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Inter-European social workers' mobility within a dynamic social work and immigration policy context: A case study of England

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Abstract

Social workers are increasingly globally mobile, pursuing employment opportunities that combine professional and lifestyle projects. Social work skills and practice are impeded in cultural, linguistic and nation-specific legislative competencies. The current article engages with the interplay of a fast-moving social work and immigration policy context and the role of inter-European social workers, using England as a case study of destination. Based on registration data of non-UK qualified social workers (2003 to 2017), a survey of 97 stakeholders from 27 European Union countries and focus group discussions, it investigates trends and challenges of transnational social workers (TSWs) in England. The findings highlight a dynamic process of social work education and immigration policy reforms during the past decade that was associated with a significant change in the volume and profile of TSWs registered to work in England. Data from European stakeholders further highlight two key findings: first, there is evidence of an increased role of inter-European social workers in most of Western European countries; second, the process of social work qualifications' recognition within Europe remains considerably variable. The implications of the findings are discussed within the context of continued inter-European policy and political changes.

Introduction

Social workers are becoming part of a wider global professional movement that are subject to macro structures as well as individual's wishes to partake in pursuing mobility. The classical approach of understanding transnational mobility has traditionally revolved around economic concepts that were primarily explained and guided by the industrial revolution and associated political and economic developments (Massey et al., 1998). Such classical approach and its associated hypotheses have been since challenged by new concepts and socio-political ideologies. The very concept and definitions of 'migration' has been largely changed from assumed long-term movements to a more fluid concept of transnationalism, where multiple short-term movements across borders have been taking place (Urry, 2007). Furthermore, the decisions for transnational mobility are increasingly shaped by a wider set of considerations in addition to or different from traditional theories revolving around economic needs. These considerations include lifestyle and professional advancements as well as family-oriented decisions. However, the 'right to mobility' remains selective and subjected to hierarchical constraints at the individual and country levels (Christensen, Hussein & Ismail, 2017; Hussein, 2018a; Castles, 2010).

Many researchers argue that social work, as a profession, is especially context-sensitive in that a good understanding of language and cultural clues are essential in the ability of workers to perform their work effectively (Hussein, 2014; Beddoe and Bartley, 2018). In that sense, while global professional mobility facilitates transnational social work (Hanna and Lyons, 2014), social work is not yet a global 'common project' with significant differences at the level of training, qualifications and practice within Europe and beyond (Bultruks, Hussein & Lara Montero, 2017; Hussein et al., 2011; Hussein, 2014; Lorenz, 2008; Weiss-Gal and Welbourne, 2008). Despite this, transnational social workers continue to contribute significantly to the national workforce of many developed countries including Canada

(Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012); England (Hussein 2014 and 2018a); Ireland (Walsh et al., 2010) and New Zealand (Bartley et al., 2012). These transnational movements are occurring within a set of constraints at different stages from application, qualifications' recognition and securing jobs to practicing in new environments and social contexts.

The social services' workforce, in all roles and activities, has expanded considerably in most European countries over the past decades. This expansion has taken place at different scales due to the pace and dynamics of demand, such as population's ageing, as well as public spending and welfare models (Lyons, 2006; Baltruks et al., 2017). Furthermore, the expansion of the European Union (EU) has led to an East-West migration flows of professional workers encompassing social workers moving from Central and Eastern Europe seeking to practice in Western European countries including England (Favell, 2008).

The aim of this article is to highlight the challenges associated with transnational social workers, not only due to issues of context-specific training and practice but also in relation to fast changing national and regional social work education and immigration policies. Using England as a case study of destination, the analysis examines the role of inter-European social workers within the seemingly open-bordered geographical context of the EU that simultaneously embodies diverse cultures, social work practices and regulations between member states.

Based on administrative data from two successive English social work regulatory bodies, spanning from 2003 to 2017, and primary data collected through an online survey of European member states and focus group discussions, the analysis investigates trends and dynamics of the contribution made by transnational social workers, particularly those from within the EU. By situating the English experience within the wider context of Europe, the

analysis aims to further the debate related to an assumed easier inter-European social workers' mobility in comparison to a wider transnational social work (TSW) global movement by exploring persisting difficulties associated with the mobility of this specific group of European social workers. Following the introduction, data and methods of analyses are explained then the findings are presented in three subsections: 1- trends in the English social work education and regulation policies; 2- changes in the UK immigration polices and their implications on TSWs in England and 3- TSWs mobility across Europe. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and implications on TSWs to England.

