

## INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMS FOR IMMIGRANTS: *Liberalism revisited, or changing ideas of citizenship?*

### Abstract

Following the trend of most western European countries, Norwegian social policy is moving in the direction of activation and conditionality. The reform studied here, the Introductory Act for newly arrived immigrants, is one of the most prominent examples of a series of reforms following the same pattern. The main topic in the debate over activation is whether conditionality is imposed in order to qualify and enable, or rather is motivated by an intention to control and deter – in other words, empowerment or neoliberalism. The topic calls for a closer look at the measures within the activation regime in question, and their ideological anchoring. The UK activation discourse provides a contrastive case for the analysis. This paper argues that the Norwegian reform rests on an ideological cocktail of empowerment, gender/political equality, and neoliberalism. The reform was preceded by considerable changes in the political and academic discourses on citizenship, and the new discourses on empowerment and gender/political equality are clearly reflected in the act. The paper also places the changes in discourse within the context for policy change created by interests and social learning.

### Keywords

Activation • discourse • ideas • integration policy

### List of abbreviations

MUD: Moral underclass discourse  
RED: Redistribution discourse  
SID: Social inclusion discourse  
ED: Empowerment discourse  
PED: Political equality/equal opportunities/women's rights discourse  
CRED: Cultural relativist discourse

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## 1 Introduction

There is broad consensus in the literature that the welfare state is undergoing a process of change in the direction of activation. Still, the debate continues on the strength of the changes, the causes for change, as well as on the consequences predicted for citizenship. Is activation eroding social citizenship by revoking rights (Handler 2003)? Or is it a “third way” social investment (Giddens 1998) that may pay off for both the activated and the welfare state, and that convey a more egalitarian relationship between citizen and welfare state by extending “contractual capacity” (Yeatman 1997) also to marginalized groups? Is it motivated by a wish to provide better services, or does it simply represent a shift towards (neo-)liberalism?

The activation trend is particularly relevant for studies of integration policy for (at least) two reasons: First, there is a close link between integration policy and social citizenship, as the recognition of the social rights of immigrants is a fundamental condition for integration policy. Second, there are indications that activation is implemented more eagerly when the target group is foreign born (Djuve & Kavli 2007; Van Oorschot 2002).

One explanation for the differing interpretations of activation may be the variety of its implementations across Europe. Barbier (2005) states that “a diversity of solutions persists for activation in both the broad and the narrow sense”. In the British case, Ruth Lister (2009) concludes that “the ‘new contract for welfare’ places greater

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emphasis on obligations than on rights” (p. 5). This may be accurate for the British case, but not necessarily for activation in general. Lister points to the neoliberal heritage of British third-way activation policy, and to influence from America but also Scandinavia. In this paper I will discuss activation reform in Norway, a welfare system with strong roots in social democracy, the latter understood both as a welfare state category (Esping-Andersen 1990) and in terms of the political dominance of the social democratic Labour Party in the postwar era. The UK activation discourse as described by Lister (2009) and Levitas (1998) provides a comparative case for the analysis.

Individual rights and demand-side policy have had a strong standing in Norwegian social policy in general. Furthermore, policy for integration of immigrants, which is the case for analysis here, strongly underscored the rights to cultural distinctiveness and choice up until the late 1980s (Brochmann 2003). By 1997, the political climate had changed, and a white paper presented by the Labour Party government for the first time proposed to investigate the alternative of linking the rights to income support to participation in some kind of training (St.mld nr.17 1996–97). Six years later, the Introductory Act institutionalized compulsory participation in full-day training for newly arrived immigrants, and thereby represented a watershed in Norwegian integration policy.

When the new measures were tested out through pilot projects in 1998, they were met with opposition both by caseworkers and teachers within the integration services, who criticized the measures for being unethical and counterproductive (Djuve et al. 2001, 2003). The effects of the new instruments were uncertain, and in addition, the instruments were fraught with considerable problems of legitimacy, being perceived as assimilationist, stigmatizing, and/or violating the integrity of the individuals concerned. This view seems to be in accordance with the official integration policy of the 1980s. In this case, however, the political opinions on what constitutes legitimate instruments changed over a relatively short period: Measures that would have been politically impossible to implement in 1993 were established by law ten years later. What had happened?

Most western welfare states have made substantial changes in social policy over the past two decades, ignoring the predictions of stability stemming from the dominant institutionalist path dependency theorem (Pierson 1994/2004). During the 1990s, welfare state change was mainly understood as retrenchment, and seen as cost containing adaptations to external drivers like globalization and demographic changes (Pierson 1994). Welfare states were understood as operating under conditions of “permanent austerity” (Pierson 2001), but still changes were interpreted and expected to be small, as a result of path dependency, veto points, and blame avoidance. The stability bias of new institutionalism has been discussed increasingly critically in the literature (e.g. Goul Andersen 1997; Hall & Taylor 1996; Hay 2001; Peters et al. 2005). Towards the end of the millennium, in the face of a growing consensus that actual change had taken place, a new interest in theory that could explain such change emerged, and particularly in theories of

