

# MIGRATION, SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION

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## ABSTRACT

### **Migration, Social Policy and Social Work. Introduction to the Thematic Section**

The complex intertwinement of migration, social policy and social work can be approached and addressed in several manners. The author proposes a few directions for research within this relatively new multidisciplinary field that can be followed by scholars and policymakers and presents a few specific themes that have proved to be of significance in times of globalisation, increased (economic) competitiveness between states and world regions, and changing welfare regimes.

KEYWORDS: migration, social policy, social work, welfare state

## IZVLEČEK

### **Migracije, socialna politika in socialno delo: Uvod v tematski sklop**

K prepletu tematik kot so migracije, socialna politika in socialno delo, lahko pristopamo z različnimi pristopi in na različne načine. Avtorica ponudi nekaj usmeritev za raziskovanje tega relativno novega multidisciplinarnega področja, ki jim lahko sledijo tako raziskovalci kot oblikovalci politik, in predstavi nekaj specifičnih in perečih problematik, ki jih srečujemo v času globalizacije, strukturnih sprememb sistemov blaginje in (ekonomske) kompetitivnosti med posameznimi državami in regijami sveta.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: migracije, socialna politika, socialno delo, država blaginje

## INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for the thematic section was the international conference *Chains of Migration. Challenging Identity Normativity*, which was organised by the Faculty of Social Work of the University of Ljubljana in March 2011. The papers that were presented by a number of invited scholars mainly focused on themes that transcended the individual fields of migration, social policy and social work, and used a multidisciplinary approach to combine them. Such intertwinement opens new research possibilities that are well worth exploring due to their increasing significance within the academic and policymaking circles. This short contribution explores only some of the possibilities for approaching the research on migration, social policy and social work and suggest some specific research themes which are relevant

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in current times. In conclusion, the articles featured in the thematic section, which cover a wide range of different issues but nevertheless stay within the discussed framework, are presented in brief.

## APPROACHING THE RESEARCH ON MIGRATION, SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK

The complex intertwinement of migration, social policy and social work can be approached and addressed in several manners: using the overarching concept of globalisation and its diverse effects on global migration dynamics and the presumed reconstruction of welfare state regimes due to erosion of national solidarity and decreasing consent for redistribution;<sup>1</sup> focusing on social policy and its general concern with variations in how welfare services for immigrants are financed, organised, delivered and consumed within political territories (Yeates 2001); or, for example, considering individual users of social services seeking assistance in destination countries due to the specific social problems they or their family members are facing as (undocumented) migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons etc. This distinction between the macro, meso and micro perspectives is the first that comes to mind.

It can also be approached by taking into consideration specific flows of migration in terms of geography, namely from south to north and vice versa, south to south and north to north, and the consequences of these flows for national social policies and social work practice. Migration affects social policy and the provisioning of services in both sending and receiving countries. The main focuses of research in receiving countries have been on the issue of integration of migrants and the impact of immigration on the welfare state in times of globalisation and increased economic competitiveness between world regions and individual states (Banting and Kymlicka 2006; Kim and Zurlo 2009; Legrain 2007). Migrants' claims for recognition and the adoption of multiculturalism policies have been perceived as controversial, in part because they could potentially make it more difficult to sustain a robust welfare state by eroding the interpersonal trust and social solidarity that sustain redistribution. However, although the research shows that there is no general tendency for recognition to undermine redistribution, the negative discourse still persists (Banting and Kymlicka 2006). Moreover, Keith Banting's research shows that there is no evidence that countries with large foreign-born populations had more trouble managing and developing their social programs than countries with small immigrant communities (Banting 2005). Thus it all comes down to finding scapegoats for the unfavourable economic situation that welfare states have been facing in the past few decades.

In the most recent years, migration and social policy researchers as well as policymakers in the respective fields have emphasised the need for addressing another issue that requires the intertwining of approaches and policies: demographic ageing, its effects on welfare state regimes in countries in the north, labour shortages and the need to attract migrant labour. Especially in European welfare states, the demographic situation presents major challenges for economic development and the restructuring of public policies. One of the main concerns is the provision of health and care services for the increasing

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1 Welfare states not only strive to provide social security and to ensure a more just and egalitarian society, but are also political projects of nation building. Gösta Esping Andersen notes that "many countries became self-proclaimed welfare states, not so much to give a label to their social policies as to foster national social integration" (Esping Andersen 1996: 2). Considering that all nation states, regardless of the different principles according to which they developed, are socially constructed, a number of different mechanisms must have been employed by states to ensure the integration of their citizens. Apart from social integration, the so-called inherent national identity plays an important role. Thus, despite significant evidence proving otherwise, immigrants are still considered a threat to national solidarity and therefore a threat to the welfare state.

numbers of elderly. In light of the decreasing role of the state in direct provision of care services and the fact that women, who have traditionally cared for dependent members of their families, are increasingly participating in paid employment, the question of elderly care and childcare needs to be systematically addressed, especially in policymaking circles.<sup>2</sup> What has been observed as a result of high demand of care in European households and in the public and private sectors is the expansion of low-paid employment of immigrant women carers (Yeates 2009). Mostly recruited by market-driven migrant recruiting agencies, these women are vulnerable to various types of abuse, including racism and xenophobia, and often require assistance from social work and other public institutions. And as all three policy sectors of the so-called welfare mix (informal, public and private) are relying on migrant labour for the provision of care services, migration and social policy need to become more harmonised, social work practice better informed and care migration no longer perceived through the prism of methodological nationalism,<sup>3</sup> but transnationalism<sup>4</sup> and globalisation of social reproductive labour.<sup>5</sup>

