

Social Work and Social Services in Europe - a changing landscape

Trabajo Social y Servicios Sociales en Europa: un paisaje cambiante

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Abstract

This article considers some of the variations and similarities, as well as possible areas of convergence, in social welfare policies; the organisation of social services; the concerns; and the education and training of social professionals across Europe. It focuses particularly on the European Union as a political bloc within a wider Europe, and identifies some aspects of its role in shaping national policies and practices, including in the fields of migration and higher education. It presumes that global and regional trends and influences, together with international population mobility, indicate that social professionals may find themselves increasingly drawn into «trans-national» interventions and that they therefore need to be aware of welfare systems and professional policies and practices beyond national borders. Respect for cultural diversity and commitment to the promotion of human rights and social justice, nationally and internationally, are regarded as essential values to be shared by social professionals across Europe, as espoused by regional bodies representing social professionals and educators.

Keywords: social services organisation, social professionals, education and training, EU social policies, migration, cultural diversity, transnational social work

Resumen

Este artículo analiza algunas de las diferencias y similitudes, así como las posibles áreas de convergencia, en las políticas de bienestar social, la organización de los Servicios Sociales, las preocupaciones, y la educación y formación de los profesionales sociales en Europa. Se centra especialmente en la Unión Europea como un bloque político dentro de una Europa más amplia, e identifica algunos aspectos de su función en la elaboración de las políticas y prácticas nacionales, incluyendo los ámbitos de la migración y la educación superior. Plantea que las influencias de las tendencias mundiales y regionales de una gran movilidad internacional de la población, conlleva que las profesiones sociales puedan verse cada vez más inmersas en intervenciones «transnacionales» y que, por lo tanto, hayan de ser conscientes de que los sistemas de bienestar y las actuaciones y prácticas profesionales van más allá de las fronteras nacionales. El respeto por la diversidad cultural y el compromiso con la promoción de los derechos humanos y la justicia social, nacional e internacional, se consideran valores esenciales que deben ser compartidos por las profesiones sociales en Europa, y adoptados por los organismos regionales de representación profesional y educativa.

Palabras clave: organización, Servicios sociales, profesionales sociales, educación, preparación, políticas sociales europeas, migraciones, diversidad cultural, Trabajo Social transnacional.

Resumen amplio

En la introducción de este artículo se da cuenta del modo como diversas organizaciones formales e informales, independientemente de su naturaleza y origen, han brindado a los profesionales sociales la oportunidad de compartir conocimientos acerca de determinados temas nacionales y de su desarrollo, y recientemente han permitido realizar proyectos de investigación comparativos transnacionales en los ámbitos del bienestar social y de las funciones de los profesionales sociales. Cada vez con mayor frecuencia a dichos profesionales se les ofrece la oportunidad de tener voz en Europa y de unirse a los movimientos de usuarios europeos y a otros grupos con quienes comparten preocupaciones en relación con la promoción de los derechos humanos y la justicia social. Con este punto de partida, se avanza señalando que la Unión Europea es una entidad política cuyo territorio abarca una parte considerable de este continente, y

los países que la componen han llegado a acuerdos sobre políticas comunes exteriores y de seguridad, así como a una mayor cooperación en el ámbito de la justicia y de las políticas nacionales, especialmente en el área de migración. Junto a ello hay variaciones significativas y de gran riqueza entre los países europeos, y la crisis económica mundial —provocada por las malas prácticas bancarias en Estados Unidos en 2008— ha impactado en todos ellos, pero de forma especial en los periféricos —Irlanda, España, Portugal y Grecia— lo que está replanteando tanto el futuro de la moneda, del euro, como posiblemente la composición y las atribuciones de la propia Unión Europea. Este marco de referencia está incidiendo en un cambio en la organización de los Servicios Sociales, puesto que las tendencias mundiales y las instituciones influyen en las políticas sociales y en el gasto en Europa, siendo además evidente que la presencia cada vez mayor de partidos de derechas y las políticas de libre mercado están influyendo negativamente en todas las prestaciones sociales, incluyendo a los Servicios Sociales. En algunos casos, se requiere a los países que lleven a cabo recortes del gasto social como condición *sine qua non* para la obtención de préstamos; así lo han exigido el Fondo Monetario Internacional o la propia Unión Europea, por ejemplo, en el caso de Grecia; mientras que en otros países la ideología dominante de la provisión a través del mercado ha producido cambios importantes en la prestación de servicios por los organismos estatales o por las entidades voluntarias, que se han transferido al sector privado, y se ha incrementado la «cultura del contrato» con una clara división entre «comprador» y «proveedor» de servicios.