policy learning and ideational change (e.g. Béland 2005; Blyht 2002; Seeleib-Kaiser & Fleckenstein 2007). The idea of cost-containment as the main driver for change has also been questioned: “the Danish welfare state does not seem to be in a condition of “permanent austerity” – and politics, interest conflicts and ideas are arguably as important as ever as drivers of change” (Goul Andersen 2007: 5). In this context, I find it particularly interesting to analyze ideational changes when they occur within a political movement (here the social democratic party) in one of the richest countries of the world. The changes described here include social democratic politicians altering their former stances, not (only) changes in the political landscape. The reform is also rather costly, as full-day paid training is clearly more expensive than the former regime of social benefits and low intensive language training – at least in the short run, and hence a poor example of retrenchment. Cost containment does not seem to be a driving force behind the reform. In other words, this is a study of ideational changes among social democrats that did not operate under circumstances of “permanent austerity”. They did however operate under circumstances of increased immigration, growing competition from the anti-immigration Progress Party and an integration regime that during the 1990s was construed as a failure (Djuve & Kavli 2007). In other words, motivations for change could be found both in a wish to improve the social and/or economic integration of immigrants, an intention to deter further immigration by curbing their access to welfare services, and/or in a more instrumental ambition to attract anti-immigration voters by showing a stricter line in integration policy. Scrutiny of the contents of the reform and the debate preceding it may shed some light on which of these motives have been openly advanced, and to what extent they are reflected in the resulting reform.

The activation of social protection has been described as “one of the most important transformations of social protection across Europe” (Barbier 2005: 113). Activation is a key notion in the European employment strategy, and activation policies and programs are main instruments to promote the transition from welfare to work and to (re)integrate people dependent on social insurance benefits or social assistance into the labor market. This has happened simultaneously with increased migration and a resulting ethnically diverse workforce. Even the most conservative predictions indicate an immigrant population in Norway of between 21% and 31% by 2060 (Brunborg & Texmon 2009). The interplay between target groups and policy has not been given much attention in the literature, but some studies suggest that activation particularly has endangered the social rights of the most vulnerable groups (Cherlin et al. 2002; Van Oorschot 2002).

On the other hand, parallel to the introduction of obligatory participation in activation programs, there has been a development of more explicit rights for citizens in the target groups of different activation programs (Dingeldey 2009). Typically, activation measures curb the access to unconditional income support, but introduce rights to participation in some sort of paid training. This underscores

the importance of monitoring multiple dimensions in studies of social citizenship.

A distinction is sometimes made between activation of the work-first type and of the human capital type. The former gives priority to labor market integration on the premise that any job is better than none, while the latter emphasizes the development of skills that will enable people to find suitable work (Dean 2003). Whether the aim of the activation efforts is understood as work, citizenship, or both has consequences for how policymakers, caseworkers, and the general public think about work methods (Hagelund & Kavli 2009). Particularly when activation is invoked in order to obtain social citizenship, the potential conflict between conditionality and autonomy become apparent. The activating state offers and expects a more active and engaged role for citizens, including marginalized citizens (Jensen & Pfau-Effinger 2005; Taylor-Gooby 2009) – at least at the rhetorical level. The active citizen is assumed to be self-responsible, and citizens who are claimants of public transfers are expected to take an active role in the process of becoming self-reliant. This role entails more autonomy and choice than the traditionally passive client role, in other words, user involvement in the shaping of services. The potential discord between conditionality and autonomy is at the core of the debate on the “true colors” of activation. Conditionality may in some cases be intended to – and/or implemented in ways that work to – discipline and restrict; in others to motivate, empower, and recognize contractual or other capabilities.

A separate strand of critique of activation policy as an employment strategy is based on the understanding that unemployment is mainly a demand-side problem. According to this view, problems of unemployment must be solved by demand-side measures. Irrespective of its implementation, activation is a supply-side measure and will accordingly not solve the problem. Ruth Levitas (1998) identified this stream of critique as the Redistributive Discourse. The three discourses identified by Levitas serve as a starting point for my analysis of the Norwegian activation discourses, and are briefly described in the next section.

## 2 A contrastive analysis of activation discourses in Norwegian integration policy

Levitas characterizes the social exclusion debate through the distinction between a ‘redistributive’ (RED), a ‘moral underclass’ (MUD), and a ‘social inclusion’ (SID) discourse. RED is based on a neo-Keynesian/solidaristic perspective, where market produced inequalities are seen as the cause of social problems, and income redistribution and demand management promoted as the means to achieve employment and equality. Social democracy has its roots in this discourse. In MUD the welfare state itself is seen as the problem, and state interventions understood to cause disincentives for work and to undermine work ethics and family values. The cure is deregulation and negative sanctions/workfare. MUD clearly corresponds to

the understanding of conditionality as controlling and deterring. SID is identified by Levitas as a discourse that has a more narrow focus on integration through paid work. While RED focuses on demand side problems, SID points to the importance of social and individual preconditions to enter the labor market. SID therefore prescribes activation schemes and training, as well as arguing in favor of a new balance of rights and duties.

Levitas’ critique of SID mainly focuses on its emphasis on lack of work over lack of funds as the reason for social exclusion. She does not seem to be particularly interested in the type of activation measures applied, nor their effects. The ideological anchoring of SID is somewhat unclear – that seems to be part of the definition of SID, which makes it challenging to draw a clear line between SID and MUD (and RED). A strict work-first approach can easily be interpreted as being in line with MUD. Empowering conditionality could be interpreted as being in line with RED, if work is understood as the best tool for redistribution. In other words, all three discourses could provide backing for activation measures. A deeper look into the rationales for activation presented in policy discourse and how these are reflected in policy measures will be helpful to determine the ideological anchoring of a particular activation regime.

This article aims to

1. identify the changes in discourses on social citizenship (in the field of integration of immigrants) that preceded the Introductory Act, and
2. investigate how these discourses are reflected in the Act: What was the ideological anchoring of the new measures? Furthermore, the ambition is to
3. study the role of ideational change for welfare reform by exploring the links between discourse, measures, and political support for the reform.