Data and Methods

English national administrative data

Registration data on non-UK qualified social workers between 2003-2017 are analysed to investigate patterns and trends of social workers' mobility to England. Data records were obtained from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and the Health and Care Profession Council (HCPC). The data obtained from the two registering bodies vary in their level of details. Data from the GSCC included individual information on 6,246 non-UK qualified social workers registered to work in England from 2003 to 2011; this has allowed analysis based on social workers' home/source country. Data from HCPC were provided at the aggregate level and provided information only on the total numbers of non-UK qualified social workers who were successfully registered to work in England by year of registration from 2012 to 2017. The latter allowed analysis of overall trends during this period but not in relation to country of qualifications. It should be noted that the year 2012, where the transfer between the GSCC and HCPC was taking place, showed a 'loss' of data during this transfer process; the numbers for 2012 have been imputed for the trends' analysis presented here. The study received ethical permission from the Health Research Authority (reference: 11/IEC08/0022).

Survey of European stakeholders

The analysis also makes use of primary survey data collected from European stakeholders across Europe and data obtained through focus group discussions with key European stakeholders that took place in 2016. Following a literature and policy review, an online survey was designed to collect information on various aspects of social work organisation and delivery across Europe. A key objective of the questionnaire was to gain a most updated understanding of the state of social work education and qualifications across Europe as well as any associated challenges and opportunities associated with inter-European social service workforce mobility. Invitations to the survey were circulated to key social service directors and managers at the municipality, local authority, and national levels in Europe. The invitation list was generated from various sources including the European Social Network; the International Federation of Social Workers (Europe IFSW); the European Association of Schools in Social Work and research contacts in the field. The invitation included information on the purpose of the survey and participants were offered the option of opting out; completing the survey was considered an informed consent to take part in the study.

The survey was completed by 97 participants from 27 countries with a response rate of 63 per cent. The questionnaire received multiple responses from several countries, especially Spain (n=15); Italy (n=11); and the United Kingdom (n=11; 3 from England, 4 from Scotland and 4 indicated their country as the UK). On the other hand, unique responses were received from some countries such as Austria, Bulgaria and Croatia. Most respondents to the questionnaire held managerial or directorship roles in social services' departments or were civil servants in local or central governmental departments with a specific focus on social services commissioning, delivery and inspection. Table 1 shows that a large group of professional

social services staff (n=24) also responded to the questionnaire, including social workers, psychologists and few academics in the field of social care and social work.

**** Table 1 around here *****

Focus group discussions with European stakeholders

Following the survey, a total of ten focus group discussions were held with 82 participants during an organised two-days event to present preliminary findings from the survey. The event, which lasted over two days, took place in Bratislava, Slovakia, in November 2016 organised by the European Social Network. Participants to the focus groups included relevant stakeholders across Europe with representations from 27 countries. Participants included directors of social services; ministers and policy makers; social care managers; policy advisors; care practitioners; directors and officers of non-governmental organisations; researchers and members/directors of independent associations.

Five key themes were identified from the preliminary analyses of the survey data; for each of these themes two focus group discussions were organised. The themes included social work structure and organisation; recruitment, retention and job quality; workforce mobility; social work education and training and opportunities for improving social services' performance. The focus of the current article is on the themes of social work education and training and workforce mobility. Each focus group consisted of an average of eight participants and facilitated by a researcher. The sessions were recorded with consent and researchers took additional notes. The transcripts and notes were then read, organised and analysed thematically.

Policy and literature scoping review

Analysis of registration data records and online survey responses was complemented by a policy review of major English social work reforms during the same period. The scoping review gathered information on the governance and regulatory frameworks and policies related to the social services workforce, planning to address present and future workforce needs, and mobility of the social services workforce in Europe. It considered literature published in academic journals, professional forums and news articles and governmental and third sector reports covering the period from 2005 to 2016. The review was further complemented by country-focused desk research, focusing on national policy documents and information provided by national professional associations, ministries and researchers.