En las últimas décadas se están identificando algunas diferencias en la organización y las actividades de los profesionales sociales de todo Europa, tanto en el contexto de patrones sociales más amplios (Esping-Andersen, 1990) como en lo relativo a las profesiones sociales en sí mismas (Lorenz, 1994). El empleo de trabajadores sociales que financian las agencias estatales de Servicios Sociales en los países nórdicos, corresponde al modelo socialdemócrata, contrasta con el predominio de las prestaciones sociales y actividades profesionales de organismos no gubernamentales en Alemania, y también en Francia, ejemplificado en el modelo corporatista, basado en el principio de subsidiariedad. En el Reino Unido a los trabajadores sociales los contrata principalmente el Estado según el modelo liberal, pero se encuentran ofreciendo servicios cada vez más residuales a una minoría estigmatizada, en proyectos de empleo en el sector voluntario con financiación a corto plazo, o participando en algún tipo de práctica privada individual o corporativa. En un cuarto modelo, propuesto por Abrahamson en 1993, el sector informal y las asociaciones de ayuda mutua serían predominantes en países como Irlanda, España y Grecia, pero todavía no hay evidencias suficientes de ello, y las posibilidades de empleo de los trabajadores sociales se limitan relativamente al ámbito del gobierno local o a las organizaciones voluntarias financiadas por el Estado. Un quinto modelo «de transición» corresponde a la ampliación de la Unión Europea con la incorporación de los países del Este de Europa, caracterizados por su filosofía y política comunistas precedentes, que incluye países grandes y pequeños —por ejemplo, Polonia y Lituania— y cuyo objetivo es el establecimiento del capitalismo y la estructuración de Servicios Sociales modernos. Los trabajadores y pedagogos sociales de estos países, a veces apoyados con fondos de la Unión Europea, han estado luchando para retomar tradiciones nacionales preexistentes, identificar «modelos de ayuda» de otros países que les podrían ser útiles, y para establecer sus propias decisiones respecto a los programas educativos y al desarrollo de Servicios Sociales, como ha sido en caso de Polonia (Pawalek, 2010). Mientras las oportunidades de formación en Trabajo Social han aumentado, no les ha acompañado la financiación suficiente en Servicios Sociales, lo que está llevando al desempleo significativo de trabajadores sociales y a veces a su emigración (Lyons y Hanna, 2011).

Además hay tendencias comunes en algunos países, a la burocratización creciente y el gerencialismo —la gestión del sector público— en aquellos en los que prevalece la provisión estatal y se produce un crecimiento de la empresa social y de la práctica privada. La justificación de las políticas gerencialistas se relaciona con el nivel de los servicios, con las expectativas sobre las economías de escala y los requerimientos de eficiencia, mientras que la burocratización tiene que ver con las exigencias de rendiciones de cuentas y la homologación de los servicios. En conjunto estas tendencias han reducido la capacidad de decisión de los profesionales sociales, dando lugar a una preocupación por la posible desprofesionalización.

La creciente importancia del «sector empresarial social», ya indicada, puede verse en Europa como una respuesta a los efectos de las presiones económicas mundiales y nacionales sobre las poblaciones locales, que han llevado a la disminución de las oportunidades de trabajo en muchos sectores y de la prestación de Servicios Sociales, junto con el aumento de las necesidades de los grupos y comunidades más afectadas por el desempleo y la pobreza.

Se apuntan así algunas preocupaciones comunes respecto a las profesiones de lo social en todos los países europeos, ya que a pesar de las diferencias históricas significativas, las denominaciones profesionales y las formas de empleo de los profesionales sociales, y las inquietudes sociales son similares. Los aspectos que centran la atención profesional se refieren a las necesidades de las personas vulnerables o en situación de riesgo, o aquellas que se encuentran, por alguna razón, al margen o excluidas de la sociedad. Además en general los servicios se han desarrollado en relación con grupos determinados por la edad o por su condición social, como es el caso de la infancia en riesgo y aquellos grupos marginados por raza, etnicidad, religión y cultura.

El texto se centra también en los desarrollos relativos a los aspectos educativos, formativos, de investigación y aquellos reguladores de la profesión de Trabajo Social.

Tras la Declaración de Bolonia, la formación en Trabajo Social ha tenido como resultado unos programas europeos que se ajustan a un patrón reconocido como licenciatura y master (Ginsburg y Lawrence, 2006, p. 35) y son ofertados en el sector de la educación superior, principalmente por universidades o «universidades de ciencias aplicadas». En la mayor parte de los casos la formación en Trabajo Social incluye alguna experiencia práctica en el campo profesional, así como un enfoque académico, aunque existen diferencias en la temporalidad (entre tres y cinco años) de los pro-

gramas, y en su denominación (Kantowicz, 2005, p. 303). Bolonia ha actuado como un catalizador para la sistematización académica rápida de la formación del Trabajo Social, de manera que la investigación se ha convertido en un aspecto más valorado en los departamentos de Trabajo Social, aunque las expectativas siguen variando en relación a si la investigación debe o no debe formar parte de la función de los profesores y estudiantes de Trabajo Social.