A comparative element is introduced by contrasting the Norwegian discourse with the British. At least at first sight, SID corresponds quite well to the Norwegian policy labeled “the work-line”, which guides current social policy in general and the Introductory Act in particular. The three discourses presented by Levitas are used as a point of departure, as I identify and categorize the discourses and ideological motivations presented for imposing the particular kinds of activation measures that are applied in the Introductory Act. I am particularly interested in arguments that can shed light on the debate on the true colors of activation: Was activation promoted through arguments about empowerment and inclusion, or rather by the contention that work incentives needed strengthening? Was the intension to curb or rather to expand the rights of marginal groups?

A weighty motive for focusing on these changes in discourses is of course the conception that the changes in discourse have played an important role in the policy changes. The importance of ideas in political change seems almost self-evident: “it is difficult to conceive of political and institutional change that is not propelled by some set of ideas about political outcomes and the arrangement to reach those goals” (Peters, Pierre and King 2005: 1296).

The interest for the role of ideas in welfare state change has increased over the past decade. The independent causal effect of ideas is however difficult to establish (Yee 1996). As stated by Taylor-Gooby (2005: 8), “Paradigm and discourse approaches contribute to understanding of welfare reform, but they cannot in themselves provide a complete explanation.”

I will present data that suggest that new (imported) ideas that coincided with agenda setting factors (such as increased immigration and conceived failure of the former integration regime) played an important role in welfare state changes. I have suggested that the reform does not seem to have been motivated by cost containment, but other drivers of change, and particularly the interests of powerful actors, must be taken into consideration. Whether or not the construction of activation as an empowering measure reveals personal convictions or reflects a hidden agenda, is hard to tell. Such a hidden agenda could possibly be an intention of social democrats and leftist political parties to show more “muscle” in integration policy, given the increased competition from the anti-immigration Progress Party during the 1990s and the 2000s. Even though the Progress Party has never been in office, their latent power may have influenced integration policy (Howard 2010). Another possibility is that social democrats have actually embraced traditional neoliberal arguments about the need to control behaviour through economic sanctions, but refuse to admit it and hide behind arguments that could lead up to similar measures. The question is closely connected to the understanding political actors may have of the underlying political problem that needs solving, but also to how problems and solutions are politically framed (Bacchi 1999; Béland 2005; Kingdon 1995).

This article does not pretend to offer a full analysis of when changing ideas actually lead to policy change, but it seems odd to talk about welfare state change without at least mentioning other drivers of change. The analysis is inspired by the analytical framework offered by Hall (1993), in its focus on how social learning/agenda setting and changing interests may have paved the way for new ideas that challenged the existing political paradigms.

One way to shed some light on the relation between ideas and interests is exactly to dig deeper into how changing ideas of activation, citizenship, and empowerment have been presented in the political discourses and in the actual policy changes. Are the changes anchored in new ideas of citizenship, or rather in a wish to restrain immigrants’ access to welfare state services? Are the resulting policy measures likely to induce empowerment, or have citizenship rights been curbed? These are central questions for the analysis.

The rest of the paper is structured in five sections. The next section is a description of Norwegian integration policy before and after the Introductory Act. I then move on to identify the changes in discourses on social citizenship (in the field of integration) that played out in the 1990s and onward. This was a period of search for a new policy (or “puzzling” in the vocabulary of Hecló (1974)). The policy outputs from this puzzling and their links to the discourses are presented in a separate section. The impact of the changing ideas of

citizenship on policy is summed up and discussed in two separate sections: One on the ideological anchoring of the Introductory Act, and one on the relation between ideas and welfare state change, where the latter acknowledges also other drivers of change. Finally, I raise the question of whether the changes are particular for integration policy, or rather should be understood as an expression of a general turn in social policy, away from transfers and towards ideas of “social investment” in a Giddens “third way” sense.

The data consist of

- a. policy documents: the original proposal from MPs to initialize trial projects of activation for immigrants, the parliament committee report on that proposal, a green paper that discusses and outlines a draft Introductory Act, the final act, the parliament committee report on the act, parliament debates over the act<sup>1</sup>, and relevant white papers from 1979 up until the Introductory Act was amended in 2005, and
- b. scholarly and less scholarly contributions to the analysis of Norwegian integration policy published from 1991 and up until today, including the main evaluations that have been conducted of the Introductory Program.

### 3 A shift from tacit to explicit activation in Norwegian integration policy

Norwegian social policy was for several decades characterized by “sleeping” clauses of activation. It can be argued that a social contract of rights and obligations has been an implicit feature of the Norwegian welfare state since its construction in the postwar period. Enactments of activation and conditionality were passed in 1960 (concerning disability pensions), 1964, and 1991 (concerning social assistance benefits), but research has revealed that the conditions were rarely implemented (Drøpping, Hvinden and Vik 1997).

The Introductory Act followed an integration regime in which the integration services were mainly delivered by the same institutions that serve the majority population. Equal treatment, regardless of ethnic origin, had been a basic principle for integration policy since the 1970s. White paper No. 39 (1987-88) explicitly places integration policy under the heading of general welfare policy, and emphasizes the principle of sectoral<sup>2</sup> responsibility for service provision to the entire population – including immigrants. Since 1982, the local municipalities have been responsible for the implementation of individual integration measures<sup>3</sup>. In the 1980s and 1990s the integration and training efforts varied substantially from one municipality to the next, but typically consisted of a few hours of voluntary Norwegian language training per week. Full-day, all-year programs were a rare occurrence (Berg & Thorseth 1995; Djuve & Pettersen 1997; Djuve & Kavli 2000; Djuve et al. 2001; Norberg 1994).

