

Internationalisation and Social Work: Social Workers Without Borders (SWWB)



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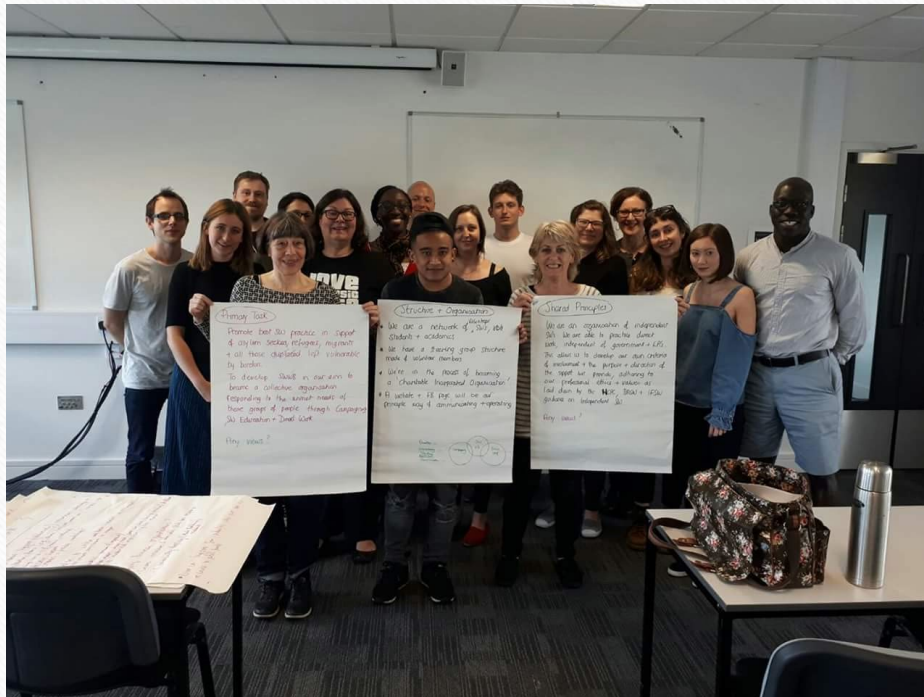
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Overview

- Scale of the problem: humanitarian crises and asylum seekers and refugees in England and social work response
- Bordering and hostile environments: how white nationalism creates hard borders around citizenship
- Case Study: Social Workers Without Borders – Qualitative study of social work practitioners advocating for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK
- Conclusions: What is the future of critical and radical social work in addressing problems of global importance?
- Is there scope for international social work and what could that look like?

Reflexive position: On becoming an activist



- Woman of colour and a migrant
- **Why I joined SWWB** - Being an activist in Botswana on issues of social justice and human rights for those affected by HIV/AIDS. Today, my work as a volunteer, is with Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- Jane Addams (1800s) inspirations of activism and social work practice
- Radical social work reminds us that meaningful practice **should always incorporate elements of political action.** Social workers need to appreciate the public causes of private pain and misery (Iokimidis 2016)

<https://www.socialworkerswithoutborders.org>

Asylum Seekers and Refugees - The scale of the problem

1) The highest total number of first-time asylum applicants in the year ending March 2020 was registered in:

- **Germany** (with 155,295 first-time applicants, the majority among EU Member States)
- **France** (129,480)
- **Spain** (128,520)
- **Greece** (81,465)
- **United Kingdom** (31, 752)

2) 85% of all refugees live in developing countries (UNHCR, 2020)

3) The UK has the highest rate of refusal of first-time asylum applications (record high of 88% in 2004) (House of Commons, 2020)

<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html>



Hostile environment

- Home Secretary Theresa May stated that her aim was to ‘create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants’. ‘What we don’t want’, she said, ‘is a situation where people think that they can come here and overstay because they’re able to access everything they need’ (2012)



White Nationalism and Hostile Environments

- Contends that white people are a race, seeks to develop and maintain a white national identity and, is attached to the concept of a white nation.
- **Current environment**
 - White nationalism sees itself as the victim of multiculturalism and the demographic changes that continue to reshape western nations. Protection of native soil is protection of white races (Sowell 2017).
 - White nationalists claim that they do not want to dominate anyone else; in fact, white nationalists think that they have been dominated (Sowell 2017).
 - This gives governments with far-right ideologies the moral right to deter those who are seen as a threat to (white) nation

New Plan for Immigration (NPI): Proposals for the Nationality and Borders Bill, 2021

- **Means of arrival** will determine how worthy the person is of protection in the UK (deepening divide between economic migrants and asylum seekers; prioritising resettlement schemes over illegal routes of arrival): deterrent policy to police human trafficking)
- **This directly contravenes the 1951 UN Refugees Convention:** “To protect people seeking asylum from persecution on the grounds of their method of entry and guarantees them access to claim asylum for the very reason that there is **no viable way of seeking permission** to enter a country in order to apply for asylum” (UNHCR).

(Rajan-Rankin, S. & Ng'andu, B. 2021)

Detention centres for Asylum Seekers outside resettlement schemes

- Australian style model of housing potential asylum seekers in detention centres while people await assessments
- Immigration Removal Centres- (Yarl's Wood, Brook House)
- Gross misuse of age assessment based on appearance- unaccompanied asylum seeking minors placed in IRCs (contravenes rights of the child and best interest assessment)

Rajan-Rankin, S & Ng'andu, B. (2021)



“The British people voted to take back control of our borders in the 2016 EU referendum. They then drove the message home again at the 2019 general election. We have a democratic mandate to fix the problem of immigration”. (Home Minister, Priti Patel)

Response to the current situation in Afghanistan

- In its first year, the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme will welcome up to 5,000 Afghans to the UK who have been forced to flee the country, with up to a total of 20,000 in the long-term (UK Government)

Why not more?