A pesar de la adopción de una «definición internacional de Trabajo Social por la FITS y la AIETS en 2001, y actualmente en revisión, y el establecimiento de «estándares globales para la educación del Trabajo Social» en 2004, y los esfuerzos derivados del proceso de Bolonia, los países difieren en su enfoque sobre la regulación de las titulaciones de Trabajo Social; por ejemplo, en el Reino Unido es un título y una profesión regulados por un organismo gubernamental, mientras que en España, a pesar de que existe un organismo nacional de Trabajo Social —el Consejo General del Trabajo Social— las universidades pueden ser las responsables de la verificación de títulos obtenidos en otros lugares.

Un avance significativo reciente para el Trabajo Social a escala internacional es el «Programa Mundial para el Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Social» (2013), inicialmente inspirado en la Declaración del Milenio de Naciones Unidas en 2002. Es producto de la colaboración de tres años entre los tres principales organismos internacionales de Trabajo Social que representan la práctica profesional, la formación en Trabajo Social y el desarrollo social global. El Programa Mundial también hace un llamamiento a los trabajadores sociales para fortalecer el reconocimiento de la importancia de las relaciones humanas y para trabajar en la sostenibilidad del medio ambiente y la comunidad.

Se puede concluir que las diferencias entre los países europeos en lo relativo a la provisión de bienestar social y las diversas profesiones referidas como Trabajo Social son una manifestación de la diversidad cultural, política e histórica de la región. Sin embargo, parece probable que las instituciones de la Unión Europea y el Consejo de Europa sigan perdurando en el futuro; y, en un mundo globalizado e interdependiente, los organismos regionales tienen un papel importante que desempeñar. Del mismo modo, los organismos regionales e internacionales son importantes para apoyar e influir en el desarrollo de los Servicios Sociales de manera que permitan a las profesiones sociales promover los derechos humanos y la justicia social, tanto a nivel nacional y, como cada vez más, en las políticas y prácticas más allá de las fronteras nacionales, ejemplo de ello es el Programa Mundial para el Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Social.

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Summary: Introduction. 1. The European context. 2. The changing organisation of Social Services. 3. Social professionals: some common concerns. 4. Developments in Education, training, research and regulation of Social Work. 5. Concluding comments. 6. References.

Introduction

Social welfare services are a well-established feature of all European countries with concomitant development of the social professions. However, there are significant variations in the origins and organisation of social services, specifically, and in the roles and titles of social professionals, a term used to include social workers but also similarly qualified occupational groups including social pedagogues (*e.g.* in Spain) and animators (*e.g.* in France)¹. These variations can be attributed to differences in national cultures and histories as well as to current financial resources and political ideologies. However, it can be argued that similarities in the values and practices of social professionals and in the client- or user-groups to

which they relate have always been recognisable.

In addition, the establishment of the European Union and the effects of globalisation have led to an extension of «external influences» (relative to national direction) on the shape of social services and the employment of social professionals, so that common trends and patterns are increasingly discernable. Further, the migration of populations globally has led to the growth of trans-national social work (including across European borders) and there is also increased labour mobility of social professionals themselves, not least within the European Union.

In these circumstances, although most social professionals continue to practice primarily at local level and within national policy

¹ The term, social professionals, was coined in the 1990s in the context of ERASMUS exchange schemes and evaluation and was referred to in print, *e.g.* by Otto and Lorenz (1998)

frameworks and social service structures, it is useful to consider some of the variations and similarities in the organisation of social services; some trends in social work concerns; and the issues in education, research and regulation of social professionals at a pan-European level. In this article we therefore aim to sketch in some of these variations and similarities and to illustrate the ways in which European networks, research and literature can contribute to developments in social services and the social professions.

Before proceeding, we should clarify that the following text focuses primarily on the 27 countries currently in membership of the European Union. Apart from its role at the (social) policy level, the European Union has played a significant part (including through financial support) in the formation of networks, such as those established under the ERASMUS/SOCRATES schemes since the mid 1980s. However, other networks also exist, some predating the EU and extending beyond its borders: these include the European region of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and social initiatives supported by the Council of Europe, whose 47 member countries form the constituency of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW). Whatever their form and origins, various formal and informal organisations have afforded social professionals the opportunity to share knowledge about national issues and developments and, more recently, to establish trans-national comparative research projects in the fields of social welfare and social professional roles. Increasingly, it is also possible for social professionals to have a voice at European levels and to join with European user movements and other European groups, which share similar concerns in relation to the promotion of human rights and social justice.²

1. The European context

As indicated above, the borders and constituent countries of «Europe» as a geographical (conti-

mental) region is contested, with wide variations in climate, topography and natural resources between the countries of the North (*e.g.* Greenland, Russia), south (*e.g.* Spain, various Mediterranean Islands), East (*e.g.* Turkey) and West (*e.g.* Ireland). There is also considerable diversity in terms of landmass, demography, and settlement patterns. Europe includes some of the most densely populated and urbanised countries in the world (*e.g.* the Netherlands, UK) as well as countries where populations are relatively sparse and still scattered in rural communities as well as urban centres (*e.g.* Spain, Romania): these factors – as well as politics and economics – have a bearing on the evolution, roles and concerns of social services and professions (Lyons and Lawrence, 2006).