Refugees normally have insufficient income sources when they arrive in their host country. Hence the sectoral welfare state recognized their problems as unemployment and low income, and

they were referred to the social assistance offices. The standard response of the social assistance service was to treat the immigrants like any other clients. Their problems were identified to be a number of deficiencies: lack of employment, income, housing, Norwegian language skills, and knowledge about the Norwegian society. The solutions chosen from the repertoire of the social assistance offices were income support, housing, access to Norwegian classes (though typically only a few hours a week), and often extensive service concerning practical purposes like acquiring furniture and domestic appliances, and handling of the refugees' household finances (paying their bills). At this stage – that could last for years or even into retirement age – the welfare apparatus did not put much effort into work training. One important explanation for this is the division of labor between the social assistance offices and the job centres. The social workers often hesitated to pass their refugee clients on to the job centres, partially because they felt that the refugees needed time to settle down and recover from traumatic experiences, and partially because they were aware of the language skills requirements of the job centres. When the refugees finally turned up at the job centres, many of them failed the Norwegian test and were sent back to the social assistance offices.

The size of the social assistance benefit is calculated according to household income and expenses, and may be influenced by the discretionary judgment of the social worker. The latitude for discretion also includes the possibility to set conditions for the cash benefits. The local implementation of conditioning was not surveyed until the 1990s, but these surveys indicate that the use of such terms and conditions was not widespread. In 1995 only just over 30% of the municipalities reported having used workfare provisions in at least one case (Lødemel 1997). Three years later, approximately 25% of the municipalities had implemented public labor-market schemes as part of their workfare programs (Vik-Mo & Nervik 1999)<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the fact that imposition of conditions on recipients of social security benefits was not very widespread in Norwegian municipalities during the 1990s, nonobservance of such conditions was not always met with real sanctions by the municipalities that had chosen to implement such provisions (Lødemel 1997; Vik-Mo & Nervik 1999). Even municipalities that had imposed conditions for participation in training programs rarely or never resorted to economic sanctions against refugees or immigrants (Djuve et al. 2001). Typically, the conditions included that the immigrant should register as unemployed and sign up for a Norwegian course.

The Introductory Act entailed an institutional change that was rather radical in the Norwegian context, and that probably had major impact on the largely successful implementation of the reform (Djuve & Kavli 2006, 2007). Income support for the participants was to be provided through an introductory benefit, contingent on actual participation in the program. Access to ordinary social assistance benefit was restricted. The introductory benefit was constructed as an individual benefit, in the sense that every adult member of a household has an individual right to it, as long as they fulfill their obligations as

participants. It should be noted that the introductory benefit is quite generous relative to social assistance benefits in most (all?) other countries, amounting to 150,000 NOK (approximately 19,000 EUR) per year. The programs were also established as an individual right, implying that the local municipalities have a legal obligation to deliver the program. This last feature was not a part of the original law proposition, but a result of an intervention from the Norwegian Parliament (Innst. S. nr. 129 (2001–2002)). The intervention was a result of a proposition from the Labour Party, the Centre Party, and the Socialist Party that was launched in a debate raised by the Progress Party, and was voted through with the support of the Progress Party<sup>5</sup>. The government coalition parties (the Conservative Party, the Christian Democrats, and Venstre (liberal non-socialists)) voted against.

Obliging municipalities to implement full-day training for immigrants was a significant departure from the traditional high level of local autonomy in the implementation of social policy. Through the enactment of the Norwegian introductory program, Norwegian authorities had reformed integration policy in three major ways: First, the intensity and quantity of qualification efforts increased substantially. Second, participation was made compulsory for all newly arrived refugees, both men and women. And third, the local municipalities could no longer choose not to offer full-day programs for newcomers. It was a change in the direction of increasing conditionality, but also increasing rights: the obligation to participate is currently reciprocated by a corresponding entitlement to a place in a program for which basic guidelines define the scope and content.

#### 4 The public debate on the introduction of compulsive integration systems

In 1991 the Norwegian sociologist Ottar Brox published a book called "I'm not a racist, but...". Brox claimed that Norwegian debate on immigration and integration was severely hampered by what he referred to as "the morality championship": In trendsetting political and academic communities, skepticism towards immigration and immigrants was perceived as xenophobic and as an expression of low moral standards. The result was that a whole range of arguments were excluded from the debate, with a polarization of stands as the inevitable effect. And, as Brox points out: the people's opinions set boundaries for the authorities. It seems plausible that the climate for debate was partially responsible for an integration policy that placed major emphasis on influencing attitudes among the majority population, while policy that targeted immigrants was characterized by facilitation and preservation of cultural distinctiveness.

During the 1990s a growing concern over policy failure was voiced in integration debate. As early as in the 1980s, criticism of the clientification effects and the deficient quality of the Norwegian integration regime for refugees was raised by researchers (NOU 1986). During the 1990s, the criticism of the integration regime increased, fuelled by a growing number of studies documenting high levels of

unemployment, low income, high dependency on social assistance, poor living conditions, low Norwegian skills, and extensive social exclusion in large immigrant groups (Djuve & Hagen 1995; Hagen 1997; Sivertsen 1995; Vassenden 1996). Researchers, media, and the growing Progress Party pointed to the gap between ambitious political goals of inclusion and actual integration. Researchers and politicians started to look for explanations.

The criticism raised by the research community targeted three aspects in particular. First, questions were raised with regard to the quality, continuity, and intensity of the training efforts, and excessive local variation in the training offered was documented (Berg 1996; Djuve & Hagen 1995; Djuve & Pettersen 1997). Problems with poor quality and continuity were partly explained by the sectoral principle of service provision, and better coordination of efforts between social assistance offices and the job centres were prescribed – repeatedly. This line of criticism did not really offer new understandings of the problem, but was an important part of the social learning process and contributed to the general understanding that the current integration policy was a failure.

