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# European social workers in England: exploring international labour mobility

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**Abstract.** *Social work is generally regarded as an essentially 'local activity' but it is increasingly acknowledged that European and international trends have a bearing on development of national services and practices. This extends to the mobility of social workers themselves and England has experienced a steady growth in the recruitment of 'international social workers' who were born and qualified elsewhere. This is a generally under-researched area but the authors have drawn on literature in the wider field of labour migration and also secondary data and anecdotal evidence to present some facts and ideas about recruitment as it applies to social workers from European Union (EU) member states in particular.*

*International social workers come to England from a large number and wide range of countries. However, the balance has been shifting between recruitment predominantly from the US and Commonwealth countries to a greater number from EU states. The current characteristics of international (particularly EU) social work recruitment are outlined in this paper and reasons related to both (national) demand and (international) supply are suggested. It is proposed that reasons are related to changes and conditions in the EU; to the national Government's efforts to curb immigration; and to the particular characteristics of social work employment in England, particularly in child protection work. Some of the implications for European social workers of working in England are explored and it is concluded that there is a need for comparative and transnational research in this field.*

**Keywords:** international social workers; labour mobility; immigration; child protection; European Union

## European social workers in England: exploring international labour mobility

### Introduction

Mobility of labour is a major theme in migration not least within the European Union where free movement of goods, services, capital and labour were enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty (ratified in 1993). Despite the national scope of welfare policies; the 'local' nature of social work practices; the need for sensitivity to cultural mores and values; and the reliance on use of (the national) language, some social workers have joined other professionals (including in the health sector) in seeking opportunities to 'work abroad'.

In this paper we explore some of the emerging trends and issues in labour mobility in the field of social work with particular reference to recruitment of European social workers to England. We are mainly concerned with professional mobility within the European Union (EU), although the impact of trans-national labour migration sometimes spreads to countries bordering the EU, particularly in relation to the social care field. We should

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clarify here our use of the terms, social work and social care, as currently used in the UK. The former term applies to staff who have qualified on a professional programme minimally at degree level and been recognised by a national regulating body (probably in their home country but also often in the country they move to). In the UK the term ‘social care’ covers a broad field of work, including social work but extending to work by unqualified or differently qualified staff in the day care, residential and domiciliary services. In addition we should mention the ‘social pedagogy’ qualification, which in some countries (e.g. Germany) is recognised as equivalent to social work, the two being interchangeable in the labour market (Lyons and Huegler, forthcoming a). Elsewhere, staff employed in social care services may hold social pedagogy qualifications or are more likely to hold qualifications in the health field (particularly nursing). We are limiting this discussion primarily to mobility of social workers and social pedagogues (where the latter’s qualifications are deemed to be equivalent).

While social workers who are employed in a different country to the one in which they qualified can be seen as part of an ‘overseas’ or ‘foreign’ workforce, they have more recently been termed ‘international social workers’ in the British context (Lyons, 2006; Hussein et al, 2010). The UK has for some time experienced staff shortages in both social work and the wider social care sector, resulting in recruitment of staff from abroad so that various cities – and even quite rural regions – in England have been significant destinations for social workers from a wide variety of countries from early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Initially, recruitment to social work posts was often from English speaking countries, particularly those in the Commonwealth (e.g. Australia, Canada and South Africa) but a change in immigration laws and policies has led to increasing use of staff trained in other countries of the European Union, with knock-on effects to recruitment of staff (e.g. to Poland and Austria) from countries bordering the EU (particularly to social care posts in the informal sector).

It should be noted here that very little research has been carried out in this field. In a scoping exercise at the start of a series of linked projects investigating the situation regarding the international *social care* workforce in England (carried out by the Social Care Workforce Research Unit), Hussein et al (2010) identified ‘less than a handful of small-scale studies or accounts’ (p.1003) and, while papers arising from their work have elaborated on the picture in England, there are few cross-national studies and very little information from the perspective of ‘sending countries’. In addition, many of these studies (including from the Social Care Workforce Unit itself) relate to the *social care workforce* as a whole and do not identify the specific scale, characteristics or experiences of social workers in particular. The following paper, therefore, is mainly based on theories from similar fields and secondary data as well as anecdotal evidence and some of our comments are impressionistic and speculative. However, we conclude that there is a clear need for international or European research in this field.