Findings

Trends in the English social work education and regulation policies

The past two decades has seen a dynamic process of social work education reforms in England, and across Europe, with direct implications on transnational social workers (TSWs). While recruitment issues have remained a concern, especially for child protection work, a number of attempts have been made to reform social work education and practice to increase the supply of home-trained social workers. Some of the earlier reforms include the transition of social work qualifications from a two-year diploma into a three-year degree in 2003, perceived to enhance the status and portability of social work qualifications and to attract new recruits to the sector (Orme et al., 2009). In 2015 the Department of Education (DfE) introduced the 'assessed and supported year in employment' (ASYE), with a monetary incentive of (£2,000) for each employer of a newly qualified social worker (in children or adults' settings). This programme's key aim was to improve retention and provide support for social workers' further training and skill development[i].

Social work, as a profession, has, and continues to have, high vacancy and turnover rates. For example, in 2016 the turnover rate of children social workers in England stood at 15.1% and the vacancy rate at 16.7% (DfE, 2017). In addition to recruiting TSWs and increasing the use of agency workers by councils (DfE, 2017), a number of 'fast-track' social work (SW) training programmes have been introduced in England with the objective to address such shortages. These training schemes were financially supported by the government through bursaries and other forms of financial support. Some of these programmes specifically targeted graduates from other disciplines to enter SW practice in areas with shortages, such as mental health. These programmes usually involve relatively short and 'condensed' university training followed by supervised practice placements. These schemes have created some controversy, particularly in relation to the highly selective process of recruiting graduates as well as the high level of resources invested in the provision of many of these, shorter, programmes (Maxwell et al., 2016). Thus, the long-term effectiveness of these schemes, especially if the funding associated with them to be reduced, is unclear.

Table 2 presents key SW policy and education reforms in England from 2009 to 2017, clearly showing a very dynamic context of change. In addition to the introduction of various condensed training schemes, there have been inter-related policy and governance reforms. With various organisations playing key roles at different stages, albeit for some organisation such as the College of Social Work, their life span being shorter than expected. The role of regulating and registering social workers is vital in the relationship with TSWs. In 2012 this role, as can be observed from Table 2, has moved from the GSCC, which had a primarily focus on SW qualifications and registration, to the HCPC, which oversees the registration of various health and care professionals. Further to this move, in 2016 the British Conservative government announced to take over direct control of SW regulation from the HCPC (Community Care, 2016). However, these plans were later retracted by DfE following fierce

opposition, instead a new independent body, provisionally named 'Social Work England', was proposed to take over from HCPC in 2018 (DfE and Department of Health [DH], 2016). The main reason cited for this change was the need to '*drive up standards in social work*' (DfE and DH, 2016: p.4). The Children and Social Work Act (2017) formally introduced 'Social Work England' as the new organisation to takeover from the HCPC as the profession's regulator.

**** Table 2 around here ****

The UK immigration policies and implications on transnational social workers mobility

For employers, the level of supply of UK-qualified and experienced social workers (SWs) is a key driver in resorting to recruiting TSWs (Hussein, Stevens & Manthorpe, 2013; Hussein 2018a). The higher stress level observed among children's SWs and continued recruitment shortages partly explain overseas recruitment campaigns undertaken by local authorities for children and families' SWs since the late 1990s (Hussein, 2018b). For instance, between 2001 and 2002, TSWs accounted for approximately one-quarter of all new recruits (Tandeka, 2011).

Similar to the rapid changes witnessed in the English SW education and regulation during recent years, there has been a parallel dynamic process of immigration policy reforms in the UK. A number of major immigration policy changes during the same period includes: 1) the expansion of the European Union since 2004, when 10 countries joined with eight of them requiring further development to meet full joining criteria, referred to as the A8 accession countries[ii],. The UK one of only three EU states permitting free labour flows of the A8 in 2004 prior to the agreed date of 2010; 2) the introduction of the UK 'points-based'[iii] system in 2008 for non-EU migrants; 3) the cap on non-EU migrants introduced in 2010 and 4) Bulgaria

and Romania joining the EU in 2007 but with rights to work and benefits restricted until 2014. The relationship between changes in the UK immigration system and the registration of TSWs is explored in the next section.

