem to follow comparable orderings across European countries (van Oorschot, 2006) is therefore still open to empirical testing requiring data from non-Western countries. Studying longitudinal trends within countries could offer great insights in changes in social legitimacy of targeted benefits under the influence or pressure of changing social contexts. But with a few exceptions (e.g. Hills 2002, 2015; Jeene et al., 2013) this is difficult considering the lack of available data.

#### **4.3 Individual effects on the social legitimacy of targeted benefits**

Another interesting perspective for further research would be to distinguish among the deservingness perceptions of different groups of people. We know that individual characteristics as self-interest, ideology, religion, education, age, gender etc. are important in determining support for different welfare benefits and groups (see for instance: Meier Jaeger, 2006; d'Anjou et al., 1995; Svallfors, 1991; Svallfors, 1995), although effects are usually not very strong (Ploug, 1996; van Oorschot, 2002b), but studies about the influence of individual characteristics on the relative weight of different deservingness criteria are very limited (Jeene et al. 2013). One could imagine that people who relied on social benefits in the past weigh criteria differently because they find some criteria, for instance control, less important than other criteria. Or people with a higher education may think differently about the criterion of attitude than people with a lower education (Jeene et al. 2013). In addition to fluctuations in contextual effects, this can have consequences for the varying importance of different deservingness criteria as well. Jeene, van Oorschot and Uunk (2013) were the first to explore this question empirically and examine with Dutch data which criteria matter more for which individuals. They find effects of socio-structural and cultural characteristics on the relative importance of the criteria of need, reciprocity and control for deservingness of disability pensions: Structural factors that are related to resource competition, like lower levels of education, lower income and unemployment, and cultural views like work ethic, are associated with stronger emphasis on the control and reciprocity deservingness criteria, while personal experience with the benefit lowers the emphasis. Other studies should examine whether these results can be generalized across time and countries, or examine differences across different benefit schemes. Also the theoretical underpinnings could be fleshed out and tested.

#### **4.4 The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefit obligations**

A new perspective on the social legitimacy of targeted benefits regards the duties that are attached to certain benefits. Policy makers place increased emphasis on activation, and 'welfare to work' measures, in which active job seeking and participating in training programs are increasingly demanded from benefit recipients (Lødemel and Trickey, 2001). Therefore, popular opinion on obligations related to activation or participation that could be attached to social assistance or

unemployment benefits are increasingly of interest. Deservingness theory can be used to explain why some groups are offered leniency on work obligations, and others are not. Studies in this field show that people generally approve of these responsibilities attached to entitlements, yet people differentiate in their approval or the strictness of the obligation between different target groups. Regarding unemployment benefits, people generally are less demanding in terms of job seek obligations in case of older unemployed and unemployed with dependent children, while being stricter for younger individuals (Houtman, 1997; Albrekt Larsen, 2008; Jeene and van Oorschot, 2015). Jeene and van Oorschot (2015) further show that for social assistance and benefits targeted at the disabled, people are less strict for individuals who are more in need or who have more dependent children. Future research could extend this research to more countries, more target groups and more specifically test if there is a relation between the deservingness heuristics regarding benefit rights and obligations.

#### **4.5 *Experimental methods in deservingness studies***

Research on the social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits is at present mostly confined to analysis of public opinion surveys that contain relevant questions. There are few of them, on national as well as a cross-national level, they often only address a small number of target groups or deservingness criteria, and building up a broad body of knowledge is difficult because surveys often have different forms and formulations of deservingness items. These are serious obstacles in developing the field further. Recent publications however, apply various new data types and methods. Vignette studies confront respondents with detailed descriptions of situations of persons with certain characteristics and let them answer questions about the deservingness of these individuals (see for example: Reeskens and van der Meer, 2014; Kootstra, 2014; Petersen, 2012). Slothuus (2007) uses fictive newspaper stories in experiments to test framing effects of deserving and undeserving poor and unemployed. The experiment revealed that framing welfare recipients as undeserving can be used by policymakers to convince citizens of welfare retrenchment policies. These new experimental studies are typically useful for assessing the relative weight of different criteria or the underlying deservingness heuristics of individuals. Extending research using this type of methods can therefore substantially contribute to our knowledge of social legitimacy of targeted benefits.

#### **4.6 *Qualitative research***

Finally, whether survey or experiment, a problem in present day deservingness research is that deservingness criteria are pre-determined by researchers, deduced from existing literature and theories, and that their importance is assessed with quantitative techniques of data gathering and analysis. What is lacking thus far is qualitative research, e.g. in the form of in depth interviewing or forum groups, in which people are asked to freely discuss and reveal what kind of criteria they are inclined to apply to specific needy groups.

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## **ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe. Social Policy and Innovation**

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

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