Varying perceptions of social dumping in most similar countries

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Abstract

Perceptions of social dumping can vary substantially across institutional and political contexts. What is perceived as social dumping depends on how the norms that social dumping violates are defined. This chapter analyses how the post-enlargement debate on social dumping has differed between two very similar countries, Denmark and Norway. In Denmark trade unions have insisted on maintaining equal treatment as the norm, despite huge practical difficulties. In Norway a gradual shift has occurred in the norm, from equal treatment upholding minimum standards. Differences in labour market models, political constellations, and the numbers of labour migrants account for these differences.

Introduction

In the Nordic countries, ‘social dumping’ and labour migration have become highly related issues in public discourse since the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007. As workers from the new EU member states have travelled in large scale to old EU member states, concerns have been raised about the effect this will have on the receiving countries. Large socio-economic differences between Western and Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries, manifested in large dissimilarities in wages and working conditions, have formed the background for these concerns. Terms like ‘the Polish plumbers’, ‘welfare tourism’ and ‘social dumping’ may be seen as a part of a populist political discourse aimed at fuelling and exploiting these concerns. However, they also represent some of the more broadly held concerns for specific institutional arrangements which have been at stake in the debates on labour migration and social dumping. This has been particularly true for the Nordic countries, where both welfare and labour market institutions have been seen as put under potential pressure from the new labour migrants.

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