Lastly, but certainly not least, the British vote to exit the EU (Brexit), in 2016, has left all actors in a state of uncertainty. So far, the implications of Brexit on EU migrants remain unclear, despite the UK triggering Article 50, starting the process of existing the EU, in March 2017. A recent report from the House of Commons Health Committee warns of the impact of Brexit not only on the supply of health and care workers but also on potential impact on the moral of EU SWs who would prefer to remain in the UK. For the latter group, there are questions related to SWs' earnings and whether they would meet the level required for work visas (House of Commons, 2017). While the impact of these changes is likely to be significant, the exact implications have not yet been observed ([DH, 2017).

<u>The interplay between the English social work and immigration policies and transnational social workers</u>

Figure 1 presents trends in the overall numbers of TSWs registering to work in England from 2003-2017. The Figure shows a significant decline in the numbers of TSWs registered to work in England after 2010. The average number of TSWs registering to work in England between 2004 and 2010 was 827 compared to an average of 368 between 2011 and 2017. This is likely to reflect the changes in the UK immigration system during this period but might also reflect some other factors such as higher supply of home-based SWs including those qualifying through various fast-track schemes. Table 3 shows that for TSWs to register to work in England they must register with the professional council and fulfil the Standards of Proficiency for SWs. Non-EU qualified SWs are also required to meet a set of additional

requirements including language proficiency tests. The drop in the numbers of TSWs registered to work in England between the two periods (2004-09 and 2011-17) could also relate to the process of qualifications' recognition and registration requirements adopted by the two different regulatory bodies (GSCC and HCPC). Bearing in mind, that unlike the HCPC, the GSCC had a sole focus on SWs and they might have had more resources to support non-UK qualified SWs to meet the requirements' threshold.

**** Figure 1 around here ***

The trend in the numbers of new non-UK qualified SWs reflects most of the UK immigration policy developments discussed above. Figure 1 shows that the number of TSWs increased sharply from 2003 to 2009 when the UK allowed free mobility of the A8 countries and at the same time overseas recruitment campaigns continued to recruit from traditionally sending countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States of America (USA). The data also reflect the introduction of the immigration cap in non-EU migrants in 2010, when the numbers of newly registered TSWs in England have declined sharply from 1,185 in 2009 to 413 in 2011. This decline in numbers may also relate to the variability in the process of qualification recognition between those obtained within or outside the EU. Previous research showed that in 2009 the registration acceptance rate for applications from non-EU qualified SWs was 92 per cent compared to only 71 per cent among those who received their SW qualifications from within the EU (Hussein, 2014). This was explained by the huge variability of the types of SW qualifications within the EU, particularly those obtained from Eastern/Central European states (Hussein et al., 2011a; Hussein, 2014).

Figure 1 also shows the number of TSWs declining steadily between 2011 until 2014 before starting to increase again. This coincided with the free mobility of workers from Bulgaria and

Romania in 2014. For example, 2014 saw an increase of 70% of TSWs registered to work in England in comparison to 2013. The rate of increase, however, was slower between 2014 and 2017, with 2017 seeing the smallest increase of only 7% compared to 2016. The latter could be an indicator of the immediate impact of Brexit in June 2016.

Data obtained from the GSCC for the period 2003-2011 allowed further interrogation of source countries of TSWs in England, while the HCPC data were provided in aggregate format with no detailed breakdown of country of qualifications. Figure 2 presents the share of SWs registering to work in England who obtained qualifications from different source countries out of all TSWs from 2003 to 2011. The data clearly show the changing share of European and non-European qualified SWs during this period. With the peak of the share of inter-European SWs during 2008-2011 when tighter immigration control on non-EU migrants took place. Recent years have also seen some active overseas SWs' recruitment campaigns from Europe, particularly from Eastern and Central Europe, by a number of English local authorities (Zanca and Misca, 2016). It should be noted, however, that SWs qualified from non-EEA countries continued to form the majority of registrants in 2011.

*** Figure 2 around here ***

Transnational social workers' mobility across Europe

Inter-European workers' mobility, including those of SWs, is becoming increasingly important to most European countries, particularly in Western Europe. The analysis of data obtained from the online survey and focus groups for the current research confirm that, like England, many Western European countries' resort to recruiting Inter-European SWs to address shortages. Participants in the focus groups recognised many of the challenges associated with such mobility for both the receiving and sending countries. In some countries,

such as Sweden, they opted to facilitate the recruitment of existing migrants with relevant qualifications into SW, which has occurred within a larger scheme of speeding up the process of qualification recognition of newly arrived professionals to Sweden.