Second, it was claimed that the social welfare system gave rise to clientification: The “poor” help provided undermined the capacity of refugees to become self-sufficient (NOU 1986: 8; Wikan 1995). The combination of low-intensity and poorly individually adapted training, long-time social assistance dependency, and over-protective social policy measures (like paying people’s bills) led to passivity, disqualification, and health problems (Djuve et al. 2001; Djuve & Hagen 1995; Djuve & Pettersen 1997). The concern was that the system itself created poorly integrated long-term clients instead of autonomous citizens. This criticism can be labeled the “empowerment discourse” (ED). In the empowerment discourse, the solutions to the conceived problem of poor integration were high quality individually tailored training and economic incentives for participation. The training should include social studies, in order to provide the participants with the information necessary to understand and participate in society. In other words, ED contested the then dominating (RED) argument that unconditional benefits were the best way to achieve social citizenship.

Third, public integration policies were criticized for being vague and indistinct in their communication of basic Norwegian values (Wikan 2002). In the 1970s and 1980s, research on integration and the policy discourse was strongly characterized by an anthropologic paradigm that emphasized cultural relativism and the immigrants’ rights to maintain cultural distinctiveness. Norwegian society should to the least possible extent force Norwegian values and life practices upon the immigrants. Emphasis was placed on allowing the immigrants themselves to decide the form of adaptation to Norwegian society. This paradigm was also deeply embedded in public policy. Brochmann (2002: 36-37) describes how policy formulations underscored the importance of facilitating real choices and protected the immigrants against forces of assimilation. An illustrative example is

found in the white paper “On immigrants in Norway” (St.meld. no. 74, 1979-80), which specifies the need to inform immigrant parents of the dangers of assimilation inherent in sending the children to Norwegian day-care centres. For a long time, the cultural studies of immigrants in Norway were characterized by a distinct unwillingness to question the cultural practices of immigrants (Borchgrevink 2003), but eventually issues of conflicting group rights (ethno-cultural-religious) and individual rights (often women’s rights) gained some attention (Borchgrevink 2002; Wikan 2002). Wikan explicitly accused Norwegian authorities of having sacrificed the rights of women and girls on the altar of multiculturalism.

This development in cultural studies lagged somewhat behind public debate. In the late 1990s, increasing attention to cultural practices involving oppression of women in certain immigrant communities contributed to a reevaluation of the cultural relativism paradigm. Media reports and documentaries on forced marriages and female circumcision spurred a comprehensive, and at times heated, public debate. Key issues revolved around how Norwegian society could and should relate to the life practices of immigrants – and those of Muslims in particular – when these collide head-on with core Norwegian values (Hagelund 2005). The perceived distance between the majority and parts of the minority with regard to key values thereby became a prominent additional argument in the criticism of the Norwegian training and integration regime for refugees and immigrants. In other words, the old cultural relativist discourse (CRED) was challenged by a “political equality” discourse (PED) with strong emphasis on women’s rights. Within this discourse, the solutions presented for the problem of poor integration range from ensuring a solid curriculum of democracy and human rights in the introductory courses, via the introduction of obligatory participation or strong economic sanctions to secure high participation rates, to proposals of obligatory testing of language and other relevant skills, mandatory loyalty oaths, and measures to reduce the influx of immigrant groups considered to have particularly divergent beliefs and practices.

Criticism also emerged from some political parties, and from those on the extreme right in particular. The topic of immigration entered the political agenda in a major way following the local elections of 1987 when the Progress Party enjoyed a leap forward in electoral outcomes. The Progress Party vented what was perceived as excessive use of welfare benefits among immigrants, and voiced the perception that immigrants intentionally abused the welfare system. The willingness of immigrants to become integrated was also made into a topic for public debate, for example following the debate on alleged ‘misplaced kindness’ (in Norwegian *snillisme*), which was set off by Rune Gerhardsen of the Labour Party (Gerhardsen 1991). The arguments are clearly related to MUD.

To sum up, one stream of criticism claimed that better integration could be achieved by doing more of the same, only better: More, individually tailored, and coordinated qualification would solve the problems. Another stream claimed that better integration could be

achieved by doing something fundamentally different: Unconditional income support would have to cease, and immigrants should somehow be made to internalize or at least accept Norwegian basic values – however difficult to define.

Opponents of activation schemes voiced concerns that these schemes would undermine social rights and depreciate and cast suspicion on social welfare clients, indicating that RED was still to be reckoned with. Towards the end of the 1990s it nevertheless appeared as if the adherents of activation had gained the upper hand in the political discourse, with regard to both integration policy and social policy in general. It is not clear whether this actually indicates that RED was on retreat, as countercyclical fiscal policies still have a strong standing in Norway. Also, the suggested introductory benefit was at least as generous as ordinary social benefits, and substantially higher when both spouses participate in the program. Furthermore, the balancing of new obligations with a corresponding right to participate in the program makes it problematic to conclude that the program represents an encroachment of rights. What seems definite is that CRED had lost ground to ED and PED.

## 5 How the public debate has been reflected in policy discourses

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s a gradual change could be observed in policy documents, all in the direction of placing more emphasis on the obligations of immigrants and refugees to participate in Norwegian society and labor markets. Report No. 39 to the Storting (1987-88) “On immigration policy” represents a turning point. Here, refugee policy is for the first time placed in the context of other parts of integration policy – even if the concept of integration does not appear in the text (Brochmann 2003). Equal opportunity and dignity are key concepts in the report. At the same time it emphasizes that immigrants, like Norwegians in general, must respect not only the laws, but also the core values of Norwegian society. These were specified to be democracy, gender equality, and children’s rights. However, it was underscored that immigrants still have the opportunity to preserve their own culture, and the undesirability of assimilation was repeatedly specified. These changes are clearly related to PED.

