

SOCIAL WORK FORMATION IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: As in Europe over the last 20 years, Ukraine's social work professionalization process has been actively developing. This process requires solid knowledge base and availability of relevant levels of professional education in which development is regulated by social work practitioners and academics. Education plays the key role in social work professionalization. Key achievements, certain challenges, and misunderstandings faced on this way, as well as the factors that cause them are analyzed in this article.

Keywords: social work education, education policy, standard classification of education.

Introduction

Social work as an academic discipline and as a profession has existed in Ukraine for more than 20 years. As a field of education, it was established in 1994 within the project 'Introducing higher education for social work in Ukraine.' However, this field of education has often been challenged by its uncertain status within the country. This is largely because of the officials' voluntarism, lack of the third cycle of education, lack of research centers, the need to operate within the frames of general requirements of the training procedures which make it impossible to ensure the relevant duration and content of practice placement which is necessary to guarantee students' quality of education.

As social work at the time of its formation was a new discipline, according to the decision of the Ministry of Education, it was referred to as a specialty that belongs within the field of 'sociology' within traditional education fields. What kind of evidence was used at that time when identifying such a status of social work is unknown; however, evaluating this decision has been prolonged for over a decade. Both positive and negative effects of such situation can be discussed, but it is important to notice that the latter ensured relevant independence for social work as sociologists, authorized to adopt regulation documents, were very well aware that sociology and social work are totally different academic disciplines. Maybe, their intervention into social work was a minimum one.

The situation was changed when the Ministry of Education of Ukraine decided to make changes to the existing standards of education having initiated the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine as of December 13, 2006, on the List of Fields of Training according to which training in higher educational institutions for the 'Bachelor' education qualification is ensured. For social work, this change meant that its status had been radically changed: since 2006, social work was moved under the 'social welfare' area of knowledge, where, but for social work, the 'social assistance' field of study was included. Thus, these two specialties envisage both Bachelor's and Master's levels of education.

Social work educators put a lot of effort into changing the situation, as it did not correspond with the international practice and created additional challenges for higher educational institutions with new specialty licensing. Thus, for instance, the School of Social Work at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy,' which had been educating social workers since 1994, because of these new standards of education had to obtain the license again for this specialized field of education even though the change was simply about its renaming. The School of Social Work is engaged in cooperation within a wide network of international professional organizations (such as the International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Social Workers, the East – European Sub-Regional Association of Schools of Social Work), as well as it supports close partnership relations with colleagues from many universities in Europe and the USA (Anglia Ruskin University, Great Britain; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; Sheffield Hallam University, Great Britain; Alice Solomon Hochschule in Berlin, Germany; Vilnius Pedagogical University, Lithuania, etc.). Thus, its lecturers and students were very much aware of the decisions' negative impact on the further development and shaping of social work.

The Ministry of Education explained the above changes by introducing in Ukraine the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), and the requests of professionals to the Ministry of Education were readdressed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Ukraine. The latter confirmed that ISCED (2011) 'for most of the countries is the basic qualification education standard.'

At the same time, in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), it was stated that it was developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics '*not for identifying specialties or levels of education, but purely for statistical research, which ensures relevant cross-national comparability of data about education systems.*' This note is a principal one as it contradicts the Ministry officials' affirmation that the ISCED in many countries is a basic document used to identify qualification education standards. Therefore, the level of awareness across the Ministry management staff on the content of the above international document and its purpose is questionable.

The logic of the ISCED authors can be understood as when speaking about the statistical data social work can refer to 'social welfare' or 'health care' as it is related to different types of social services most of which are provided within the social welfare and health care systems. However, here it is necessary to consider the specifics of social work, which significantly depend on the specific context of each country. In Western countries, there are large numbers of social workers engaged in health care hospital work, along with various medical programs, whereas in Ukraine such practice is lacking. The Ministry of Health Care requires exclusively medical education from the staff of health care institutions, and positions of social workers are not foreseen in staffing levels. Thus, it is difficult to apply the ISCED classification to Ukrainian social work.

Special consideration is needed by the other field of education – 'social assistance' (the field of education code 6.130101), adopted by the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministries of Ukraine as of December 13, 2006. This field as well as social work belongs to the 'social assistance' area of knowledge. According to Ukrainian legislation, social assistance concerns material aid that is provided to people in difficult life circumstances. Thus, social assistance education at the Master's level entails at least a surprise; however, that does not prevent it from existing in Ukraine during the last several years and in fact to duplicate social work curriculums. Also, it is worth noting that in the international practice there is no such

specialty or field of training (at least the authors of the article and their colleagues were not able to find it). The ISCED lacks this field, too.