As an example of East-West European migration flows, Slovakia provided an interesting example. Here, emigration to neighbouring Austria and other EU Member States with higher income has almost drained the domestic workforce in the SW sector. In this case, most Slovakian trained SWs were recruited to work in lower skilled jobs in Western Europe due to competitive wages in comparison to that in Slovakia.

Most participants in the online survey had either limited knowledge or no knowledge at all about the recruitment process of SWs who qualified in other countries either from within or outside of the EU. Only 23 participants were able to provide further information on this topic. Nearly half (48%) indicated that there are no national guidelines on the recruitment of either EU or non-EU SWs and only one participant indicated they work with organisations in other countries when recruiting from abroad. This small group of participants indicated that the major challenges in recruiting EU TSWs related to language proficiency (15 out of 21) and their ability to understand users and carers' needs (10 out of 21). For non-EU migrants, participants identified challenges related to retrieving references from previous employers (16 out of 20) and language proficiency (16 out of 21).

Findings from the survey and focus group discussions identify a lack of mutual recognition of SW qualifications in the EU making working in another member state difficult with cumbersome recognition processes. Only 13 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire were aware of any local or national programmes focusing on harmonising SW and social care qualifications obtained within the EU. This was felt by participants to be due to the lack of

specific focus on SW and social care professions in the EC Directive 2005/36/EC. They highlighted that there was no EU regulation on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications in these subject areas.

Table 3 provides a summary of SW qualifications and the process of qualification recognition in selected European countries based on participants' responses as well as desk research. Generally speaking, 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. For example, in Austria, one-stop recognition procedures are available for country-specific professions for people from certain European countries, where applications are processed within an hour.

**** Table 3 around here ***

Discussion

Social workers continue to be part of a growing global professional body utilising their skills to enable cross-border mobility particularly within the free-labour mobility zone of the European Union. This is occurring within a context of a profession that is not easily internationally transferable, albeit continued efforts by academics, educators and regulatory bodies for a comprehensive international social work identity. Drivers for skilled migrants are triggered by demand in host countries, in England, the SW sector continues to face considerable challenges in attracting highly skilled staff, particularly to work with children and families. A dynamic process of reforms has been occurring in England over the past decade in relation to SW education, policies and regulation. These changes, among others,

play a crucial part in facilitating or hindering mobility to some TSWs, particularly those from within Europe. Furthermore, tighter immigration roles on non-EU migrants and an expanding EU hinder the mobility of some professional migrants while creating opportunities for others. The Brexit vote presents further challenges, and a great deal of uncertainty, to social workers' mobility from Europe to the UK.

While there have been a number of fast-track social work training schemes put in place to address chronic shortages of SWs in England, some local authorities have been actively recruit social workers from Eastern European countries such as Romania in the past few years (Zanza and Misca, 2016). Such active overseas recruitment schemes highly suggest the persistent shortages and challenges faced by local authorities to recruit SWs from within the UK despite the supply of new recruits from the various fast track training schemes.

The primary analyses presented in this paper show the changing scene of the UK immigration policies to have a significant association with the volume and profile of TSWs registering to work in England. The past decade has witnessed considerable changes and developments in the UK's immigration policy, restricting some and allowing other groups of migrants, including TSWs, to join, and work, in the UK. Empirical data on the numbers of TSWs registering to work in England shows an almost direct association between various immigration policies and the level and profile of workers. The period from 2007 and 2010 witnessed the highest uptake of TSWs, when workers from the A8 member states were allowed free mobility to the UK simultaneously while active recruitment from traditionally non-EU sending countries, mainly from the Commonwealth, were occurring. Following the introduction of the non-EU immigration cap in 2010, a sharp decline in the numbers of TSWs registered to work in England was observed. By 2011, the share of European TSWs registered to work in England has grown significantly, however, non-EU TSWs remained to

form the majority of registrants. Since 2011, much tighter immigration controls were applied to non-EU nationals and it is likely that the contribution of that group of TSWs to be significantly reduced over the past five years. However, the aggregate nature of data obtained from the HCPC did not allow investigating this assumption fully. The UK immigration policies are still evolving with new dynamics in place, chief among them Brexit with unclear implications on TSWs from within and outside of Europe.

