

SOCIAL WORK: EDUCATION. RESEARCH. PRACTICE

Summary

The collection of articles *Social Work: Education. Research. Practice* comes at a time when works of the previous programming period (2014–2020) have been closed and there is already a clear picture of strategic challenges for social welfare in the coming period of 2021–2027. The articles in the collection reflect work that has been done and make one think about future challenges.

The collection is introduced by the presentation of the Minister for Welfare (23.01.2019– 03.06.2021), Ramona Petraviča, on basic tasks in social area. The article highlights development of social work and social services as one of the main priorities of the social protection and labour market policy guidelines in 2021–2027. The development of services and their accessibility will largely depend on how social services will be able to take on the future social policy of municipality in the context of the Administrative Territorial Reform (ATR). Ensuring of professional and competent human resources involved in the provision of social services is an important task. The article pays particular attention to social work issues, including education of social workers.

The articles in the Education section of the collection reflect one of the topical issues of recent years: relationship between education and practice in social work. Interview with the professor of the University of Essex, head of the International Social Labour Federation's Temporary Education Commission, Vasilios Ioakimidis, deals with the experiences of different countries and reflects the course of work on the *Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training*. (The interview was conducted during the development of the Global Standard. The Standard was adopted in the autumn of 2020, <https://www.ifsw.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training/>).

International collaborative study programmes develop as an innovative model in European social work education, extending the understanding of both students and teaching staff on the diversity of experience. Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU, Latvia) in collaboration with Mikola Romeris University (Lithuania) has been implementing the Master's degree programme "Social work with children and young people" for six years. In autumn 2020 for its functioning and development,

the programme received a six-year funding from the European Commission in the competition for Erasmus Mundus projects. The article *Common Degree in the International Master's Studies Programme "Social Work with Children and Youth": experience* (I. Trapenciere (Latvia), V. Gudžinskiene (Lithuania)) reflects the performance of international cooperation.

M. Lotko's article gives a brief overview of major spotlights of recent years in the work of the European Association of Social Work Schools.

A number of articles reflect research conducted by RSU social Masters. The study *Expectations of population and members of the municipality from social workers* (E. Rutman, M. Lotko) explains problems of understanding the social work profession by examining what citizens and members of municipality expect from social workers. The results of the study show that there is a certain "gap in expectations" between citizens and municipality members on the one hand and social workers on the other. This suggests thinking about a new study: why social workers see a more pessimistic assessment of their work on the part of the population than it actually is.

The article *Thirty years of social work in Latvia: aspects of knowledge, skills and competence in social work* (L. Vilka) analyses professional preparedness of social workers / specialists for work, based on data from the 2012 and 2017 *ex ante* studies. The article has a methodological focus, encouraging thinking about the question how knowledge becomes applicable in practice. Bridging the gap between theory and practice can be realised by improving approaches and methods in teaching and learning.

The article *Barriers to adoption process ensuring the best interests of children* (K. Prūsis, D. Rence, V. Sandberga) discusses a very sensitive problem in Latvia – outside family care, ensuring the child's inalienable right to grow up in a family. The authors have considerable experience working in outside family care, studying how the rights of the three parties – the rights of the adopters, the child and the family of the child's origin – are guaranteed.

S. Rupaine in the article *Importance of emotional intelligence in social work education* outlines the issues of improving the skills of emotional intelligence of social work students and social workers in non-formal and formal education. Emotional intelligence is one of the 10 most important required skills in maintaining people's versatile relationships now and in the future. The article contains a rich theoretical explanation of understanding the emotional intelligence and describes the practice of improving emotional intelligence.

I. Gerharde in her study *Voluntary work management in hospitals* has looked at the content, motivation and skills as well as the management of volunteering. The article reflects the contribution of volunteer work to the medical treatment

institutions in improving patients' well-being. In the author's view, volunteering is something more than just individual support for patients. Volunteering can be a healing process for society as a whole, where haste prevails and less and less time remains for the sick relatives.

In recent years, social workers, working on the new version of the Code of Ethics for Social Workers, have been actively debating professional ethics issues in practice. M. Larmane's and M. Moor's article *Social work ethics in the context of limited personnel resources in social service* reflects the results of the study in response to the question what the most typical strategies are for addressing ethical dilemmas for employees in the context of limited personnel resources in Riga Social Service. Analysing the results of the study, the authors see a number of risk factors that have a negative impact on the provision of a high-quality social work service, including the trend of formalisation in the professional activity of social work.

The collection includes the article *Garden of senses for an innovative approach to rehabilitation of people with functional disabilities* (A. Ābele, Ā. Baltina, D. Erkena) which encourages creativity in the use of outdoor environmental possibilities in practice. The authors show how the use of a variety of natural materials, special equipment and appropriate methodology can be useful for specialists in practicing and developing the senses for people with disabilities.

Irripugi Shelomi Pramoshitha Perera is the RSU graduate of 2020 of the International Studies Programme *Social work with children and young people*. The experience of her studies in this programme and her acquaintance with Latvia can be read in an interview conducted by I. Trapenciere. Nonetheless, in the article *Social Work in Sri Lanka*, Irripugi Shelomi Pramoshitha Perera presents Sri Lankan social welfare system and the inherent social problems, which are largely linked to cultural and traditional impacts. Social work in Sri Lanka is still on the road to recognition as a profession, despite its high demand in the country and the need for professional social workers.

In the article *Towards professionalism in social work* (E. Gludiņa), the author delves into the issue of new specialist's preparedness for practical social work highlighting the importance of field practice during studies. The author has studied the reasons of the gap between social work theory and practice, and ways of better matching knowledge and skills to the needs of the branch. The article also reveals the author's own personal experience in studying social work in higher educational establishment.

Social work from an interdisciplinary perspective is encouraged by the article *Social Work and Healthcare Contact Points* (L. Deklava).

Two articles, reflecting international cooperation within *Nordplus* projects, close the collection. The article *Age is not an obstacle* (D. Stake, B. Paševica,

E. Pāvulēns), broadly reflects international cross-sectoral cooperation in the *Nordplus* project whose aim is to provide knowledge and skills in promoting active lifestyle in order to raise quality of life for seniors in the Baltic States. The project closed in December 2019. However, in 2020, *Nord Plus* was re-granted financial support for further development of the project.

The *Nordplus* project *Healing greenery* (I. Trapenciere (Latvia), P. Beseckas (Lithuania), Kaie Kranich (Estonia), Kadri Maikov (Estonia), Katriina Pylkänen (Finland)) shows collaboration activities in a three-year period from 2019–2021 among universities of four countries – Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (Lithuania), Savonia University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Estonian University of Natural Sciences (Tartu, Estonia), Tallinn Institute of Services Economics of the University of Technical and Applied Sciences (Estonia) and the Welfare and Social Work Department of Rīga Stradiņš University (Latvia).

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