Shifting the perspective to sending countries reveals that here, too, migration, social policy and social work are closely connected and should not be located in separate domains. In the case of care migration, the countries of the South are usually the sending countries, struggling with care drain and the issue of children left behind, i.e. children separated from one or both parents who have found work abroad. A care drain has also been observed within the European Union, most notably in Romania, where women from specific regions (most notably the north-eastern Iasi region) decide to find employment in the care and other sectors in Western European countries and leave their children with grandparents or relatives. A recent report written by Romanian social workers and psychologists reveals that parental absence for longer periods of time can have significant negative effects on their psychosocial development, attendance and performance in school, they are more vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation, including trafficking, and they tend to resort to criminal activities in higher numbers than their peers. (Alternative Sociale Association 2008) The absence of parents also leaves grandparents overburdened and in need of increased medical and social assistance, putting further strain on medical staff, social workers and non-governmental organisations. On several occasions I have encountered the opinion that arrangements of such transnational families bring more benefits than harm, as remittances are contributing significantly to the social development of poor countries. But owing to the fact that remittances are transferred to individual families and taxes are not deducted, this income does not directly contribute to the improvement of public health and care services.

There is also the complex issue of return migration and reintegration of migrants. Although returnees potentially face significant social problems linked to economic and social exclusion, reintegration has received relatively little scholarly attention.

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2 Selma Sevenhuijsen argues that care has “entered policy agendas through a variety of channels, ranging from the reform of health care and welfare policies, to new programmes regulating the parental leave and social care for the elderly.” (Sevenhuijsen 2003: 13)

3 Methodological nationalism refers to the nationalisation of the global regime of nation states, meaning that the boundaries of the nation state define the unit of analysis. (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003)

4 Perez Orozco argues that it is no longer possible to discuss and explain care within the context of national borders as an autonomous element of a socioeconomic system (Perez Orozco 2009), as it has been increasingly recognised that “financing, organisation and provision of a range of care services within one country cannot be adequately studied and explained without reference to their transnational qualities or to wider geo-political, geo-economic and geo-social dynamics.” (Yeates 2009: 6)

5 Care labour as one form of social reproductive labour is an essential component of wider societal processes through which social relations are maintained and which creates and sustains people as physical, social and cultural beings.” (Yeates 2009: 5-6)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION

The most common approach to addressing the migration—social policy—social work nexus is to consider individual phenomena that have significance for social policy and social work theory and practice. Five such cases are presented in this thematic section. They cover a wide range of different issues that have relevance for this multidisciplinary research field, but nevertheless stay within the discussed framework.

Processes of decision-making on length of stay are discussed by Claudia Schneider and Deborah Holman, using data from a longitudinal study of migrant workers from A8 and A2 countries in the East of England. The authors conclude that apart from the maximisation of economic benefits, strong normative principles and goal orientation, another important factor in the decision making process is a positive perception of the wider social situation in the UK. Ana M. Sobočan discusses transnational adoptions using the case of Slovenian parents who have adopted children from abroad. Her focus is on the complex processes of identity formation and social integration of children in the new environment, as well as on the issues of belonging, ethnicization and coping strategies. She argues that there is much more to belonging than citizenship or legal kinship. The issue of identity and belonging is also discussed by Mojca Pajnik. She uses the narratives of immigrants from ex-Yugoslav republics in Slovenia to argue that due to specific contexts, the general identity labels used to describe migrants' experience cannot grasp the complexity of their realities.

The role of the state in ensuring successful reintegration of returning migrants in the Republic of Macedonia is addressed by Suzana Bornarova. She argues that reintegration requires major social and economic adjustments by returnees, especially vulnerable groups including children, older people, single parents, people with special needs and victims of trafficking, who are often exposed to the risk of social exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. She moves on to present readmission agreements between states and concludes with a recommendation that the Macedonian government develop and implement a comprehensive and efficient migration policy, and work towards improving cooperation between ministries. The thematic section concludes with an article by Svetlana Trbojevik and Natasha Bogoevska, who touch upon the complex issue of seasonal migration of Roma and related social problems, including unfavourable health and sanitary conditions and social, educational and cultural exclusion, which all have a strong impact on their integrity and identity formation.

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## POVZETEK

### **MIGRACIJE, SOCIALNA POLITIKA IN SOCIALNO DELO: UVOD V TEMATSKI SKLOP**

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Namen kratkega prispevka je predstavitev nekaterih možnosti in pristopov k raziskovanju na področju multidisciplinarnega polja, ki združuje migracije, socialno politiko in socialno delo v obdobju globalizacije, ekonomske krize in kompetitivnosti med državami in regijami sveta ter temeljnega preoblikovanja režimov blaginje. V članku, ki je hkrati tudi uvod v tematski sklop, je na kratko predstavljenih pet prispevkov, ki obravnavajo različne tematike v okviru obravnavanega področja.