

Mobilization through the population organized by organisations, students, labour unions, etc. can be another way to speak for rights and equal opportunities. This will be illustrated by the campaign initiated by the Danish branch of ICSW. The campaign ran for almost 2 years under the headline of “Let us create a socially decent Denmark for all of us“.

**TOWARDS EMPOWERING PRACTICE OF SOCIAL WORK:  
ACTIVATION AND SUPPORT OF EMPLOYMENT AS A PRACTICE  
OF SOCIAL WORK IN THE MUNICIPALITIES**

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The aim of the study was to analyse how the development of activation and employment support services for long term unemployed and for persons with disabilities has affected social work practices in the municipalities in Finland. The data consists of interviews and training materials collected in 2003–2004 in the Helsinki region.

The theoretical framework of the study relies on the conceptual discussion on empowerment, social work, and rehabilitation in Finland in the beginning of the 2000's. The social work practice descriptions and evaluations of the interviewed are compared to the good practices of activation and social work described in the literature and in the relevant research and development projects. The implications and stipulations on customer-oriented practices in the municipalities of the new workfare paradigm of social policy are being evaluated, as well.

As a member of a multidisciplinary team, social worker brings comprehensiveness and larger societal views to the problems of employment and disability. Social worker's views and practices concentrate on the barriers of employment and aim at overcoming them. Assessment of the life situations of the clients, case management, counselling of long processes, and securing the rights of the clients is the core content of empowering social work practices.

Empowering social work practices in the municipality social welfare services were previously coincidental. The change has been rapid and thorough in the beginning of 2000's, and it has brought new perspectives to the aims and practices of the client work, and the network of cooperation has broadened and become closer. The multisectoral cooperation in activation, employment and vocational rehabilitation services is considered to be primarily well functioning and effective. However, the encounter of varying work cultures, practices, values, and service models has brought about contradictions, as well.

At the present moment there is a continuous re-organizing process of client work and work organizations in the municipalities. During the last two years numerous joint employment service centres have been established, primarily in urban areas, in co-operation with employment, social welfare, health care, and social insurance authorities. This development is changing the local service cultures from sectoral approach towards close partnership and comprehensiveness in client work.

Various stipulations and mechanisms are endangering the establishment of empowering social work practices in the municipal social welfare services. The high turnover of workers, recruitment problems, case load, and introduction of new tasks and responsibilities also hamper the establishment of the new practices. The conditions of social work have become unstable.

Social work has an essential role in the employment services, and accordingly it should have a stronger organizational status. The employment services should be supplemented by services enhancing life coping skills and employability of the clients. Activation focusing on labour supply should also be supplemented by measures increasing labour demand and abolishing mechanisms of exclusion.

## **ROMA CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK IN SWEDEN**

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The National Board of Health and Welfare is the Swedish national expert and supervisory authority that works with issues concerning social services, and health and medical services. In early 2006 the board received a commission from the Swedish Government concerning social work with Roma families. The background for the coming of the Commission was that the Roma representatives lodged a complaint to the Government about the way social services worked with Roma families. The representatives said that it was more likely for a Roma family compared to the families of the majority population to have their child taken into care, and that the number of Roma children taken into care had increased. Their opinion was also that social services took Roma children into care on the basis of incorrect reasons. They also claimed that Roma children seldom were placed in Roma families, therefore the Roma children lost contact with the Roma society while they were in care.

In 2000, Sweden ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and acknowledged the Roma group, among four others, as a Swedish national minority with specific rights.

The National Board of Health and Welfare started a project that included Roma representatives. The main issue and focus of the project was to clarify whether Roma children and their families were discriminated by the social services.

The main results from the project are:

Social workers have no or very limited knowledge about the Human Rights of the Roma group as a national minority group.

Social services seldom include relatives and friends of the Roma family during the assessment which is a reason why they do not find families with the same culture to place the children in. The social services generally end up placing Roma children in families of the majority population.

The efforts of the social services to ensure that Roma children in care can maintain and develop their language, traditions and cultural heritage, are insufficient.

During an assessment the social workers seldom ask the Roma children and their parents about their view on what is important for them in their culture to maintain and develop. The social workers often have their own (biased) opinion about a child and its parents and about Roma culture.

The National Board of Health and Welfare recommends that the social services train their social workers in minority status and what the social work with Roma families can mean.