Before outlining some trends and characteristics of labour migration in social work as it relates to England and discussing some of the implications and positive and negative experiences, we present a brief review of the literature about migration which has direct or indirect relevance to the field of social work.

### **Migration Theories and Processes**

Although international labour mobility has risen exponentially in recent decades most people continue to reside in the country of their birth (Castle & Millar, 2003). Given that

immigration as a process involves substantial practical challenges and is an ongoing and life changing event for even the most well prepared professional migrant (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Castles & Millar, 2003; Segal & Heck, forthcoming), what then motivates people to take such a step? A review of explanatory theories of human migration by Massey et al (2005), proposes seven theoretical groupings to explain this decision. Indeed, such is the complexity of the experience it has been suggested that an interdisciplinary focus is best suited to understanding the variety of personal and structural factors that contribute to it (Lee & Hernandez, 2009; Price, 2009; Castles & Millar, 2003).

Notwithstanding the abundance of theoretical lens through which it is possible to view migration, economic theories remain the best known. Lee's (1966) 'push-pull' factors in both the country of origin and the destination country affecting people's decisions to migrate is linked to neo liberal Marxist political economy and world systems theory which argues that the uneven configuration of world markets explains the migration of people from less powerful peripheral countries to more powerful and wealthier core countries (Lee 1966 cited Price, 2009, 20; Segal & Heck, forthcoming). In the case of professional workers, of which social workers are an example, intermediaries such as recruitment agencies are often used to target and attract valued workers to fill gaps in the domestic labour market of countries like the United Kingdom (UK) (Bernard- Grouteau, 2007 cited Price, 2009). By contrast, neo classical economic approaches suggest that people's decisions to migrate are based on a rational comparison of the relative costs and benefits of remaining in their country of origin or moving elsewhere, the central principle being that people make decisions to migrate because it increases their human capital and brings potential gains in future earnings (Castles & Millar, 2003).

Other academic disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and political science have also offered theoretical explanations for the individual, family and group experiences of migration (Lee & Hernandez, 2009; Price, 2009; Castles & Millar, 2003). Migration systems theory exemplifies this more inter-disciplinary approach by arguing that immigration is best understood by recognising the dynamic link between structural factors (such as the existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries, based on colonisation, political influence, trade investment and cultural ties) as well as individual factors (involving migrants' beliefs, and pre-existing social and familial networks in the destination country) (Castles & Millar, 2003).

More recently transnational theory, emerging from Anthropology, positions migration as a dynamic social process (Castles & Millar, 2003; Flavell, 2008). Although transnationalism, which originally focussed on the movement of people from economically peripheral countries to centres of capital, is linked to the availability of employment opportunities, it also recognises the development of circulatory or repeated mobility patterns of migratory movement. Such arrangements now stand alongside conventional and traditional patterns of temporary or permanent migration, as skilled migrants with valued expertise in destination countries view their migratory movement as opportunistic, circular, and not necessarily linked to permanent settlement (Castles & Millar, 2003; Flavell, 2008). Improvements in communication technologies, air travel and other forms of transport facilitate the ability of migrants to maintain links and to visit or return to their sending (home) country (Lee & Hernandez, 2009).

Transnational migrants represent a group who actively maintain social and emotional ties, political activity and ongoing property and business interests in their country of origin,

whilst working and living in another (Richman, 1992 & Rios, 1992 cited in Bartley & Spoonley, 2008) Although this pattern of migration involves an intensification of migrant contact and exchange between sending and receiving societies, Bartley (2010) refutes the conceptualisation of trans-migrants as ‘sojourners’ as they actively pursue integration into the receiving society. Rather, trans-nationalism as an explanation for human migration and identity construction across geographic borders, challenges conventional notions of migrant settlement and eventual assimilation reflecting the capacity for ‘simultaneous embeddedness’ and the ability of individual migrants to expand their cultural identities and negotiate new meaning and identity in increasingly ‘transactional geographic spaces’ (Bartley, 2010, 388).

Flavell (2008, 703) argues that migratory movements and patterns from Eastern to Western Europe show that immigrants are increasingly ‘free movers’, who engage in a pattern of transnational and circular mobility influenced by the rise and fall in economic demand, rather than long term permanent migration. This is a general pattern that will increasingly see social work practitioners from inside and outside the EU become part of the transnational phenomenon of professional people who hold allegiance to several locations simultaneously (Lee & Hernandez, 2009; Dominelli, 2010). Whatever way migration is theoretically constructed, however, its reasons and effects are both complex and challenging for those concerned, and research focussed on the micro ethnographic or day to day level of immigrants’ lives is arguably best placed to provide explanations (Flavell, 2008).

