

144 Learning from researching the experiences of social workers with asylum seekers in North Greece and South Italy in the covid-19 context

Chair: Shulamit Ramon; Discussants: Shulamit Ramon, James Cox

We are conducting currently research on The Challenges of Social Work with asylum seekers in North Greece and South Italy.

This unique study aims to highlight the key issues for social workers at this frontline of European social work. The issues will include barriers, facilitators, challenges and achievements entailed in their work from their own perspective in the Covid-19 context.

Asylum seekers clients are interviewed as to their views on the contribution of social workers to support their transition period within the Covid-19 pandemic .North Greece and South Italy were chosen as European sites with large numbers of asylum seekers.

We aim to interview by phone or online a total of 40 social workers specialising in asylum seeking, and a similar number of asylum seekers.

The study includes also having an advisory group in each site with representatives of social work and migrants organisations

The data analysis of the recorded interviews will follow thematic analysis principles, conducted by local researchers as well as by the UK researchers and practitioners. The analysis will shed light on the underlying dimensions of working within a highly stressful environment for both workers and clients, due to current living conditions, high level of uncertainty concerning the future of each asylum seeker, the political positions of the governments and public opinion of the two countries and EU policy concerning asylum seekers, the and the impact of the pandemic.

Lessons learned from the study pertaining to the achievements, challenges, failures and recommendations concerning near future social work with asylum seekers in North Greece and South Italy, as well as in the rest of Europe, will be outlined.

The presenters and the discussants have considerable experience of practice and research in this field.

PRESENTATIONS:

Learning from researching and experiences of social workers with asylum seekers in North Greece, Theano Kallinikaki, Roberta di Rosa, Elena Allegri, Theano Kallinikaki, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece.

Since 2015, the largest part of the social work practice has been developed to Migrants Refugees practice, not only for social workers who work in services and programs targeted to these groups, but also for those who work in other sectors.

Hence this research took place in North Greece, near the land border between Greece and Turkey from where the refugees come.

Local authorities, as well as national and international NGOs are running programs of hosting and supporting the most vulnerable asylum seekers.

We had skype interviews with representatives of refugees and social workers in housing programs, massive camps, safe zones, youth support centers, shelters for unaccompanied children and vulnerable families, foster care street work, protective custody, and in medical services, in cities and semi-urban towns.

The focus was on the new challenges due to recent governmental migration policy, and of working and living in the context of the Covid19 pandemic since March 2020. The data describe the consequences of the lockdown, for those living in closed camps and housing programs, on refugees life and on the role, the methods, interventions and referrals social workers used to apply before.

Social workers need adequate equipment for remote work and distant contact, including interpreters, to optimize their contribution in this highly challenging context. Policy change which will enable asylum seekers to have the status of refugees and to open the rest of Europe to them has to accompany this change.

Keywords: social work with asylum seekers, covid-19 context, challenges, support structures and strategies

Rethinking support relationship in covid-19 times: challenges for social work in the Italian asylum seekers reception system, Roberta di Rosa, Elena Allegri

Roberta T. Di Rosa, University of Palermo, and Elena Allegri, University of Piemonte Orientale, Italy

Social work has played a key role in the attempt to integrate of migrants in Italy. Ever since the first rescue operations, social workers have represented the interface of the Italian reception system, meeting migrants face to face, welcoming them and getting to know their personal histories.

Nevertheless, in the daily practice of social workers there are marked variations in the professional skills involved and in the consistency and effectiveness of the interventions on offer, often required to remedy the deficiencies of existing policies for this high need group.

Critical issues for Social Workers in the migration field are mainly linked to the motivations and skills of the operators; their level of cultural sensitivity; the jeopardized provision of resources and the services' capacity for inclusion; the pressure created by governmental social policies; and the tough challenge of reconciling the professional and institutional mandates.