Additionally, variations within and between national cultures are indicated by the fact that over 50 languages are spoken in the wider Europe, comprising 48 countries. 47 countries (with the exception of Belarus), with a population totalling 800 million citizens, are members of the Council of Europe (established in 1949 in Strasbourg, France). The Council drafted the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and established the European Court of Human Rights, the findings of which have implications for national social policies. It aims to «create a common democratic and legal area throughout the whole of the Continent ensuring respect for its fundamental values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law» and its objectives include the promotion of Europe's cultural identity and diversity; and seeking common solutions to current challenges (Council of Europe, 2012).

The other major institution often used as a «defining area» for Europe, is the European Union (EU) which also grew out of a post-second world war peace keeping and trading initiative. The European Union itself was formally established in 1993 with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty marking the completion of the «Single Market» and allowing for the free movement of goods, services, capital

² The international definition of social work agreed by the IFSW and the IASSW in 2000 states that “The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work”. (Authors' italics added).

and people within the EU area. A major expansion of the EU occurred in 2004 with the addition of 10 countries, including eight from the former «Soviet bloc» (the Accession states, A8) with Romania and Bulgaria joining in 2007, bringing its current population to over 495,000,000 inhabitants (Europa, 2012).

The EU is not therefore contiguous with the European «region» but it is a political entity embracing a considerable part of the European continent with countries agreeing joint foreign and security policies and increased co-operation over justice and domestic policies. These policies are important in relation to national immigration policies and trends in European migration (Lyons and Huegler, 2012a). In addition, 17 countries currently share a common currency (the Euro) although there are significant variations between the GDPs of both established members (whether or not in the Euro zone, *e.g.* Sweden and Greece) and relative to those of some of the more recent members, as well as countries beyond its borders (*e.g.* Norway and Switzerland are two of the wealthiest countries in Europe, while Belarus is one of the poorest). Additionally, the world economic crisis (precipitated by banking malpractices in USA in 2008) has impacted on all European countries, particularly those on the periphery (Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece) and led to a crisis in terms of the future of the Euro, and possibly the membership and powers of the EU itself.

One of the areas in which the EU has exerted particular influence, with implications for the welfare sector and social professional roles, is in relation to migration. There tends to be a correlation between the economic and demographic characteristics of particular countries and their status as either «sending» or «receiving» countries. However, migration flows are complex and vary according to the «types of migrants» so, for example, Spain receives large numbers of immigrants from poorer countries while also «sending» well qualified Spanish migrants abroad. Migration flows are also a function of national histories, so, for instance, in both France and the UK, ethnic mino-

rity populations (sometimes established since the 1950s) have traditionally come from former colonies, including a number of African countries: once established, such patterns tend to persist (Lyons and Huegler, 2012a).

National policies in relation to immigration, race relations and integration have varied considerably, for example, with the French system being described as «assimilationist» and the UK policy as «multi-cultural». For the last couple of decades, the EU has paid increasing attention to the flow and composition of immigrants into the area, forging agreements between states through the Lisbon Treaty (2007, not signed by all members) and establishing FRONTEX, an agency concerned with strengthening the EU's external borders (Spencer, 2011), emphasising the earlier epithet of «Fortress Europe». However, the boundaries of the EU remain «porous» in places, with migrants attempting to gain entry, legally or illegally, *e.g.* through routes across the Mediterranean to Spain and Italy; and across the Balkans, to Greece. Some migrants may be seeking economic opportunities (primarily) but others are seeking asylum (from conflicts and/or religious persecution) (Lyons and Huegler, 2012a).

While the legislation relating to immigration and the provisions made for asylum seekers are still essentially national, the influence of the EU has led to an overall «hardening» of policies towards immigration from outside the EU region, while the free movement of citizens within the region (enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty) has shifted the balance towards internal movements, particularly, most recently, from the A8 countries to Western Europe. For instance, in 2008, 13 percent of the Spanish population were born outside Spain: 38 percent came from Latin American countries but the largest proportion came from other EU countries (Martinez Brawley and Gualda, 2011). In the UK the increased proportion of EUROPEAN UNION migrants has been noticeable in all areas of employment, including of social professionals themselves. For example, figures have recently shown³ an

³ Figures quoted in Lyons and Hanna (2011) were based on an analysis of data held by the (English) General Social Care Council, the body responsible (at the time of writing) for the registration of qualified social workers (including those trained outside the UK).

increase in the numbers and proportion of social workers recruited to British social services from other European countries, relative to those from the Commonwealth countries (e.g. Australia, Canada). This trend reflects both changes in national legislation but also in the training and employment of qualified social workers in the «sending countries» (e.g. Spain, Germany and Romania) (Lyons and Hanna, 2011).

