



# International Social Workers' Mobility in Europe: Challenges Associated with Diversity in Social Work Qualifications

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## Objectives

- ▶ To highlight the challenges associated with transnational social workers
  - ▶ in the light not only of a context-specific training and practice but also within a fast changing national and regional policies
- ▶ The analysis particularly engages with the interplay of a fast-moving social work policy context and the role of inter-European social workers
  - ▶ using England as a case study of destination

# Background

- ▶ Social workers as part of a globally mobile professional group
  - ▶ pursuing employment opportunities that combine professional and lifestyle projects.
  - ▶ Increasingly fluid concept of transnationalism
  - ▶ However, the 'right to mobility' remains selective and subjected to hierarchical constraints at the individual and country levels
  - ▶ Subject to macro structures and individual's characteristics and motivations
- ▶ Social work as a profession
  - ▶ especially context-sensitive; skills and practice are embedded in cultural, linguistic and nation-specific legislative competency
  - ▶ it is argued that social work is not yet a global 'common project'
  - ▶ significant differences at the level of training, qualifications and practice within Europe and beyond

## Data and Methods

- ▶ Primary survey data collected from European stakeholders across Europe (n=97)
- ▶ Data obtained through focus group discussions (n=80) with key European stakeholders that took place in 2016
- ▶ To examine the situation in England, registration data on non-UK qualified social workers between 2003-2017 are analysed to investigate patterns and trends of social workers' mobility to England
- ▶ A policy review of major English social work reforms during the same period
- ▶ Complemented by country-focused desk research, focusing on national policy documents and information provided by national professional associations, ministries and researchers

## Number of participants who completed the online survey by country and job role.

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Country	Job role	Number of respondents
Austria	Social service director (SSD)	1
Belgium	(SDD)*2; social service inspector; civil servant	4
Bulgaria	Social service advisor	1
Croatia	Social service advisor	1
Czech Republic	SSD; legal advisor	2
Denmark	SSD*4	4
Estonia	Civil servant*2; Social work manager	3
Finland	Social worker *3; civil servant; legal advisor; social work academic	6
France	SSD *2; Not provided (NP)	3
Germany	NP	1
Hungary	Social work academic	1
Iceland	SSD*3	3
Ireland	Social worker*5, SSD; NP	7
Italy	Social worker*6; psychologist *2; SSD; social work academic; civil servant	11
Latvia	SSD	1
Luxembourg	NP	1
Malta	SSD; finance manager; social worker	3
Netherlands	Social work manager	1
Norway	Social service advisor	1
Poland	Social work academic*2	2
Portugal	Civil servant; NP*2;	3
Romania	SSD; social service officer	2
Slovenia	SSD; civil servant	2
Spain	Lead officer*4; SSD*4; social worker*5; NP*2	15
Sweden	SSD*5	5
Switzerland	Social work manager*2	2
United Kingdom	Social worker*3; SSD *4; advisor; officer*2; SW manager	11
Total number of participants in the survey		97

## Findings: Trends in the English social work education and regulation policies

- ▶ A dynamic process of social work education reforms in England, and across Europe
- ▶ Some of the earlier reforms include the transition of social work qualifications from a two-year diploma into a three-year degree in 2003
- ▶ Since 2010, a number of 'fast-track' social work (SW) training programmes have been introduced
  - ▶ Some are specific to certain specialism e.g. mental health
- ▶ In 2015, (DfE) introduced the 'assessed and supported year in employment' (ASYE), incentive of (£2000) for each employer of a newly qualified social worker (in children or adults' settings)
- ▶ International SWs (especially from within Europe) remained an important source of recruitment

## Selected policy and practice developments in the English Social Work system (2009 and 2017).

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YEAR	KEY SOCIAL WORK POLICY AND PRACTIC DEVELOPMENTS IN ENGLAND			
2009	Laming report	Social work practices with children		
2010	Step up to social work programme			
2011	Social work Academy opens	Social work reform board (SWRB) report		
2012	College of social work established	GSCC abolished	HCPC started registering SWs	
2013	Frontline SW training scheme	Chief social workers for children and adult appointed		
2014	The Care Act (2014)	Children SW innovation programme	Children and Families Act 2014	
2015	Think Ahead Mental Health SW training	College of Social Work abolished	English councils actively recruiting SWs from Romania	Assessed & supported year in Employment (ASYE) introduced
2016	Government announced to regulate SW in 2018	Government retracted regulating SW	A proposed new independent body to regulate SW in 2018	The Children and Social Work Bill introduced
2017	Children and social work Act 2017	The Adult Social Work Priority Setting Partnership (James Lind)		