In 1996 the need for a more unified training effort to qualify refugees for employment and other participation in Norwegian society was emphasized in Report No. 17 to the Storting (1996-97). As a follow-up to Report No. 17, the Ministry of Local Affairs commissioned a report on other countries’ experiences with a closer coupling of participation in qualification with economic transfers. This can be interpreted as intended policy learning before implementing the (in the Norwegian context) new ideas of conditionality. The resulting report presented a list of common characteristics of successful programs that practiced economic sanctions in case of illegitimate absence from the program (Djuve & Pettersen 1997). The report – and the list – was extensively

referenced when the Committee on Local Affairs in Parliament in March 1998 proposed mandatory and individually adapted full-day training for refugees, initially on a trial basis (Dok 8:87 (1997-98), Innst. S nr 192 (1997-1998)). Trial projects were launched in 26 local municipalities between 1998 and 2001. The initiative came from Labour Party MPs, but gained support from a broad political coalition, including the Progress Party. Neither the proposition from the MPs or the parliament committee report makes any reference to the need to clarify obligations, to sanction, or in other ways discipline the refugees. The proposition is explicitly motivated by the need for better and more comprehensive training in order to enable refugees for life in the Norwegian society, and for better use of the resources represented by refugees. The shift from general social assistance to the targeted introductory benefit is legitimized by the need to establish a link between individual performance and outcomes, in order to fight clientification. Concepts like “obligation” or “duty” are not applied. In other words, the proposition was clearly influenced by ideas that belong within ED.

However, PED and women’s rights played an important role in the decision to obligate the municipalities to implement the Introductory Act (the centre/right government originally suggested that the municipalities should be able to choose whether or not to implement the Act). In the final proposition the choice to make the Act obligatory also for the local municipalities was explained mainly by the need for access to high quality qualification for all refugees, irrespective of their place of residence in Norway (Ot.prp nr. 28 (2002-2003)). As mentioned above, the decision was however made as a follow-up of a proposition from the Progress Party (Dok. nr. 8:50 (2001:2002)). The proposition made explicit reference to the tragic case where a young Swedish woman of Kurdish descent, Fadime Sahindal, was killed by her father in Stockholm in January 2002. The young woman had married without consent from her family. The proposition pictured so-called honor killings as a symptom of widespread oppression of women in immigrant communities, and called for measures to counter what they perceived to be an increasing level of problems between Norwegians and some immigrant groups. None of the eight proposed measures from the Progress Party gained support from the political majority. Instead, the alternative measure of introductory programs that were made compulsory also for the municipalities, was launched by a coalition between the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party – and was voted through in Parliament with the support from the Progress Party. When Parliament handled the proposition, securing the rights of immigrant women were explicitly referred to in the debate as a motivation for making participation in the program compulsory, and for obligating the municipalities to provide such programs: “If this (participation) is not a right for everyone, we all know who will be sent to the kitchen and denied the opportunity to learn Norwegian, who will not have access to knowledge about their own rights, who will not be given training so they can manage in the labor market. That will be the women (...) we will not be able to solve

this if it is not both an individual right and an obligation for society to provide” (Karin Andersen of the Socialist Left Party. My translation)<sup>6</sup>.

Parallel to the trial projects, a new act on introductory programs for immigrants was elaborated. A green paper was presented in 2001 (NOU 2001:20), and the law proposition (Ot.prp nr. 28 (2002-2003)) was passed in 2003. In these documents (from the Centre-Christian Democrat coalition) a new vocabulary is introduced. The pair of concepts “rights and obligations” appear 34 times in the proposition, and the slightly condescending “need to make responsible” (in Norwegian: ansvarliggjøre) (the refugees) appear four times. The latter concept seems to imply that the refugees were initially irresponsible. Both

documents firmly place the “responsibility to participate actively in society” on the “newly arrived immigrants” (Ot.prp.nr. 28 p. 7) but also underscore the importance of society providing an effective and comprehensive training program. In other words, while the original proposition seems to be influenced by what I have identified as ED and PED, the resulting act features also several MUD-like elements. The MUD elements are however mostly to be found in the general parts of the law proposition, and are difficult to pinpoint in the description of the actual contents of the Introductory Program. The shaping of the program has not changed much from the trial projects to the Introductory Act.

Table 1. The consistency of four main discourses with the introductory act

	Elements prescribed as solutions to the identified problems	Introduced in the Introductory Act	Mainstream policy (general welfare policy not particularly targeted at immigrants – but available also for immigrants)
Empowerment discourse (ED)	Tailoring Full-day training User involvement Conditionality (activating) Social studies Childcare	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	(All measures may be applied but do not constitute an obligatory program for the whole target group)  Yes
Political Equality/ Gender Equality Discourse (PED)	Democracy/human rights studies Strong economic sanctions or incentives for participation Strong incentives for “double breadwinner” model Childcare Long term residency permits made contingent on (partial) completion Residency permits made contingent on exam results Obligatory loyalty oaths Measures to reduce the influx of immigrant groups considered to have particularly divergent beliefs and practices	Yes Disputable Yes Yes No No	Yes
Moral underclass Discourse (MUD)	Conditionality (restrictive) Lower benefits Work first	Yes (?) No Disputable	Unsystematically
Redistribution discourse (RED)	Un-conditionality High benefits Participation is an individual right Countercyclic fiscal policy	No Yes Yes	Yes

## 6 The ideological anchoring of activation measures

Several features from the new discourses about integration and citizenship can be traced in policy documents from the mid-1990s and up until the Introductory Act was passed. The introduction of an individual introductory benefit represented a strong incentive for the “double-breadwinner” model: When both spouses participate, the household income is doubled. This, and the introduction of democracy and human rights on the curriculum for the courses is clearly consistent with PED. The more restrictive and punitive measures suggested by some participants in PED were not reflected in the Act, with the exception of an amendment made in 2005, that made long-term residence permits contingent on completion of 250 hours of language training and 50 hours of social studies.

