Foreword

In most European countries, combinations of economic, social and cultural challenges have resulted in a precarious political context marked by intensified discussions about the scope and generosity of the welfare state. More concretely, we witness an intensification of critical debates about the necessity and fairness of redistributive relationships organized in the past, and relationships that, in view of these challenges, should be organized anew. Clearly, the European welfare state debate has come full circle, in the sense that the basic welfare deservingness question of ‘who should get what, and why’, dominating discussions in the early times of welfare state formation, is back to the forefront again, and will possibly stay there for some time to come. This longer-term perspective on the need for welfare reform and the related debates on targeting and re-targeting justify addressing the question of the social legitimacy of differently targeted welfare schemes.

The wider aim of this book is to contribute to the welfare reform debate by bringing together a collection of recent studies revolving around this question. Because in our view the deservingness opinions of various social actors play a pivotal role in the social legitimacy of welfare schemes, the concrete aim of the book is to present a picture of the latest theoretical, conceptual and methodological developments in the field, as well as to offer new and more detailed knowledge of popular deservingness opinions. The various chapters contribute to our understanding of welfare legitimacy by addressing the nature of deservingness judgments, as well as their roots and consequences. By means of diverse methodological tools, scholars coming from different research communities test the central tenets of the deservingness framework empirically, and explore whether deservingness is a useful theoretical lens to investigate welfare legitimacy.