To analyze the situation, there is a need to answer two questions: ‘What kind of evidence do the officials of the Ministry of Education use while making such decisions?’ and ‘What kind of evidence should they be guided by?’ The authors have the answer for the second question, and it concerns the fact that social work as an academic discipline and profession has its own old world traditions. The core documents that identify its development have been developed a long time ago and are known within the professional community, except for Ukrainian officials. The key organizations related to social work are the following:

- The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) – the world federation of national organizations of social workers from 90 countries which represents over 750 000 social workers [1];
- The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) – global non-governmental organization with the membership of tens of thousands of organizations from all over the world, which are actively engaged in programs to assist social welfare, social development, and social justice [2];
- The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) – the international community of schools of social work and social work educators which supports quality education provision, social work theory and practice research, management of social institutions and building social policy. IASSW represents two thousands schools of social work from across the world [3].

The above three international organizations were established in 1928 and during the decades hold official consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations Organization and with the other UN structures and relevant organizations.

It seems that it is much easier and more natural to explore the experience and practice of the Western social work education system that Ukraine intends to become a part of after its joining the Bologna system. Social work has existed for more than a century and it has been taught at leading universities for decades. According to the classification adopted by the European Union (EU Subject Area Codes), social work belongs to the social sciences (Code 14). Political Science, Sociology, Economic Sciences, Behavior Sciences, Psychology, etc., belong here too. The social work code in this list is 14.5. More branched classification of social sciences is used in Canada, and it includes generalist social work, gerontology, child and youth care, probation, etc.

Almost a decade ago, the ‘Global Standards for the Social Work Education and Training’ [4] were adopted where the standards for curriculum are described, including practice placement, standards for basic curriculum, standards for the teaching staff, etc., which have been translated into Ukrainian by one of this articles authors and disseminated across the professional community.

Social work, according to the definition adopted in July 2014 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work and International Federation of Social Workers 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' [5].

In the case of Ukraine, the local definition of social work not only has nothing to do with the above but it also contradicts even simple logic. According to the Law of Ukraine On Social Work with Families, Children and Youth, "*social work <...> – an activity of authorized bodies, enterprises, organizations and institutions which implement social work <...>, as well as social work professionals and volunteers which is aimed at social support for families, children and youth, ensuring their rights and freedom, improving quality of life, addressing needs and interests*" [6]. This definition has at least two contradictory statements on social work. First, social work is a professional activity, and not an activity conducted by volunteers. Second, the key place in social work structure is taken by the very needs of clients, people in difficult life circumstances, and not 'addressing their interests.' The term 'vital activity' is unsuitable as in social work, as a rule, they speak about 'quality of life.'

In addition, the Law includes some odd definitions of types of social work: social prevention, social rehabilitation, and social maintenance. This is not similar to the way social work is viewed by the authors of another key document for social work – "The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: Commitments to Actions" – where it is mentioned that in 2012 – 2016 social work should be focused on such areas as [7]:

- promoting social and economic equalities;
- promoting the dignity and worth of peoples;
- working toward environmental sustainability;
- strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships.

The challenges of social work education obviously have a direct impact on its practice, as they result in the adopting at the national level of legal documents of poor quality. The latter, in its turn, intensifies confusion and has a negative impact on the authority of social work, creating barriers and threats to its development.

In terms of context of social work and its structural organization in practice, most social workers (holders of a diploma) are employed at Territorial Centres for single disabled citizens functioning in most cities of Ukraine and Centres for Social Services for Family, Children, and Youth. The goal of the first is to help elderly people and people with disabilities. The second type of institution is identified as a special institution ensuring social work with families, children, and youth, which are in difficult life circumstances and in need of outside assistance, and the professionals from social pedagogy's area predominantly work there. Thus, they understand the meaning of social work in a different way. Also, there is the All-Ukrainian League of Social Workers in Ukraine. However, its goal concern "assisting in uniting people despite citizenship and place of accommodation to assist social work with children, families and youth" [8].