Individually tailored, full-day training in Norwegian language and social studies and a strong focus on user involvement fits well with the solutions preferred within ED. The relatively generous introductory benefit, conditional on participation in the program, may also be portrayed as an economic incentive and hence meet with ED specifications. Still, critics of the Introductory Program underscored the conditional nature of the introductory benefit. When the introductory benefit is interpreted as a sanction it may be consistent with MUD. The relatively high benefit level is clearly less consistent with MUD. The Introductory Act does however underscore the importance of entering the labor market “as soon as possible”, something that can be interpreted as a MUD “work-first” approach. On the other hand, comprehensive training is given major weight, and relatively few participants quit the program to start working during the first few months (Kavli et al. 2007). This may however be a result of the Introductory Program being implemented slightly differently than was intended.

In the original law proposition, MUD arguments were more or less absent. Instead the Introductory Act was (at least officially) guided by arguments and research that pointed to the empowering potential of comprehensive and compulsory qualification programs. Still, when the final Act was elaborated and passed, these arguments were accompanied by MUD arguments on the need to discipline social assistance clients. Even so, PED and particularly ED seem to have been influential on the contents of the Introductory Program, while MUD can be traced mainly in its framing – again, depending on how the conditional element is interpreted.

The principle of conditionality may conflict with the value attached to unconditional rights within RED. However, core elements of RED are still operating. The Introductory Act for the first time established full-day, tailored training as an individual right. (Table 1)

Introductory benefit levels are high relative to most other countries, and are in many cases higher than social assistance benefits. And last, but not least, supply-side measures are being applied systematically. It may be argued that this form of conditionality is not necessarily in conflict with RED. Still, whether the reform results

in a curbing or expansion of rights will depend heavily on its implementation and output. Interestingly, while research on participants in activation programs in the UK indicate that participants experience the activation as demeaning (Chan and Bowpitt 2005), a study of the participants in the introductory program reports that a vast majority find conditional benefits to be fair (Djuve 2010).

The introductory program and the discourses that played out prior to its enactment hence differ substantially from the British discourses and policies, as described by Levitas and Lister. The British “third way” has entailed increased conditionality and fewer rights as well as a strong “work-first” approach. The Norwegian Introductory Program introduced an introductory benefit that is conditional on participation in the program, but in addition a substantial expansion of rights to training. Benefit levels are relatively high, and there is a solid focus on tailoring of services. The Norwegian version of SID seems to be closer to RED, while the British SID is more difficult to distinguish from MUD. Taking into account the different welfare regimes in Norway and the UK (Esping-Andersen 1990), these differences are coherent with the perspective that institutions and history matter.

## 7 Conclusion: Ideas and welfare state change

The Introductory Act clearly reflects new (at least in the Norwegian context) ideas about citizenship and how citizenship can best be obtained. In course of the latter part of the 1990s, the idea that unconditional benefits was the best way to obtain autonomous and active citizens, rapidly lost ground to the ideas of the empowering potential of obligatory and individually tailored training for all immigrants. The fact that (parts of) the Introductory Act appeal both to the participants in the ED discourse, the PED discourse, and the MUD discourse, paved the way for a political coalition. The conditional nature of the Introductory Act appears to be a key element for the support from the political right (as in the coalition government of the Conservative Party, the Christian Democrats, and Venstre (2001–2005), as well as the support from the Progress Party), who interpreted this to be a MUD element. By comprising both an expansion and systematization of the training efforts – and a cut-back in the access to ordinary social security benefits, the scheme appealed both to the leftists, who were oriented towards solidarity, and to the rightists, who were oriented towards avoiding abuse of social security schemes. Politicians to the left expressed concerns with the failure of the old regime to produce social citizenship and cheered for activation as an empowering measure, while politicians to the right were alarmed by increasing welfare consumption and welcomed activation as a disciplining measure. Finally, the reform appealed to the entire political spectrum in its promise of better integration outcomes. In this case, it seems like ideas and interests joined forces. The act was passed with broad political support (the proposition from the parliament committee was unanimous with the exception of a few details). It seems plausible that the mixture of

ideological motivations for the act increased its political attractiveness. The alliance formed between groups that feel a particular solidarity with refugees on the one hand, and groups that have quite limited solidarity with refugees on the other, constituted the factor needed to vote the reform into reality.

The new ideas also had important “helpers” in their breakthrough. In addition to the general social political climate of increased conditionality both nationally and internationally, the conceived failure of the former policy regime helped to open a window of opportunity as the legitimacy of the old regime crumbled. Norwegian policy is characterized by ambitious social political goals and is dependent on high labor market participation. Hence the welfare gap between the refugee population and the majority, as well as the welfare loss inflicted on society by economically passive groups, served to weaken the legitimacy of the former regime. And, while policy failure and new ideas may have been the main drivers behind the Introductory Act, concerns over violations of women’s rights in some immigrant groups probably had a major say in the decision to force the reform on the local municipalities, and thereby establish participation in the program as a right for all members of the target group.

