

For-profit vs. Non-profit? Attitudes towards privatisation among social workers in five countries

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Symposium: Perceptions and attitudes of professional social workers in different welfare systems: determining factors and implications for practice European welfare states have been subject to significant restructuring since the 1990s. In welfare state research, terms like subsidiarisation, privatization or marketization are used to grasp a general trend towards downsizing the role of the state, and to a greater extent engage other actors in the designing, managing and implementation of social policy. Private actors, both for-profit and non-profit organizations, are gaining new roles in social services. While comparative welfare research often overlooks the distinction between for-profit and non-profit actors, third sector research emphasizes the different logics underlying these two types of non-state actors. The purpose of this paper is to analyse Nordic and Italian social worker's attitudes towards a greater involvement of for-profit and non-profit actors in social work. The empirical base for the study is nation-wide surveys among social workers in four Nordic countries and in Italy. The survey was answered by in total 7 569 social workers (Sweden N= 2809, Norway N= 703, Denmark N=743, Finland N= 1299 and Italy N=2718). The study shows that most social workers in all countries are negative towards a stronger role for non-state actors in social work. But their attitudes towards privatisation are only partly connected to which welfare model they work within. Age and working sector of the respondents are other factors of significance. An important finding is that there are different explanatory factors behind positive attitudes towards for-profit and non-profit privatisation, which indicate that social workers do not interpret the role of for-profit and non-profit organisations in the same way.

Key words: privatisation, social worker, attitudes, survey