The interest in social work has significantly grown in relation to the military events in Ukraine. There are 1.2 million internally displaced people (or 892,161 families from Donbas Region and Crimea) officially registered while in reality, their number might be much higher. Many of these people are in need of a needs assessment, support, and intervention by social workers, and thus, the government has recently considered a plan for creating new workplaces for 1500 social workers in the most critical regions. At the same time, in most Territorial Centres, the

number of home care assistants (a position that envisages service provision on individual care and housing) is reduced, as local budgets do not have the funds to support services. Therefore, it is difficult for social work practitioners to have an impact on legislation that identifies the tasks and regulates social work. It is obvious that a leading role should be played by social work academics, who have more knowledge and experience in international social work, opportunities for lobbying necessary changes, etc.

In autumn of 2013, UNESCO reviewed the International Standard Classification of Education and suggested its amended variant. The latter includes the area of knowledge 'Health and Welfare,' with the code 09, and the column 'specification' includes the field of education 'social work and counseling' with the code 0923 [9].

While considering the appeals of the lecturers of the School of Social Work at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' and of a range of other academics from Kyiv universities, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education in 2015 at last addressed the new changes in the International Standard Classification of Education and took into consideration the relevant information placed on the official European Commission website, where the relevant electronic system was created for matching international and European standard classifications of education. Social work is represented there both according to the ISCED and the European classification: 0923: Social work and counselling (14.5 – 762) [10].

As a result, starting from the 2016 – 2017 academic year, social work in Ukraine has been identified as a separate area of knowledge that has two fields of education – 'social work' and 'social welfare.' Both of them envisage two levels of education: Bachelor and Master. These are positive changes that will assist with integration of social work into the European education area, and that will have a positive impact on the field's status within the country. At the same time, in the new classification social pedagogy has disappeared, as it is practically not represented in the European universities. As in Ukraine, approximately half of faculties were faculties of social pedagogy and social work training mainly social pedagogues; it is obvious that they will have to switch to now training social workers. This change will have a rather negative impact on the quality of social work education as most lecturers have their basic degree and an academic degree in pedagogy.

While taking the above into consideration, it is an urgent and actual issue to create the third cycle of education in social work. At present, in Ukraine, there is no officially approved education program for the highest level of education in social work. At the same time, within the pilot experiment of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, in 2008 at the base of the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy' (NaUKMA) there was a program created aimed at establishing the third cycle of education according to the European approaches. With this goal, there was the Doctoral School created – academic and research division of NaUKMA, which ensures training academic-pedagogical and research staff of the highest qualification within aspirantura and doctorantura (postgraduate training), as well as via creating structural doctoral (Ph.D.) programs. This program's formation was preceded by prolonged exploration of different countries experience, specifically Great Britain. However, despite this, in the process of this division's functioning there were a number of issues arising out of 'mounting' the third cycle of education (Ph.D.) into the Ukrainian education system, a situation that was analyzed by local researchers Morenets, V., (2010), Kabachenko, N., & Boyko, O., (2010) [11 ; 12].

Conclusion:

To summarize, the conclusions can be made that for the education policy aimed at further social work development and professionalization, it is important:

- to identify who and what role plays in the formation of the social work education strategy and concept, as the present practice allows education officials to approve independent decisions on relevant specialty while being guided exclusively by personal, often insufficient knowledge and limited understanding;
- to be based upon existing international standards while forming relevant legal regulation for social work education, specifically the Area standards, organization, and conducting practice placements;
- to take into consideration the specific provision for academic discipline: lack of lecturers with the academic degrees and ranks, limited experience in social work, non-understanding of its core by most of the officials authorized to approve relevant decisions in the Ministry of Social Policy (the evidence for the latter is an interpretation of the subject of social workers' activities and the content of social work within the Law of Ukraine On Social Work with Families, Children and Youth and the Law of Ukraine on Social Services);
- to reach agreement with the Ministry of Justice, a concept counteracting the use of new notions and definitions that are lacking in acting laws of Ukraine. Such counteraction is a sufficient barrier to social work development as a profession, as it does not allow legalizing its innovation practices (an example can be the notion of 'supervision' which is a component of both social work practice and education process);
- to strengthen the role of the academic community, which since the time social work has arisen in Ukraine has played a key role in its institutionalization and development;
- to initiate and to support relevant research aimed at exploring the national experience of social work education development and understanding of it specifically; to consider these research outcomes during the decision-making process on the further development of discipline. The latter has special importance within the process of reforming education in Ukraine as it allows for a better understanding of the stakeholders' professional interests, as well as those of the academic community.

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