

Regional contexts and professional values as determinants of social workers' views towards vulnerable groups and related policy measures: Italy compared to the Nordic countries

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Symposium: Perceptions and attitudes of professional social workers in different welfare systems: determining factors and implications for practice In most European countries, social programs directed at vulnerable groups are the responsibility of one or more sub-national, regional and/or local, administrative levels. Various differences in local contexts might also affect, or interact with, the views of the implementers of the programs (often social workers), potentially affecting actual provision and use of services, since implementers exercise some discretion regarding individual cases. These views might either advance or counteract differences in official policies. On the other hand, social workers are often considered to constitute a profession, characterized by (internationally accepted) ethical guidelines and core professional values. If this factor is central to the reasoning of social workers, more universal and commonly accepted ways of perceiving vulnerable groups and preferred policies among this group could be expected, regardless of local contexts. Based on large national surveys in Italy(N=2718), Sweden(N=2809), Norway(N= 703), Denmark(N=743), Finland(N=1299), we examine the perceptions regarding economically and socially vulnerable groups, and attitudes to related policy strategies, among professional social workers with a main focus on regional contexts in Italy. Italy makes an interesting case in this respect, since it is characterized by substantial regional differences in issues of social assistance. Since not only intra-national, but also international differences in welfare policies have been assumed important, we also compare the Italian results with data on the views of Nordic social workers, which represent a different welfare regime as well as a system of less varying (although locally administered) system of social assistance. Preliminary results indicate a substantially larger intra-country variation in views Italy, especially regarding more concrete policy measures.

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