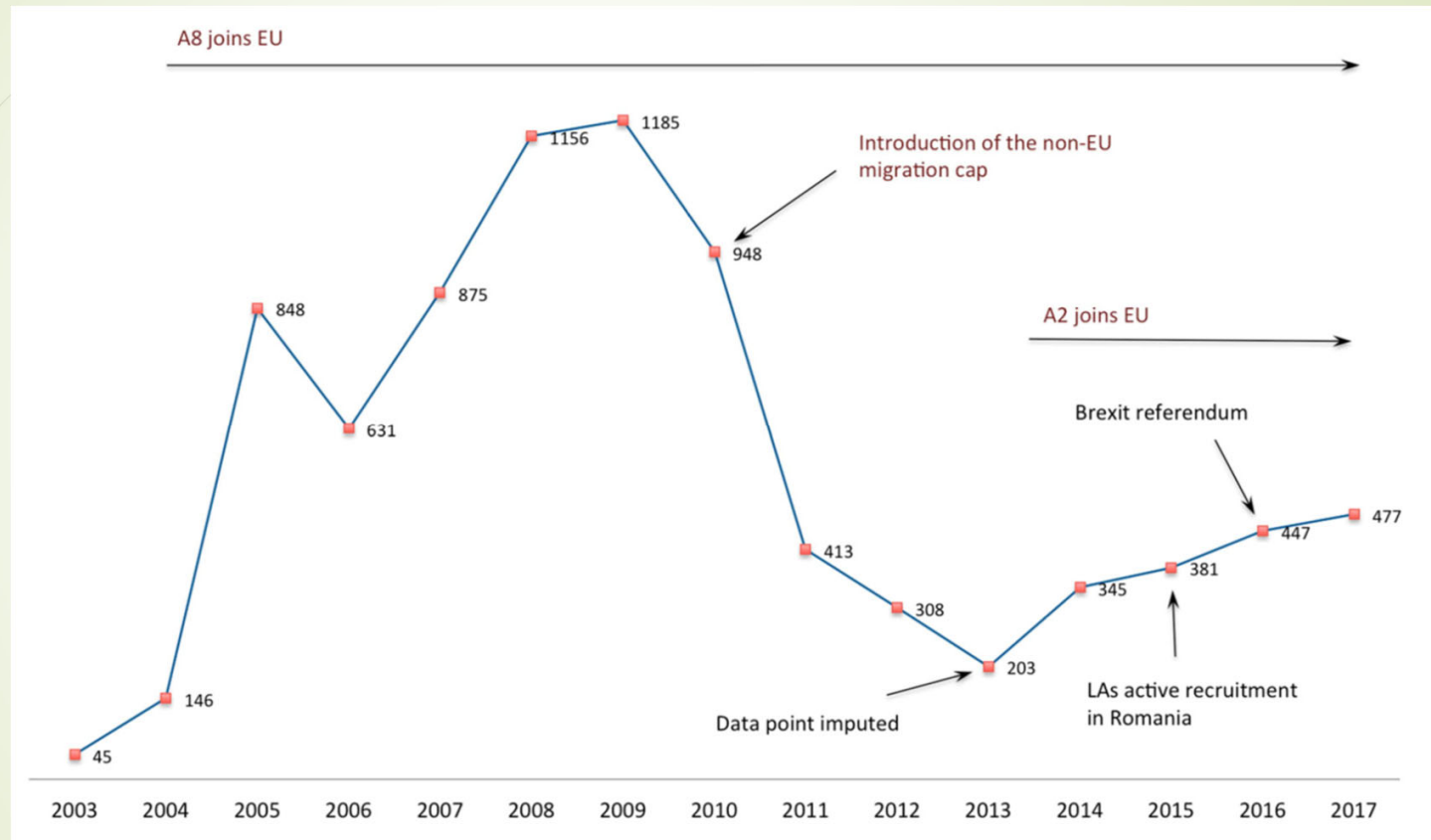


## Findings: The UK immigration policies and implications on transnational social workers mobility

- ▶ A dynamic process of immigration policy reforms in the UK
- ▶ A number of major immigration policy changes during the same period includes:
  - ▶ the expansion of the European Union since 2004;
  - ▶ the introduction of the UK 'points-based'<sup>3</sup> system in 2008 for non-EU migrants;
  - ▶ the cap on non-EU migrants introduced in 2010 and
  - ▶ Bulgaria and Romania joining the EU in 2007 but with rights to work and benefits restricted until 2014.
  - ▶ Brexit
  - ▶ Immigration policy white paper 2018



## Number of overseas-qualified social workers registered by the GSCC and HCPC to work in England from 2003 to 2017.



## Findings: Transnational social workers' mobility across Europe

- ▶ Many Western European countries resort to recruiting Inter-European SWs to address shortages
- ▶ There are clear diversity in SW qualifications' content and routes across Europe
- ▶ In some countries, such as Sweden, they opted to facilitate the recruitment of existing migrants with relevant qualifications into SW
- ▶ As an example of East–West European migration flows, Slovakia provided an interesting example
  - ▶ many Slovakian trained SWs were recruited to work in lower skilled jobs in Western Europe due to competitive wages in comparison to that in Slovakia.