Internationalisation and Social Work

International social work has become a buzzword as more and more social work educators and practitioners become involved in initiatives loosely aimed at getting students, practitioners and educators involved in widening their horizons by engaging with courses and placements overseas.

- Gurid, Aga Askeland, and Malcolm, Payne (2017) Internationalizing Social Work Education: Insights from Leading Figures Across the Globe
- Claudia Di Matteo & Claire Ganne (2020), The internationalization of social work. Emerging discourses from the Erasmus Mundus Advances program, Social Work Journal, Vol. 39, Routledge, pp23-40

Internationalisation of the social work labour force:

“Increasingly, more social workers are training in one country and working in another, raising various questions about the transferability of training, its relevance as it crosses borders, and contexts to be applied in very different cultural milieus”.

Jo Moriarty, Shereen Hussein, Jill Manthorpe and Martin Stevens (2011)

What is the potential for social work practice through activism?

Current 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 knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFSW, 2014).

Social Workers Without Borders (SWWB)

- Campaigning
- Direct Work
- Education
- Re-humanising the alien (Paulo Freire's principles')
- Working to the emancipatory principles of social work practice, of social justice
- Developing an alternative social work narrative and practice with asylum seekers and refugees

Research study context

- A qualitative exploratory study on the experiences of social workers volunteering with Social Workers Without Borders (SWWB) and working for Local Authorities in the United Kingdom.
- Applying radical social work (Turbett 2014) and systems theory (Stein 1974) to practice

Research questions

1. What are the issues arising when volunteering and working from a radical social work, and working from a state sanctioned social work approach?
2. How do social work practitioners volunteering for SWWB and working for UK local authorities manage these issues?

Participants - 13 semi-structured interviews with social work practitioners.

Data analysis - Thematic analysis of the data was employed, seeking meanings and common themes arising from the responses:

Findings –

1. Becoming an activist and radical social work- ‘Speaking back’ (Stanford 2010)
2. Reinvigorating social work practice

Theme 1

- Becoming an activist and radical social work: 'Speaking back' (Stanford 2010)



Grassroots Activism

- “I think to begin with it was more like an activist sort of kneejerk reaction. If I’d known where it [laughs] would have ended up, maybe I would have thought twice. There was no organisation involved to begin with, other than setting up a group on social media to gain interest and link in with like-minded social workers. We then decided, to go over to the camp and see what was going on. And really, that's what we did” (Participant 7).

Speaking back: Collective Resistance

- “I realised that there were children there and was outraged that there was no organised response from social work. I started thinking about how we are working as social workers, as part of institutions that are racist and ‘othering’ of those vulnerable in society. I want to make a difference not just doing the day to day job but being an activist. There is a difference between just adhering to social work values such as social justice and human rights to being an activist. **As an activist you have to rock a few boats, and it was time that social workers spoke out about what was happening in Calais. This is a global issue and there is need for solidarity.** Giving a positive narrative to asylum seekers than the constant portrayal of negativity in the press. There was just this feeling of having had enough” (Participant 8)

Caped Crusaders?

“Only my closest colleagues know, it is very tricky because I am still doing social work, but the work I am doing in my own time is controversial. Discussions of immigration, asylum seekers and refugees have become very toxic in our society ...I have seen these influence practice in my Team...what is said about asylum seekers, that they should not be coming here” (Participant 3).

Theme 2

‘Reinvigorating social
work practice’



Reinvigorating practice

“In SWWB, I can challenge this, I feel more comfortable with saying what I think. I am also using the law a lot more in my work with SWWB – really getting a good understanding and application of Human Rights, which is not so strong in Local Authorities. In LA, my Manager wants a decision quickly and I know what that decision should be. I have challenged this in supervision and try and emphasise the Human Rights aspect for the young (UASC) people, and been successful. But it took a lot to do that, and it has shown me that **I can go beyond my day job to make a difference. This reinvigorates my belief in social work values**” (Participant 8)

Value-based social work practice

Being in the Calais camp actually really contextualised it for me, and made me think, you know, I've read this on paper, I've seen the pictures on the telly, but there's nothing like experiencing the smells, the sounds, you know, what it's actually like. **There's something about value based social work that SWWB really helps to promote.** It enabled practitioners to just have a little glimpse into what the young people they are working with have been through. You are engaging with your senses when you go over there and do something like that. And it just brings it home what the young people have been through. **It is about humanizing the young people** (Participant 9).

What is the potential for an internationalised social work?

How far can radical social work go?

- I think that we can change, that we are agents of change, whether that's individually or it's collectively, whether you're doing that within your own organisation, whether that begins from that kind of subterfuge social work, from ..., or being able to have those conversations with other colleagues. Then maybe collectively, being able to have conversations with managers. And actually finding out that managers often hold the same opinions as you. **I suppose for me, it's getting rid of that 'them and us' and actually realising that you've got allies in places that you might actually think is quite unlikely. Social work is global, why not reach out, and have a social work conversation, our values are global?** (Participant 7)

Thank you



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