2. The changing organisation of social services

The deterioration in the economic conditions of virtually all European countries and populations has had significant implications for social welfare provisions, since, although increasing numbers of people are unemployed or otherwise in need of welfare and social services, most countries have been attempting to reduce spending either on the services normally provided by the (local and central) state (e.g. Denmark) or on the funding available to services provided through the voluntary sector (e.g. Germany). However, spending on social welfare and the organisation of welfare services – welfare benefits, housing, health, education as well as social services – is not simply a function of a country's economic circumstances, but is also related to the dominant political views of the day (Welbourne, 2011). Global trends and institutions have a bearing on social policies and expenditure in the European region and there is evidence that increasingly right-wing, «free market» policies influence welfare provisions, including social services. In some cases, countries are being required to cut welfare spending as a condition of getting a loan, for example from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the European Union itself (e.g. Greece); while in others the dominant ideology, that «the market should provide», has seen major shifts from the provision of services by the state or voluntary agencies to the private sector and the growth of «commissioning» and the «contract culture» with the split between the «purchaser» and the «provider» of services.

Differences in the organisation and activities of social professionals across Europe have long been identified both in the context of broader welfare patterns (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990)

and in relation to comparative study of the social professions themselves (e.g. Lorenz, 1994). The employment of social workers in relatively well-funded state social service agencies in the Nordic countries (corresponding to the Social Democratic model) can be contrasted with the dominance of social provisions and professional activities by non-governmental agencies in Germany (and also France), exemplifying the Social Insurance or Corporatist model based on the principle of subsidiarity. In the UK social workers have been predominantly employed by the state (according to a liberal model) but they increasingly find themselves offering residual services to a stigmatised minority, or seeking employment in «projects» with short term funding in the voluntary sector; or engaged in some form of individual or corporate private practice. In a fourth model (suggested as «the Latin rim» by Abrahamson in 1993), the informal and self/mutual-help associations are (still) far more in evidence in countries such as Ireland, Spain and Greece, with relatively limited opportunities for employment of social workers in the (local) state or state-funded voluntary agencies.

A fifth model, «transitional», corresponds to the extension of the European Union to Central and East European (CEE) countries (formerly adhering to Communist philosophy and governance) as countries large and small (e.g. Poland, Lithuania) embrace capitalism and aim to establish modern social services. In these situations, sometimes assisted by European Union funding, social workers and social pedagogues have been striving to re-ignite pre-existing national traditions; to identify which «helping models» from other countries might be useful; and to determine their own directions for educational programmes and social service developments (e.g. Poland, see Pawalek, 2010). While the opportunities for social work training have increased, these have not necessarily been matched by sufficient expenditure on social services (whether provided by the state or the voluntary sector) leading to significant unemployment of social workers and sometimes their migration (Lyons and Hanna, 2011).

Within these broad patterns, recent trends are evident across a number of countries,

including increased bureaucratisation and managerialism («public sector management») in countries where state provision is prevalent and the growth of social enterprise and private practice. The rationale for managerialist policies is related to the scale of services, with expectations about economies of scale and requirements regarding efficiency, while bureaucratisation relates to calls for accountability and uniformity of services. Taken together these trends have reduced the discretion of social professionals, leading to concerns about deprofessionalisation. Arguably the needs of organisations and national/local budgets have been prioritised above the needs of service users, despite the increasing rhetoric and some efforts to put the client at the centre of services and shift responsibility for choice and expenditure to the «consumer» *e.g.* through the «personalisation agenda» in the UK. The two fundamental principles of the personalisation agenda are to enable service users to choose the services they need and to have control over those services, by utilising service user self-assessments and, in some cases, by devolving personal budgets for service users to «spend» on their own choice of services (Needham, 2011)⁴.

The growth of private practice and social enterprise projects have been particularly evident in countries where state social services provision is weak, but are also increasingly important where public sector provisions are being reduced. For instance, an increasing number of social workers in the UK have established themselves as «independent social workers»: such moves can partly be attributed to the «flight» from the frustrations of working in large organisations (*e.g.* where little time is allowed for the practice of «traditional skills in relationship work»), but also to the increased requirements placed on local authorities to «contract out» a wide range of their responsibilities, including some in the social services field, to voluntary or private sector agencies and personnel.

The growing importance of the «social enterprise sector» in Europe can be seen as a response to the impact of global and national economic pressures on local populations which have led to decreased job opportunities (in many sectors) and provision of social services, alongside the increased needs of groups and communities worst affected by unemployment and poverty. Social enterprise schemes are also supported by national policies which encourage self-help and community based initiatives (whether on ideological or economic grounds) and the provision of alternative forms of training and employment, not exclusively in the «social field». In such circumstances, social professionals are among those who have taken the initiative with local groups to establish a wide range of projects, including for example, furniture renovation schemes or community cafes. These provide training and employment for local people in an enterprise that offers goods or services which a local community wants. The motive is social, since, although such projects are expected to cover their costs, they not driven by the profit motive in the same way as commercial undertakings. (*e.g.* Social Enterprise UK, 2012).

