# Contingent citizenship – how active welfare state reforms change the conditions for social work and people with cognitive disabilities

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In Scandinavia the Normalization principle has had great influence on social services for people with cognitive disabilities. The principle refers to the idea and overall goal that the living conditions of people with cognitive disabilities should be as close as possible to the mainstream of society and that people with cognitive disabilities should have the same rights as all other citizens. However, the political landscape is changing and over the past two decades social policy in Europe has increased the focus on cost-effectiveness and economic and social outcomes. Active welfare state reforms have been implemented in most European countries with the main aim of combatting unemployment – partly by reducing social benefits to increase incentives to take up work, and partly by introducing various forms of activation aiming to improve the employability of unemployed individuals. Originally these reforms were targeting unemployed groups with no problems besides not having a job, but over the years individuals with severe disabilities and health problems have also been included as target groups, and activation policies have gradually permeated the field of social policy. The reforms lay stress on improving the disabled individuals’ workability and increase sanctions and the threat of sanctions if the disabled individual is not making suitable efforts to improve his or her situation. Yet, little knowledge exists on what this means for social work with individuals with cognitive disabilities, who are too disabled to respond to financial incentives and are unable to develop sufficient workability, and what the consequences are for these groups.

In this presentation we will analyze the consequences of active welfare state reforms and the political focus on effectiveness in social services for individuals with cognitive disabilities in Denmark. Based on policy analysis of the Danish reforms and drawing on qualitative and quantitative empirical results from three recent Ph.D. dissertations, we will discuss the transitions in the living conditions for people with cognitive disabilities. More specifically, how the possibilities of social citizenship becomes contingent, when active welfare state reforms are implemented and when ‘being active’ – formally or informally – becomes the condition for receiving financial and social support. The findings from the dissertations show that when ‘activity’ and supporting development of a particular ‘active behavior’ among individuals with cognitive disabilities becomes the aim of social work, care and equal dignity for people who depend on assistance are left in the background. Thus, despite the aim of inclusion, the efforts to ‘activate’ those unable to engage in paid work and ‘a normal everyday life’ have had counterproductive consequences, when it comes to social marginalization and social citizenship, in particular for adults with cognitive disabilities.