For inter-European SW mobility, The EU presents a paradoxical situation of free labour-mobility combined with greater diversity in levels and requirements of training and qualifications (Baltruks et al., 2017; Hussein et al, 2011; Hussein, 2014). Tighter immigration controls for non-EU nationals across Europe present considerable barriers on the mobility of SWs from outside the EU irrespective of their individual level of qualifications, relevant experience, awareness of the local legal and cultural context or language proficiency (Reinzo and Vergas-Silva, 2015). On the other hand, while EU nationals with SW qualifications can cross borders and practice within Europe, the variability of SW qualifications, spoken languages and diverse cultures within the EU present considerable challenges at the practice level. Linguistic and cultural differences are particularly challenging to SW practice, where the only means of interventions are through the use of language and understanding the legislative context of the country as well as the cultural background of the users' group.

The current study highlights two key themes about inter-European SWs mobility. First, like England, there is evidence of an increased role of inter-European SWs, particularly those from Eastern and Central Europe, in Western Europe's social service delivery. Second, the process of SW qualifications' recognition within Europe remains variable despite existing principles and legislations aimed at facilitating inter-European professional mobility. In practice, few participants in the survey and focus group discussions were aware of the

processes of recruiting professionals gaining qualifications from another EU member state indicating a lack of national recruitment strategies on the topic.

The empirical analysis and findings presented here highlight the complex interplay faced by TSWs, and their host countries. On one hand, globalisations and free-labour mobility zones act as pull factors to an increased TSWs movement. When such drivers change, they have direct implications on individual SWs and their ability to exercise their 'rights to mobility'. On the other hand, even when such mobility is facilitated, the variability of SW identity that is rooted within the local and national context remains a barrier to homogeneity and transferability of practice. The findings from the European perspective clearly show that even within a policy structure that aims to facilitate mobility, SW qualifications and skills' recognition remain problematic across Europe, particularly between Eastern/Central and Western Europe. Language barriers are particularly challenging, where SW practice is embedded in the use of language and cultural clues. Here, inter-European mobility poses an interesting example of easier mobility at the macro level but challenging skills' transferability processes at the micro level. There remains a number of questions related to the implications of such dynamics on the broader social work identity; the homogeneity of work in the host countries; quality of work and users' experience and potential gaps in services and skills in the sending countries.

Limitation of the study: While the study makes use of a variety of data sources and attempts to triangulate both quantitative and qualitative findings there are a number of limitations to be pointed out. First there are other factors that might impact on the trends related to TSWs registering to work in England that the analysis was not able to account for. Prime among these is the changing nature of work of the regulatory bodies and specifically the degree at which the HCPC and GSCC provided support to TSWs and whether these were significantly

different. Second, the impact of austerity observed in the English public sector and whether it has an impact on the recruitment of TSWs. Additionally, it is worth noting that the associations between the changing SW and immigration policies and the observed variations in the volume and profile of TSWs are asserted through patterns rather than statistical associations. Further quantitative research is required to confirm such associations.

Conclusion

The share of transnational social workers, increasingly from within Europe, is significant to most Western European social services workforce including that in England. While recognizing the role of inter-European social workers' mobility in addressing shortages and high vacancy rates, 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 are usually embedded in the national and local contexts. Specific to the English context, significant reforms both in relation to social work training and wider immigration policies over the past decade are associated with changes in the contribution of transnational social workers. The latter is observed through a significant reduction in the overall number of transnational social workers registered to work in England as well as an increased role of EU social workers especially those qualified in central and Eastern member states. Recent changes, particularly those related to Brexit, are expected to further influence the ability to attract and recruit EU social workers.