The COVID 19 emergency is an inevitable and largely insurmountable challenge for all migrants, but in particular for asylum seekers hosted in the reception system, who experience a high level of uncertainty even before the pandemic. This emergency has increased vulnerabilities and uncertainties, requiring both asylum seekers and professionals to be able to readjust and reshape life plans and aid processes.

Starting from the testimonies and indications on methods and strategies collected from social workers working in the reception facilities, we will share a reflective summary on the redefinition of the helping relationship in times of emergency; the centrality of reflexivity and on the tools tested. In particular, we focus on critical points and resilience strategies of social worker in this demanding field in pandemic times, highlighting effective practices in the support process, thus making a contribution to future development of social work knowledge and methods.

Keywords: social work with asylum seekers, covid-19 context, challenges, support structures and strategies

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EASSW - European Association
of Schools of Social Work



TALLINN UNIVERSITY
School of Governance,
Law and Society



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WELCOME TO ECSWE 2021

Dear EASSW members, colleagues and friends

On behalf of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW), I am delighted to invite social work educators, scholars, students, service users and practitioners, policymakers, and all those stakeholders involved in social work education to our biennial conference. The University of Tallinn in Estonia, specifically SOGOLAS (the University's School of Governance, Law and Society) has generously offered to host the conference from 15–18 June 2021. We hope to be able to have the conference in person, as we know how important and nurturing it is to have such events face-to-face, but if this is not possible then an online conference is already planned.

Together with the EASSW vice president Ines Amaro, I want to send our deepest thank you to all those who are engaged in the organisation of the conference, and especially the chairs of the conference committees Raymond Kloppenburg from the University of Utrecht, Christos Panagiotopoulos from the university of Cyprus, chairs respectively of the Steering and the Scientific committees and Karmen Toros from the hosting university of Tallinn, excellent chair of the local Organising committee and her team. Their great work of navigating in uncertainties and finding the best solution is a guarantee in the achieving the goal of having a rich and inspiring conference.

This is the 4th biannual conference held by the EASSW since 2015, and so we thought it time to give it a special name: the “ECSWE European Conference on Social Work Education”. Over the last few years, EASSW conferences have tackled the major current themes and challenges in society. This year the conference will address the impact, the consequences and the methods adopted to react to and cope with the COVID pandemic that struck our global world in 2020. The title of the conference – “Innovation and resilience: preparedness of social work education in uncertain times” – expresses the essence of our joint efforts during this period: innovation, in discovering and managing new ways to communicate; and resilience, in searching for how we have, and how we can, collectively and individually deal with such a collective trauma. Collective traumas unveil the texture and strengths of a community. In recent years, a community of social work educators has grown and EASSW is constantly engaged in supporting and developing this community through several activities.

We sincerely hope that the conference will be a place to share reflections, thoughts, experiences and research among participants as well as a place where the dialogue between the three pillars of social work – education, research and practice – can be developed, enriching the lively and constructive debate about the future of social work education in Europe and beyond.

We invite you to submit your abstracts and to contribute with your ideas, experiences, aspirations and plans for the future of social work education.

I look forward to meeting you in Tallinn,

Teresa Bertotti
EASSW President



Welcome message from the Scientific Committee

We hereby greet all members of the social work education community who are attending and participating in the bi-annual Conference of Social Work Education, promoted by EASSW in partnership with Tallinn University.

The theme of this year's edition is Innovation and Resilience: the preparedness of SWE in uncertain times. The challenge is posed to all those involved in social work education to share your knowledge, experience and debates on how education can prepare social workers for uncertainty and the unexpected.

The ability to be innovative and the capacity to face adversity and instability with resilience are certainly important aspects of a qualified practitioner in social work. However, how can we develop these qualities? What are the most successful practices in education settings? What are the doubts, the challenges and the difficulties in this area? What are the lessons learnt during periods of uncertainty?

Collaborate with us in gathering together academics, teachers, students, researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and service-users in the field of social work and share your practices and experiences with this community.

We invite presentations, workshops, symposia and posters covered by the themes presented at the Call for Papers.

