

Social work and refugees in Iceland: Challenges and opportunities

The focus of the workshop is social work with asylum seekers and refugees, opportunities and challenges. Iceland has a short history of migration of quota refugees, refugees and asylum seekers and the involvement of social workers is also fairly recent. The workshop focuses on the role of social workers in support and some of the challenges and benefits experienced by social workers working in Iceland. Social workers experience similar challenges that social workers in other European nations do, including ethical dilemmas when unable to provide support due to their clients lacking rights and financial pressures within institutions which often prevent them from responding based on social work ethics and human rights principles, key elements of social work. They also face lack of community resources and risks of burnout due to lack of clear policies and roles given the short history of receiving and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland. Social workers find themselves often 'learning by doing'. There are however also benefits such as more flexibility in roles and some power in influencing outcomes of client cases. Social workers benefit from a small Icelandic community as they often have close links to professionals on governmental levels and in various institutions and work within a favorable public atmosphere where the public and the media is able to influence a return on decisions on individual asylum claims. This however also means the risk of producing practices of responding to cases on an ad hoc and unequal treatment basis and presents social workers with another ethical dilemma. In the workshop a set of questions will be presented to discuss in relation to challenges and benefits of doing social work with refugees and asylum seekers.