3. Social professionals: some common concerns

Shared experience and comparative research have illustrated that there are significant variations in the histories, titles and patterns of employment of social professionals across European countries, including in the extent to which they are involved in the fields of social assistance and health care. However, social concerns are remarkably similar and significantly focused on the needs of people who are vulnerable or at risk in some way and/or on the margins of (or excluded from) society for some reason. Thus services have generally developed in relation to particular client- or user-groups, defined by age or condition. Given limited space, we have chosen

⁴ Critics of personalisation suggest it is a way for government to shed its welfare responsibilities while maintaining control of eligibility for services (by both financial and need criteria). Furthermore, they claim it can be stressful for some service users to hold responsibility for managing the employment of carers with difficult technical requirements in taxation, regulation, training and health and safety (See, for example, Adams, [2010]).

to focus on two such groups – «children at risk», and «out-groups» – to indicate some of the concerns of social professionals.

3.1. Children at risk

Societies have reacted differently over the years and across national boundaries to the value placed on children; to expectations with regard to parenting; and to the provisions made for children without families (or where these are deemed to be «unsafe»). All countries in the EU have developed «child care services», employing workers with a specific focus on the welfare of the child, whether in specialist teams within a generic social services agency, or in specialist agencies. The extent to which «preventative services» are available varies, although different forms of social, emotional and financial support to parents, coupled with appropriate input to assist child development, can enable children to remain in homes that might otherwise be deemed as unsuitable or risky. However, the resources to support preventive strategies and practices tend to be lacking when social service budgets are under pressure; national and organisational policies may promote more cautious and even defensive practices; and social professionals themselves may have been trained or acculturated to avoid risks in their practices (Webb, 2006).

So, for instance, in the UK, in recent years, despite some input to preventive services (e.g. in the form of «parenting classes» through Surestart schemes), there has been an increase in the number of applications to Court for children to be admitted to care on the grounds of neglect or abuse. This may reflect a real «worsening» in parenting practices, or may be an indication of increased public pressures on social workers to remove children from (potentially) damaging situations. Although concerns about child abuse and the need to develop protective services tended to be seen in the 1990s as a peculiarly British (and American) **obsession**⁵ it has since been recognised that this is not an exclusively

Anglophone concern. Additionally, «abuse» can take many forms and is not confined to family relationships and behaviours. Thus, concerns about school bullying; cyber bullying; «grooming» of children and young people for sexual exploitation; and trafficking of young people for commercial sexual exploitation are all forms of abuse which are of increasing concern to social professionals across Europe. In the case of child trafficking, criminal activities cross national boundaries requiring social professionals themselves to work with other occupational groups (e.g. police and law enforcement agencies) and internationally: the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights recently produced a report on this topic, identifying a range of policy issues and good practices (Lawson and Koffeman, 2009).

If children lack families able to take care of them society has to make alternative provisions and it is in the field of «alternative care» that significant differences in policies and practices are evident across Europe. Attitudes to adoption vary and other provisions range from an emphasis on fostering rather than residential care (e.g. in many countries of North and West Europe) to variations between the forms and standards of «care homes» themselves. While the media has highlighted the poor standards of care in residential institutions (sometimes still inappropriately termed «orphanages»), persisting as a legacy from the Communist era in some A8 countries, more positive pictures emerge of smaller and well-staffed «homes» with well-trained staff in countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands (Petrie *et al.*, 2006). Meanwhile, international adoption is a field in which social workers need some understanding of differences in culture and national policies as well as regard for the rights and interests of individual children (Selman, 2009). With increased migration it is likely that more social workers will need to intervene in situations of individual or family breakdown across national borders.

⁵ An unpublished survey (by one of the authors in the mid nineties) of the concerns of social workers in Europe as perceived by individual national associations found that only the British Association of Social Workers identified work in the child protection field as a major concern leading to public attitudes to the profession which could be described as hostile or critical.

3.2. «Out Groups»

Various populations in different societies can be described as «out groups», being distinguished from the majority population by markers of race, ethnicity, religion and/or culture: they are marginalised or even excluded from the main expectations and provisions of the dominant community and wider society. Immigrants and migrant populations are particularly vulnerable to such a label. In the European Union generally, social policies have been advocated to promote inclusion: programmes directed by social professionals are aimed at «empowerment» of the minority and/or at countering negative public attitudes and situations of conflict between different communities.