In this window of opportunity, new ideas appear to have significantly affected the shaping of Norwegian integration policy. In contrast to the British social policy discourses, the activation discourses in Norwegian integration policy were clearly influenced by ideas of empowerment and political/gender equality. These elements of the discourse had significant impact on the institutional setup and contents of the Norwegian Introductory Program. In particular, the Introductory Act has not necessarily changed the balancing of rights and obligations in favor of obligations. Even though a trend towards activation, similar to the developments in the UK, can be identified, the social democratic Norwegian welfare state still constitutes a clearly distinctive case. The Norwegian welfare state is characterized by high social political ambitions compared to the UK, and the context of permanent austerity is not so pertinent to the Norwegian case. My analysis shows that social democratic ideas remain central, and that the activation element present in integration policy is incorporated in a way that allows different actors to perceive it as a solution to earlier problems.

Finally, the departure integration policy made from general social policy in 2003 deserves a brief comment. The departure leaves at least two important questions: First, why did the reform happen first in the sector of integration, and second, has the reform influenced other sectors of social policy?

A main difference between the discourse on integration policy, and the discourse on social policy in general, has to do with agenda setting. Problems with long-term dependency on social assistance in the majority population never reached as high on the political agenda<sup>7</sup>. Immigration was relatively new and increasing, and concerns for the possible emergence of a new underclass seemed to draw more attention than the underclass that was already established.

Internationally, some research also indicates that ethnic diversity weakens the sense of solidarity in the population (Putnam 2007), and that immigrants and refugees are perceived as less worthy recipients of public benefits than the majority population (Van Oorshot 2006). To the extent that the introduction scheme is perceived as representing a restriction of the access to social security benefits for refugees, these attitudes may have contributed to making the reform appear first in the field of integration.

In addition, refugees constitute an easily identifiable target group. The process may have gone faster than in other parts of social policy, because recently arrived refugees have no special interest organizations that can protest or in other ways delay the enactment of social reforms – there was less “institutional stickiness” (Pierson 2000).

There are also indications that the Introductory Act has influenced general social policy: In the comprehensive reform of the labor and welfare administration that is currently being implemented we can identify several of the key components of the introduction scheme. Report No. 49 to the Storting on Labour, Inclusion and Participation (2003-2004) suggests that the introduction scheme has spearheaded the reform: “In the Government’s opinion, the introduction scheme constitutes a good example of how the programmes of the welfare state can be modernised and adapted to emerging challenges (...) The approach to the scheme could also serve to reduce the suspicions of abuse and thereby contribute to better mutual trust between the citizens” (p. 32). In 2007 a qualification program for long-time recipients of social assistance benefits was launched. The program is a blueprint of the Introductory Program – with the important exception that the municipalities can choose whether to implement it or not. With the introductory programs already up and running, transfer of the new measures to other policy areas was practically and politically easier.

On the other hand, the changes in the general labor and welfare policy would probably have happened anyway. The reorganization of integration policy has taken place in a period when similar changes have occurred in social policy in most western European countries, and could therefore be regarded as part of the general development towards more activation of social protection, increasing conditionality, and possibly towards the social investment state (Giddens 1998); while social protection was earlier given as transfers, the idea is now that making transfers conditional on participation in training is a social investment that at some point may pay off. And while the tracing of new and old ideas in the policy documents preceding the Introductory Act might give the idea that social democrats shy away from MUD arguments, the “no rights without duties” rhetoric is now also applied by social democrats in Norway as in other European countries (Aust & Arriba, 2005). One example which received broad media coverage was the statement made by the (then) Labour Party Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion Bjarne Håkon Hanssen in the context of the plans to introduce welfare contracts for social clients, when he declared to the daily *Dagbladet* that he “(...) would have no mercy on those who refuse to sign”<sup>11</sup>.

1 *Dagbladet* October 2005

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### Notes

- 1 These may not accurately reflect the motives of the politicians involved. Still, hiding potential motives of introducing disciplining or controlling measures (as opposed to empowering ones) doesn't seem like a tactical move if the purpose was to attract voters that are skeptical to immigrants.
- 2 Sector responsibility implies that each sector of service provision (health, education, social service, employment service etc.) is in charge of service provision for all groups in the population, and there is no single institution that is responsible for provision of services to immigrants.
- 3 Until 1982, the Norwegian Refugee Council was responsible for receiving the refugees. From 1982 onward the governmental

efforts were relocated to the Ministry of Social Affairs, which established a new agency: the Governmental Refugee Secretariat. Responsibility for local efforts was transferred to the individual municipalities.

- 4 The figures are not directly comparable, because the phrasing of the question varies slightly. The question used in Lødemel's study was: "Has the municipality initiated 'work for social security benefits' provisions as a condition authorised by the Social Services Act, Section 5-3, second paragraph? It is sufficient that at least one recipient of social security benefits has been gainfully employed as a condition for receipt of social benefits." The formulation used by Vik-Mo and Nervik was: "The 'work for social security benefits' programme defines requirements that the user must fulfil in order to receive financial social security benefits (The Social Services Act, Section 5-3, second paragraph). Are the municipal programs part of the 'work for social security benefits' program? Response alternatives were: "None of the program places", "Some of the program places", and "All of the program places".
- 5 The proposition from the Progress Party, Dok 8:50 (2001-2002) is further described two sections ahead, under "How the public debate...".
- 6 Source: [www.stortinget.no/stid/2001/s020418-01.html](http://www.stortinget.no/stid/2001/s020418-01.html).
- 7 Whether or not long term dependency on social assistance in the majority population is a major problem remains a topic of discussion, see [Dahl et al. 2006](#); [Lorentzen 2006](#).

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