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Table 1 Number of participants who completed the online survey by country and job role

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

Table 2 Selected policy and practice developments in the English Social Work system (2009 and 2017)

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)		

Figure 1 Number of overseas-qualified social workers registered by the GSCC and HCPC to work in England from 2003 to 2017
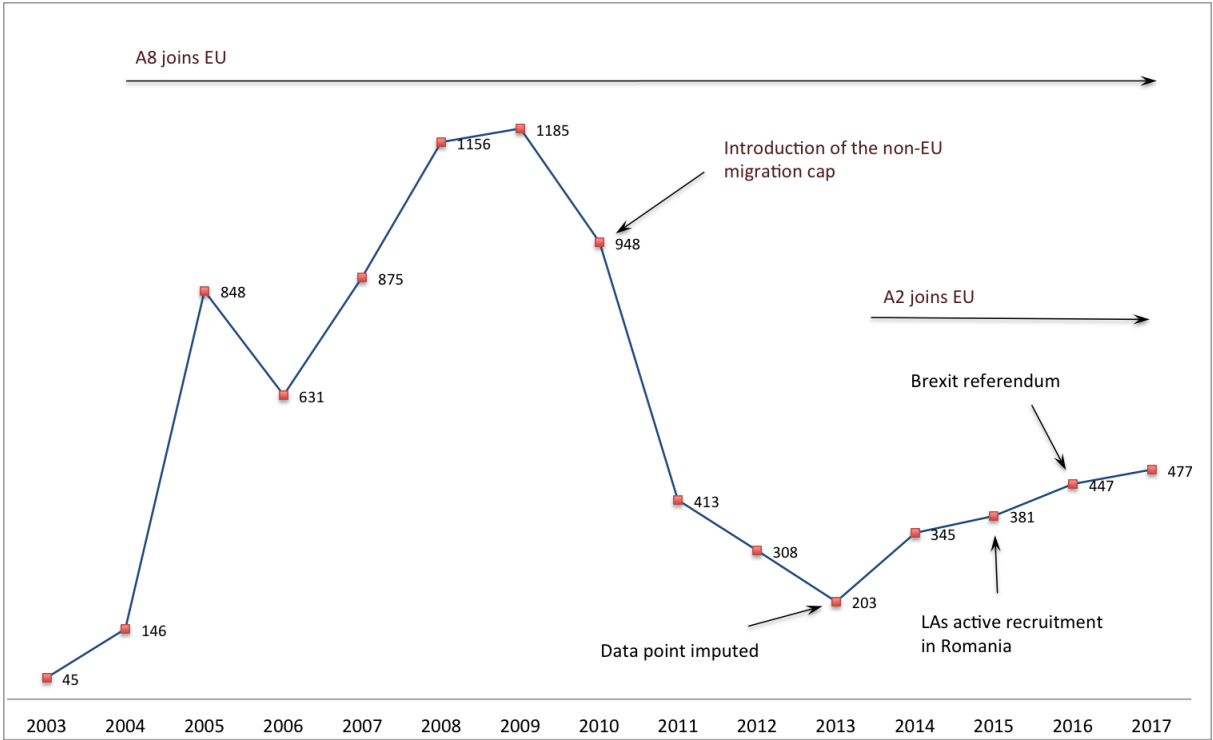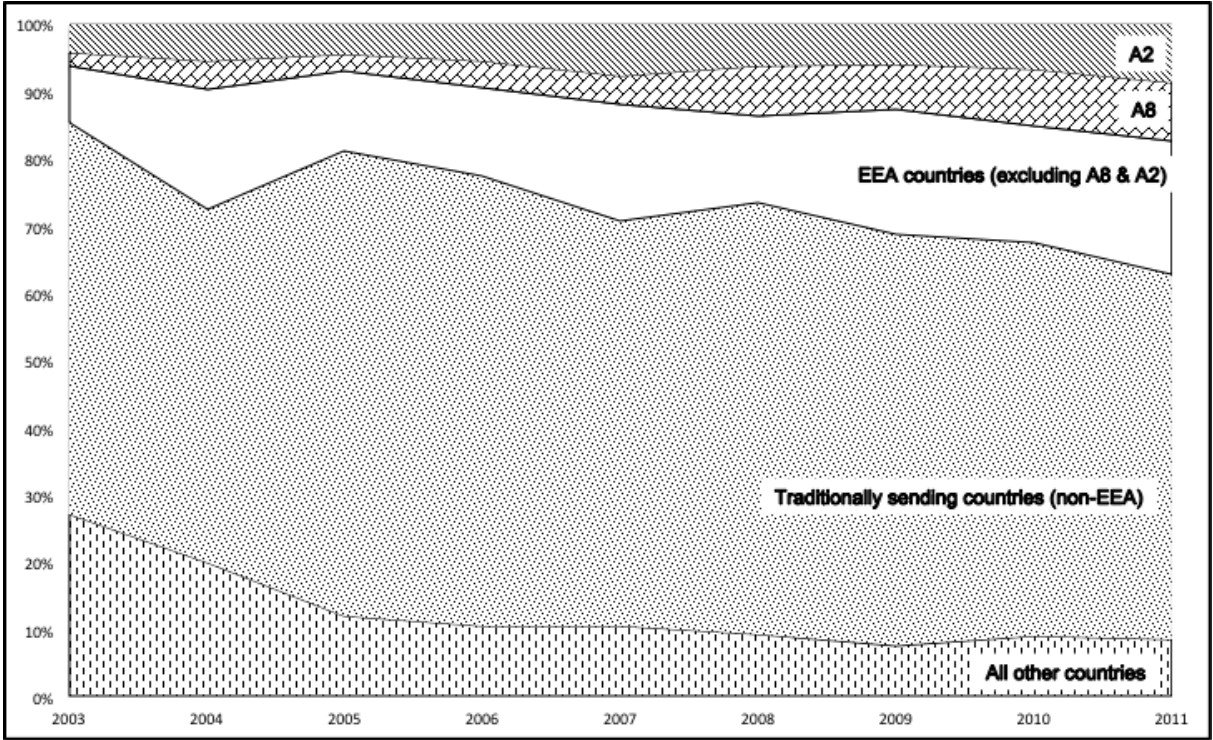
Figure 2 Share of different groups of transnational social workers in England between 2003 and 2011, GSCC non-UK qualified SWs registration data

