

Preface

Inequality is a theme that has preoccupied decision-makers, populations, and also researchers for many, many years. The increase in economic inequality over the last 20–30 years has contributed to this development, but at the same time there is a growing recognition that inequality cannot be considered by looking only at the distribution of economic resources. There is a need for a varied and broad approach to understanding inequality, its causes, and instruments for changing it if so desired.

At first glance, it sounds simple to analyse and describe inequality, but it is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, several choices have also been needed to ensure that the book, on the one hand, systematically covers the topic, but on the other hand does not become so detailed that it comes to overshadow the understanding of the overall elements related to inequality.

My hope is that the book will contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of inequality, a range of causes of inequality, and what instruments welfare states will have available if there is a desire to change inequality in one or more areas. At the same time, the book is an attempt to illustrate that we shall always have a certain degree of inequality, and some kinds of inequality may be necessary to counteract inequality in other areas. When the book does not provide a clear answer as to what needs to be done and in what way to change the degree of inequality, it is because, ultimately, it is a normative question as to how great a degree of inequality is acceptable. But at the same time, the book clarifies that a high and growing degree of inequality can have negative consequences for the development of welfare states. Thus, there are some balances to be aware of.

The book is deliberately interdisciplinary in recognition of variations in the understanding of inequality, and further, to a large extent, building on the tradition of analyses within social policy. This includes, for example, philosophical, economic, sociological, and political science approaches to understanding and analysing inequality.

My thanks to referees and my research group at RUC for comments, which I believe have helped to make the book better and more structured.

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