In the current global climate, more than ever we need to think and act collectively and collaboratively to understand how European social work education is dealing and responding to the new challenges and demands of these times.

Come and share your ideas with us!

Christos Panagiotopoulos

Chair of the Scientific Committee



Welcome from Tallinn University

Dear social work educators, researchers, students, social workers, service users and other practitioners contributing to the social work profession,

We are honoured to host the next EASSW 2021 European Conference on Social Work Education in June at Tallinn University's School of Governance, Law and Society.

2021 has a significant meaning for us in terms of social work education – it marks 30 years of educating social workers to be professionals empowering those in need. We started by learning ourselves from our international colleagues – the what and the how – and we are still learning today, more than ever. This is especially so in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a global impact. Social workers have not been unaffected by this pandemic, and this will be true for other crises in the future (environmental, economic, etc.). Therefore, it is crucial to come together and discuss how social work and professional practice can be performed during such times, and also how to prepare social workers to do so. Social work cannot be done alone; it can only be done together.

This conference is a good chance to share good practices, meet old and new colleagues, learn from times of uncertainty and build on these lessons for the future. In the conference, we want to share our good practices; for example, how we educate child protection workers or how we use project-based teaching methods to educate social entrepreneurs. The social entrepreneurship master programme aims to improve entrepreneurship and innovation in traditionally non-profit sectors, such as social services, rural areas and community development. Social services are increasingly co-created within the community, whereby services users play an important role in designing services according to their specific needs. While educating these students, we have turned the educational setting into a creative hub, where students not only participate in academic education but the learning environment also serves as a pre-incubator, enabling spin-offs of the most viable ideas. We are planning a hackathon during the conference to develop innovative ideas on how to educate social workers in these uncertain times. Come and be part of it!

We welcome you to take part in the conference to debate the challenges, opportunities, and innovative approaches and practices in social work education.

On behalf of our team,

Karmen Toros

Professor of Social Work, the Chair of Local Organizing Committee



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CONFERENCE THEMES

The overarching themes of the conference are innovation, resilience and preparedness of social work education (SWE) to learn from times of uncertainty and build on these lessons for the future. Social cohesion has been challenged in the past decades through ongoing human rights abuse, challenges in human service delivery and human crises. At the same time, European societies have been immensely challenged as a result of the recent socio-economic and public health crises. These have resulted in challenges for social welfare systems, social organisation and individual lifestyles. Therefore, issues and questions are rising on the preparedness of SWE to respond to new demands for students, practitioners and service users, including new forms of liaising within and between these groups of people, new ways of making sense of SW practice and its impact on peoples' lives as well as how this can make a difference and new pedagogical approaches to trigger the transformation of SW students' worldview. This conference aims to address such issues through rigorous and challenging discussions through six themes:

I. Lifespan and SW in an Era of Innovation

II. SWE for Sceneries of Exception (Crises, Disasters and Unexpected Events)

III. Post-Traumatic Approaches in SW

IV. Innovative SW Teaching Practices Involving Service Users

V. Innovative Skills for SW Practice with Distressed Groups: Migrants, Refugees, War and Conflict Victims and Health Crises Victims

VI. SW Ethics in Times of Uncertainty: Balancing Innovation and Tradition

Re-examining the skills and knowledge applied by professional social workers and, consequently, the development of innovative SW curriculum and training to respond to these new challenges today is crucial. Consequently, SWE must critically reflect on methods, theories and practices that have been developed thus far, to be a lead actor in addressing current crises in a meaningful way. Lessons must be learnt to build new solutions, which enhance collaboration between disciplines and fields of study that share common values. The task must be none other than to increase resilience and maintain social cohesion, social justice and human dignity. By creating transformative social initiatives that engage SW educators, service users, researchers and students, society can collectively improve in times of uncertainty. Collaborative approaches, co-creative practices, are also part of an emerging framework for SW and SWE.

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