

Social Work Education in Europe: towards 2025

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Global Definition of Social Work

‘Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.

Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.’

(IASSW, 2014)

Social Work Education

- Rich tradition dating back to 1899
- Halted in many countries from 1930s
- From 1950s and 1980s social work resumed and/or expanded in many countries in Europe
- After 1989 social work resumed in former USSR countries, assisted by EU, Council of Europe, IASSW and EASSW

The European Macro Social Context

The years since 2008 have seen ever more people forced into poverty and increased vulnerability. Austerity policies chosen by so many governments have drastically reduced our public services and many social work jobs have been cut in the countries where social workers are most desperately needed. We have seen the march of neo-liberalism in Europe privatizing public services and attempting to reduce state social work to a mere bureaucratic and administrative function in its most extreme form.

We have also witnessed the humanitarian crisis of the mass movement of peoples from countries in Africa and the Middle East due to conflict and instability and the unwillingness of the leaders in Europe to properly acknowledge the plight of those migrating and give a human rights or even an humanitarian based response.

We have seen the war in Ukraine threatening to undermine the stability of the former Soviet controlled countries.

Social work responses (1)

Initially, observation but lack of active response. Then, the re-emergence of radical social work:

- The Orange Tide in Spain, which has brought together social workers and service users to actively resist austerity measures;
- Social workers in NGOs working tirelessly with and advocating for migrants who are homeless and stateless;
- The Social Work Action Network (SWAN), which has held many events, seminars and conferences, bringing together social workers, academics, service users and students to share ways in which resistance can be and is possible;

Social work responses (2)

- The people of Greece supported by thousands of Greek social workers resisting the austerity measures that have pauperised a nation;
- PowerUs and other service user partnerships who are transforming social work education by participating in programmes to more appropriately train social work students for future practice;

Social work responses (3)

These initiatives and more have shown us that there is the will in the social work and social development community to work together and that another type of social work is possible.

Let us take inspiration from these and other such European and international groups and movements and debate what the role for social work SHOULD be in the coming decade.

Social work responses (4)

- How should social work educators be preparing the next generation of social workers for a social landscape characterized by reducing state welfare commitment?
- How can we as social work educators train our students to assist families and communities to become more resilient and empowered and together challenge hostile state policy responses that diminish human rights and social justice?

Social work responses (5)

- Debates within three international social work & social development organisations about the role and purpose of social work, nationally and internationally that resulted in:
- Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, inspired by the UN Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2002)

<http://www.globalsocialagenda.org/>

The Four Themes of the Global Agenda

1. Promote social and economic equalities – addressing the impact of oppression, social injustice and other human rights violations
2. Promote the dignity, diversity and worth of all peoples
3. Work towards environmental and community sustainability
4. Strengthen recognition of the importance of human relationships

The Global Agenda: a standard for social work

- Become engaged and active in participating in dialogue and action with service users, students and other social work organisations and professional groups in finding ways to make a difference
- Submit evidence to the European Observatory on how you are promoting the four themes of the Global Agenda here in Latvia (see www.eassw.org or www.ensact.com)
- Inspire students and peers with examples of creative and innovative practice on the European Observatory to encourage new methods of social intervention

EASSW Supporting Social Work Education

- In many countries in Europe both social work and higher education are subject to severe cuts in spending
- Schools of social work and social work courses have been closed
- The quality of social work education in some countries is being threatened & undermined

Get involved

Join with EASSW in supporting social work education (www.eassw.org) working in partnership with service users, students and other social professions to:

- Recommit social work as a human rights profession - emphasise the centrality of values of human rights and social justice to ethical social work
- Ensure students understand structural explanations of the causes of social problems
- Move beyond casework & include social action: community work, advocacy, lobbying and empowerment praxis in social work theory and methods teaching

Stay involved

- Promote the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development to local, national, regional and international politicians, organisations and media
- Be active on World Social Work Day: 15 March 2016
- Prepare to submit a film to show how social work in Latvia will be marking World Social Work day

Participate in the EASSW conference
in Paris, France in June 2017:

‘Social Work Education in Europe:
Challenging boundaries, promoting
sustainable futures.’

(www.eassw.org)