The motivations and experiences of internationally mobile social workers (i.e. social workers who move to another country to undertake professional activity) are under-researched (Hugman, Moosa – Mitha, Moyo, 2010; Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b). However, it is possible to make some assumptions about this group on the basis of studies about the motivations of other migrating professional groups and the experiences of student social workers undertaking placements abroad (Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b). These detail similar push- pull factors affecting other groups of migrants as well as motivations that include adventure, altruism and an opportunity to explore cultural roots, improve life chances and undertake professional development (Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b). No empirical data exists to evidence the incentives for social work mobility between European countries and the UK although this movement is attested by recent registration figures from the General Social Care Council (GSCC)(2010).<sup>1</sup>

We shall return to a further consideration of the literature relating more specifically to social work migration when considering some of the issues and implications of labour mobility in this field after a brief account of recruitment of international social workers to England.

### **Trends in Recruitment of International Social Workers to England with special reference to European social workers**

As previously indicated there is very little information about mobility of social workers other than in relation to the UK as a receiving country, including even a dearth of information about social workers leaving the UK to work ‘abroad’. In relation to the latter, the few accounts that were found tended to be from British social workers who had chosen to work as volunteers or consultants on short term projects abroad (e.g. Jones (2005) wrote a personal account of working with the Christian Children’s Fund in Albania). Similarly, there is no central body offering information or advice to (British) social workers who

might wish to work abroad (Valios, 2008). However, recruitment agencies offer various forms of advice related to prospective job opportunities to social workers wishing to work in the UK and, as mentioned, the GSCC can provide data about the numbers registered to work here.

As also previously mentioned, recruitment of international social workers to the UK has tended to be predominantly from English speaking countries, but there are indications of an increasing trend towards recruitment of social workers from other EU countries relative to the previous pattern of recruitment from countries in the Commonwealth or the USA. The requirement for people wishing to work as social workers to register with the General Social Care Councils (one for each of the four countries within the United Kingdom) has meant that, during the course of this century, a central data base of people qualified and approved to gain employment as social workers has been developed, including identifying those who gained their professional qualifications abroad. Thus, in March 2011, there were 80,438 UK qualified social workers relative to 6,946 internationally qualified social workers on the English register, suggesting that internationally qualified social workers constitute about 8% of the English workforce overall. Moreover, the GSCC figures show that, while such social workers gained their qualifications in 83 different countries (an increase from 65 in 2005), there had been nearly a fourfold increase in those registered from other European Union (EU) countries in 2011 relative to 2005.

Closer inspection with regard to 'European trends' reveals that in 2005 EU qualified social workers comprised 18% of the internationally qualified social workers, while in 2011 they comprised 24% (having increased from 447 in a total of 2,467 to 1,700 in the total of 6,946 respectively). It is also interesting to note that by 2011 there were entries in the Register of social workers trained in all countries of the EU (26 without the UK) with the exception of Cyprus (where social work training within the country is still relatively new) and Luxembourg. (In 2005 registrants came from 20 other EU countries). In addition, the numbers being registered from each EU country in 2011 tended to show a three or fourfold increase over those in 2005, with notable exceptions of Ireland and Slovenia (both increased 11 fold from nine to 109 and 1 to 11, respectively); Portugal (increased 14 fold from 6 to 86) and Lithuania (increased 20 fold from 2 to 40). Meanwhile numbers from Hungary and Slovakia showed six and nine fold increases (from 8 to 51 and 3 to 28) respectively. While Germany is still the largest 'exporter' of social workers to England (379 registrants in 2011, relative to 112 in 2005) there are also 354 Romanian social workers on the register in 2011 (110 in 2005). All the other EU countries have less than 100 social workers each on the English register in March 2011 with the exception of Poland (138); Spain (112) and Ireland (109). Of course, registration does not mean that all those registered are currently employed in English social work agencies but since the social workers have registered in order to gain employment and there continue to be labour shortages in the English workforce (see later) it is likely that the great majority are.