At national level, particularly in countries where immigrant groups are long established (but still disadvantaged in terms of income and attainments), policies have included encouraging multi-cultural approaches and respect for diversity, backed up by legislation which outlaws discrimination (on a wide range of grounds not limited to race, ethnicity and religion). Social professionals are expected to demonstrate anti-racist/anti-oppressive practices and to promote positive identity at individual level as well as devising practical strategies for widening opportunities for whole groups. Concern to respect difference and promote healthy self-image has sometimes led to development of policies and practices which might seem extreme to social professionals in other countries or even to those outside the profession. For example in the UK, «same race placements» (the attempt to place children for fostering or adoption with carers/parents who most nearly match the racial/ethnic characteristics of the birth parents) have been criticised as preventing or slowing down the placement of children with foster or adoptive parents who might otherwise be considered «suitable».

Asylum seekers constitute another (often heterogeneous) population on the margins of society, sometimes literally excluded, being separated into reception, detention or transit centres, either during the processing of their claims for asylum and/or pending their repatriation when applications have been denied. Asylum seekers are found throughout

the European Union – and wider Europe – but numbers are particularly high in the countries bordering the Mediterranean. The provisions for their reception and integration (if successful) and the role, if any, of social professionals in these processes, vary widely. In 2006 European Union concern about the conditions under which «vulnerable people» (children, elders and people with disabilities) are accommodated (in various types of open and closed centres) led to research involving 130 centres in all (then) 25 countries: findings included that 71 percent of the centres were «temporary structures» and that 76 percent of the centres could not provide statistics on the number of vulnerable people accommodated (nor had staff equipped to assess them). While conditions and systems were heterogeneous, access to activities and to legal, health and psycho-social services were generally limited, with particularly poor basic conditions noted in Greece, Italy and Spain. A few countries demonstrated some positive efforts in this field (e.g. Finland, France) although there were criticisms of all systems, including of the length of time taken to reach decisions on applicants» status (Chubere and Simonnot, 2007).

4. Developments in education, training, research and regulation of social work

Social work education in Europe has a rich tradition dating back to 1899, when the first formalised social work training was founded in The Netherlands, rapidly followed by courses in Germany, UK and Poland. The widespread development of social work education was interrupted in many countries from the 1930s, when the economic and political maelstrom affected all of Europe. Following the Second World War, social work education was newly established in countries such as Finland and Greece during the reconstruction period (Lyons and Huegler, 2012b). After 1989 social work education resumed in the former USSR countries, sometimes assisted by funding and advice from the EUROPEAN UNION, Council of Europe, International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and EASSW.

The current legitimacy of social work in the wider Europe can be found in the European

Social Charter (Council of Europe, adopted 1961, revised 1996) aimed to guarantee the social and human rights of people in Europe. In this charter, rights that include the provision of social service and social work are specifically mentioned in Article 12 (the right to social security); in Article 13 (the right to social and medical assistance and appropriate public and private services); and in Article 14 (the right to benefit from social welfare services). The last specifically describes the promotion of services «which, by using methods of social work, would contribute to the welfare and development of both individuals and groups in the community, and to their adjustment to the social environment».

Whilst not all social professions share the same codes of practice and conduct, the value base and ethical discourse within European social work are very similar. The discourse has shifted from 19th century thinking (help for the deserving poor) towards a focus on human and citizen rights and equality among European populations (regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability): these values are reflected in social work curricula in diverse ways.

Social work education in Europe in the 21st century is characterised by differences in scale (corresponding to varied geographical and population size of different countries), for example, Iceland has only one school, while UK has around a hundred; by centralisation or decentralisation of educational provision – compare the highly prescriptive provision in UK to the variations in the autonomous regions of Spain; and by sub-regional differences, as exemplified in the Nordic countries.

The Bologna Declaration was signed in June 1999 by Higher Education Ministers from 29 countries: it sought to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 aimed at harmonisation of academic programmes and structures to promote academic and professional mobility (Leskošek, 2011). Forty-seven countries have acceded to the Declaration since 1999 and the outcome for social work education has been that most qualifying programmes in Europe now conform to a recognizable pattern at bachelor and/or masters level (Ginsburg & Lawrence, 2006:35) and are delivered in the tertiary

education sector, mainly in universities or «universities of applied science» (institutions formerly providing vocational or applied professional education in north-western Europe). Most social work education includes practice placement experience of some kind as well as an academic focus, although differences remain in programme length (between 3-5 years) and named award (e.g. Bachelor, Diploma, License) (Kantowicz, 2005, p.303).

Generally, «Bologna» furthered the recognition of qualifications within Europe and internationally through a common pattern of undergraduate (bachelor), postgraduate (master) and doctoral levels of higher education. The harmonising reform facilitated an ideological shift concerning the purpose of science, seen increasingly as serving the needs of industry and capital and favouring «skills acquisition» over the potentially more transformative power of critical thinking. However, Bologna acted as a catalyst for the rapid academisation of social work education so that research has become more highly valued within social work departments, although expectations still vary as to whether research should form part of the role of social work educators and students. A French led European project included an exploratory attempt at mapping doctoral programmes in social work and their outputs. It revealed that social work academics could undertake doctoral study in their own right as «insiders» of social work as an academic discipline in some countries (predominantly in northern Europe), whereas elsewhere, social work academics had to work as «outsiders» in other subject areas and paradigms. This study also demonstrated that there were very few countries, apart from Finland, where doctoral output is formally centrally recorded (Lyons and Huegler, 2012b).

