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Everyday Welfare and Ethnographic Vignettes of Social Work Across Central and Eastern European Countries: Is there Something like an Eastern European Social Work?

Darja Zaviršek

Abstract

Social work practice in the region of central and eastern Europe is deeply imbedded in the social history of the countries. The professional responses of the three welfare players, the state, non-governmental organisations and faith-based welfare services are determined by economic hardship of the majority of populations especially in the countries of south east and eastern Europe. Economic instability and insecurity are experienced also by social workers and other helping professionals and the precarious work conditions influence their professionalism and active engagement at the work place. Social workers from state social services instrumentalised by the needs of the governments are driven by the pragmatic idea of delivering welfare assistance money for those in need with often limited engagement and even more limited resources. The local and international NGO's are busy in the areas which remain abandoned by the state and often focus on diversity, equality and community and street-work approach but with limited influence on the broader population. Social workers in the religious organisations are serving the poor and often reach families with many children, the lonely elderly and those who are traditionally prone to seek help in the religious organisations. . A remaining medically oriented institutionally based social work model and thinking and the lack of practising diversity within social welfare and policy by the major welfare services in the countries remain almost a general characteristics of the eastern European social work.

Key words

Social work in central and eastern Europe; social policy; historical perspective; economic disadvantage; diversity