# Overview of recognition of foreign qualifications of social work professions in selected European countries

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Social work	Profession	Recognition of foreign qualifications
Austria	Social worker	The Austrian professional association of social workers (OBDS) advises social workers seeking to work in Austria to obtain official recognition of their education/training, since this documentation needs to be provided to the future employer in Austria. Foreign social workers are required to undertake training in Austria law, and – if necessary – language training. If the foreign social worker has a foreign university degree, they can get this recognised by the Austrian Ministry of Science.
Denmark	Social Education ( <i>pædagog</i> ) Social worker ( <i>socialrådgiver</i> , literally social advisor)	In both cases, the person who is interested in having their qualification recognised must apply to the Danish Agency for Higher Education, which provides an assessment of the qualification and whether it corresponds to the Danish qualification. The assessment of foreign qualifications can serve the purpose of obtaining admission to vocational training, upper secondary education and to higher education.
France	Social service assistant	The requirements for non-nationals to have their qualifications recognised by French law are outlined in the Code de l'action sociale et des familles (CASF):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a post-secondary diploma in the field, delivered by an accredited national body in the home country;</li> <li>• Obtain an authorisation from the French state.</li> </ul>		
Both EU and non-EU nationals (except those from Quebec, who have a special agreement) must fill in the same application form to request the authorisation. Within four months, a decision should be made. Either the applicant can become an assistant de service social, or they have to engage in compensatory measures (either a competence test or a traineeship combining a 12-week professional traineeship and 250 hours of theory).		
Germany	Social workers ( <i>Sozialarbeiter/ Sozialpädagoge</i> )	The German Professional Qualifications Assessment Act ( <i>Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz – BQFG</i> ) regulates the formal recognition of degrees awarded by foreign institutions. Due to the regional differences of what social work entails, the federal states implement the assessments demanded by the BQFG in different ways.
Italy	Social worker ( <i>assistente sociale</i> ) Specialised social worker in management position ( <i>assistente sociale specialista</i> ) Professional educator Family counsellor	The Ministry of Justice is the authority responsible for recognising degrees awarded in other EU countries. The Ministry acts through a special Commission (Conferenza dei Servizi), which assesses the requests.  The Ministry of Health is responsible for recognising the qualifications awarded for these two professions in other EU countries.

## Findings: challenges associated with inter-European SWs mobility

- ▶ Lack of national guidelines on the recruitment of either EU or non-EU SWs
- ▶ lack of mutual recognition of SW qualifications in the EU
  - ▶ making working in another member state difficult with cumbersome recognition processes
- ▶ Very few participants work with organisations in other countries when recruiting from abroad
- ▶ Major challenges in recruiting EU TSWs
  - ▶ language proficiency (15 out of 21)
  - ▶ ability to understand users and carers' needs (10 out of 21)
- ▶ For non-EU migrants, challenges related to
  - ▶ retrieving references from previous employers (16 out of 20)
  - ▶ language proficiency (16 out of 21).

## Summary of Findings

- ▶ Inter-European social workers' mobility is becoming increasingly important to most European countries, particularly in Western Europe.
- ▶ Survey and focus group data analysis confirm that, like England, many Western European countries' resort to recruiting Inter-European SWs to address shortages.
- ▶ Yet, there are many of the challenges associated with such mobility for both the receiving and sending countries.
- ▶ Lack of mutual recognition of SW qualifications in the EU making working in another member state difficult with cumbersome recognition processes.
- ▶ For foreign nationals to be able to join the SW profession in Europe, their qualification needs to be officially recognised as being of equivalent value to corresponding national qualifications.
- ▶ Some countries appeared to have more efficient systems of qualification recognition than others.

## Discussion

- ▶ SW presents a profession that is not easily internationally transferable
  - ▶ albeit continued efforts by academics, educators and regulatory bodies for a comprehensive international social work identity.
- ▶ The complex interplay faced by TSWs, and their host countries
- ▶ Globalisations and free-labour mobility zones act as pull factors to an increased TSWs movement
- ▶ The variability of SW identity that is rooted within the local and national context remains a barrier to homogeneity and transferability of practice
  - ▶ Even in free-mobility zones
- ▶ Language barriers are particularly challenging, where SW practice is embedded in the use of language and cultural clues
- ▶ inter-European mobility poses an interesting example of easier mobility at the macro level but challenging skills' transferability processes at the micro level



## Conclusion

- ▶ The share of transnational social workers, increasingly from within Europe, is significant to most Western European social services workforce including that in England.
- ▶ The complexity in constructing social work training that is transferable to national and international contexts continues to be challenging.
- ▶ Inter-European social work qualifications' recognition and transferability of skills in practice remains a challenge in many countries.
- ▶ These are in part related to the variability in the languages used across the continent and the history and development of social work training that is usually impeded in the national and local contexts.



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# Acknowledgment and Disclaimer

- The quantitative analysis of social workers' registration data was funded by the English Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) [grant number DH/035/0095]. The online survey and focus group discussions were funded by the European Social Network.
- The views presented here are those of the author alone

# Thanks for listening

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