Internationalisation in social work education is becoming more widespread, partly assisted by funding for staff and student mobility through EUROPEAN UNION Erasmus and Tempus Programmes. These opportunities for mobility, since the 1980s, have enabled scholars and students to experience new approaches and interventions in the social sphere. Postgraduate European Union courses have also been an outcome of the EUROPEAN UNION educational mobility programmes, including,

for example, the MA Comparative European Social Studies (MACCESS), a collaborative course delivered since 1994 at Zuyd University in Maastricht and validated by London Metropolitan University. MACCESS is taught by a pan-European team drawn from a network of partner Universities throughout Europe (Lawrence, 2006). In 2009 the first joint European doctoral programme, INDOSOW (International Doctoral Studies in Social Work), was established by six social work schools in Europe. (Zaviršek and Lawrence, 2012).

Despite adopting an «international definition of social work» by IFSW and IASSW in 2001 (currently being revised) and setting out «Global standards for social work education» in 2004, and the efforts stemming from the Bologna Process, the recognition of social work qualifications gained in other countries still takes place mainly on an individual case basis. Countries vary in their approach to regulation of social work qualifications, for example, in the UK «social work» is a protected title closely regulated by a government body, compared to Spain, where (although there is a national social work body) individual universities can also be responsible for verifying qualifications gained elsewhere.

One significant recent development by and for social work internationally is the «Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development» (2013). Initially inspired by the UN Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2002), the «Global Agenda» is a product of a three-year collaboration between the three main international social work bodies representing social work practice (IFSW), social work education (IASSW) and social development globally (ICSW). The strategic objectives of this Global Agenda are challenging and will need to be undertaken at international, national and local level to be of significance. The Agenda includes calls for social workers to enable people to have power over their own lives and to work with service users to create more equal and effective social agendas (*e.g.* at national and European levels). The Global Agenda also calls on social workers to strengthen the recognition of the importance of human relationships and to Work towards environmental and community sustainability.

This ambitious rallying call suggests that the efforts of international social work

organisations to create a universal programme for social workers to strive towards signify the commonalities of the tasks and ambitions of the profession for the 21st century.

5. Concluding comments

The differences between European countries in their approach to social welfare provision and the various professions broadly termed «social work» are a manifestation of the cultural, political and historical diversity in this region. The geo-political groupings of countries within the European Union and the Council of European Union have had a significant impact on developing a sense of «European consciousness» (and sometimes identity), with increasing recognition of the power and influence of regional bodies on national policies and systems, including in the fields of welfare and social services. The availability of funding for staff and student mobility, for academic conferences and for research projects have provided opportunities to compare similarities and differences within the social professions, in social provision and in social work education.

Within the wider European region, the impact of European Union policy on the framing of national legislation impacting on the social sphere is increasingly apparent, not least in the field of migration, where efforts to «protect» regional and national budgets and identities have resulted in a general hardening of policies and attitudes to immigrants, including asylum seekers. Additionally, while the benefits of European Union membership to less wealthy countries were widely appreciated through the nineties and into the 21st century, the more recent economic crisis has resulted in very severe austerity measures as a precondition of financial support to countries such as Greece and Ireland. Resulting national responses have evoked varying degrees of muted support or outright hostility from the general public and some questioning and weakening of support for the European project (including the Euro), spreading beyond those countries most directly affected.

However, it seems likely that the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe are here to stay, and, in a globalised and interdependent world, regional

bodies have an important role to play. Similarly, regional and international bodies are important in supporting and influencing the development of social services (however organised) in ways which enable social professionals to promote human rights and social justice, both nationally and, increasingly, in policies and practices across national borders as exemplified by the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

1. The term, social professionals, was coined in the 1990s in the context of ERASMUS exchange schemes and evaluation and was referred to in print, e.g. by Otto and Lorenz (1998)

2. The international definition of social work agreed by the IFSW and the IASSW in 2000 states that

«The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. *Principles of*

human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work». (Authors' italics added).

3. Figures quoted in Lyons and Hanna (2011) were based on an analysis of data held by the (English) General Social Care Council, the body responsible (at the time of writing) for the registration of qualified social workers (including those trained outside the UK).

4. Critics of personalisation suggest it is a way for government to shed its welfare responsibilities while maintaining control of eligibility for services (by both financial and need criteria). Furthermore, they claim it can be stressful for some service users to hold responsibility for managing the employment of carers with difficult technical requirements in taxation, regulation, training and health and safety.

5. An unpublished survey (by one of the authors in the mid nineties) of the concerns of social workers in Europe as perceived by individual national associations found that only the British Association of Social Workers identified work in the child protection field as a major concern leading to public attitudes to the profession which could be described as hostile or critical.

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