Traditionally sending countries: India, South Africa, Australia, United States, Canada, Zimbabwe and New Zealand.

Table 3 *Overview of recognition of foreign qualifications of social work professions in selected European countries*

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 (*pædagog*)	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.
	Social worker (*socialrådgiver*, literally social advisor)	
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*): • Have a post-secondary diploma in the field, delivered by an accredited national body in the home country; • Obtain an authorisation from the French state. 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 (*Sozialarbeiter/Sozialpädagoge*)	The German Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (*Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz* – BQFG) 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 (*assistente sociale*)	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.
	Specialised social worker in management position (*assistente sociale specialista*)	
	Professional educator	The Ministry of Health is responsible for recognising the qualifications awarded for these two professions in other EU countries.
	Family counsellor	

Social work	Profession	Recognition of foreign qualifications
Spain	Social worker	The recognition of social work qualifications in Spain is regulated by Law 10/1982 through which the official colleges of social work were set up. To work as a social worker, one has to hold a university degree in social work and register with the college of social work of the province or region where the social worker intends to work. For degrees obtained in the EU, the social worker will need to request the official recognition of the professional qualification of social work issued by a Member State of the EU. The Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality is responsible of processing and resolving the request according to the Annex X of the Royal Decree 1837/2008, by which the Directive EC/2005/36 was transposed onto Spanish legislation. The request is to be submitted to the General Directorate for Family and Childhood of the Ministry. The Directorate also requests the Council for Social Work to issue a report related to the recognition request and the fulfilment of academic and professional qualifications.
Sweden	Social worker *(Socionom)*	Foreign social workers must register with the Arbetsförmedlingen (National Agency for Employment), which is responsible for assessing their qualifications and experience.
United Kingdom	Social worker	Foreign nationals must register with the professional council responsible for the UK nation they intend to work in. They must fulfil the Standards of Proficiency for social workers that describe what a social worker should know, understand and be able to do when they have completed their social work training. Citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) have European mutual recognition rights and must complete a separate form. The professional council's advisor will check this and confirm whether the applicant has provided sufficient evidence of mutual recognition status or has to undertake further training or education.

Notes

i https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessed-and-supported-year-in-employment-asye/assessed-and-supported-year-in-employment#assessed-and-supported-year-in-employment-asye

ii The A8 countries are a group of eight of the 10 countries that joined the European Union during its 2004 enlargement. They are commonly grouped together separately from the other two states that joined in 2004, Cyprus and Malta, because of their relatively lower per capita income levels in comparison to the EU average. These are: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

iii The 'points-based' system score individual migrants in relation to their skills and allows visas to specific quotas for various sectors. This is accompanied by a 'shortage occupation-list' to reflect national demand and is reviewed yearly.