We suggest that the reasons for these trends are related to both wider European political changes and socio-economic conditions; and also to UK national policies with regard to immigration; and the labour market for social workers in particular. Considering the wider European situation first, the expansion of the EU from 2004 to incorporate the Accession States, with the addition of two CEE countries in 2007, marked a shift in the distribution of economic power and employment opportunities across the region and, notwithstanding the significant gains made by countries in political and economic transition from the

Communist era, the eight (then 10) States which were formally part of the Soviet bloc have continued to experience relatively lower per capita income and depressed employment opportunities, not least in the social welfare sector. Although considerable efforts were made over the two decades from 1990 to (re)establish social work education programmes (sometimes with the assistance of British social work educators under specially funded programmes) in many of the Accession states, the rapid increase in the number of trained social workers has not subsequently been matched by an increased number of funded social programmes in either the state nor the third sector and thus employment opportunities in some countries (e.g. Poland and Romania) remain limited.

The situation in Central and East European states of the EU has therefore increased both the size of the 'pool of labour' and the economic motivation for workers to seek employment in West European countries, not least the UK. However, transitional economies are not the only ones where there is an imbalance between supply of and demand for social workers, and it has been the case for some time that, whereas there were limits on the numbers of students who could be recruited to social work courses in the UK, no such limits were applied in many other European countries resulting in a surplus of social workers in countries where spending on social welfare has ceased to expand or been reduced in recent years. So, for some time, 'European social workers', for instance from Spain, Germany and Ireland, have sought both higher qualifications on European educational programmes and work experience in other West European countries, specifically the UK.

There is some impressionistic evidence that the majority of social workers from European countries tend to be younger, less likely to have family responsibilities and with less intention to 'settle' in the UK than their international counterparts from countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. In this sense their demographic profile and professional motivations may have more in common with international social workers from the 'Old Commonwealth' countries (Australia, Canada and New Zealand) who, in addition, may also be 'exploring family roots' (Lyons and Littlechild, 2006; Lyons and Huegler, forthcoming b; see also Timonen and Doyle (2009) who have suggested a similar classification of the demographic characteristics of migrant workers, more generally). However, there has not yet been any systematic research into the characteristics or career experience of European recruits.

Turning to the national situation, as indicated above, immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive in the UK (as in the wider European region), not least in relation to migrant labour (Smedley, 2011), such that there have been concerns about the impact of new legislation and procedures on the ability of social service agencies to fill vacant posts. Shortage of social workers, particularly in the field of Children and Family Work (specifically Child Protection), has been a concern to employers and the profession for some time (Reid, 2010). One way in which UK local authorities have addressed chronic labour shortages of social workers has been to recruit overseas trained and qualified professionals to fill staffing vacancies, particularly in children's services (Crisp, 2009; Welbourne, Harrison & Forde, 2007; Walsh, Wilson & O'Connor, 2009). This strategy is most apparent in statutory child protection services, an area of employment said to be avoided by local social workers because of the difficult and stressful nature of the work (Welbourne et al, 2007). While ongoing shortages may have roots in lack of reliable estimates of the numbers of social workers needed (and therefore the cap placed on

numbers trained), the situation is now compounded by the age profile of the professional workforce, which (in line with national demographics) is aging. In addition to quantitative aspects there are also qualitative ones related to the demands of the type of work and the conditions under which Child Protection work in particular is carried out. Public criticism of the profession following the deaths of children in families under the supervision of social workers and concerns to 'raise standards' have made this a turbulent and precarious field of work and one in which staff burnout and high turnover are commonplace.

A recent report (Munroe, 2011) has added to the debate about the role, responsibilities and needs of social workers in this area of work and change is also indicated as a result of government cuts to local authority budgets and a continued preference for a split between those who purchase services and those who provide them and 'outsourcing' of many areas of service provision. It is to this field that international, including European, social workers are most likely to be recruited, although social care (then including social work) was removed from the Home Office list of 'skills shortage occupations' in 2008 (Travis, 2008). This impacted particularly on recruits from outside the EU (since previously the regulations had enabled employers to get work permits for recruits from abroad for up to five years (Lyons and Huegler, forthcoming b) and may account in part for the increase in the proportion of social workers qualified in the EU. More recent representations (for example, by the British Association of Social Workers) have led to reinstatement of social work (but not social care) on the list of skills shortage occupations, which may lead to further shifts, although the imposition of a cap or ceiling on numbers overall may nevertheless impact on this group. In addition, concerns have been expressed about the experiences of international social workers and a voluntary Code of Practice with reference to Employer responsibilities has been devised in the UK (Brown et al, 2008) with calls for there to be an International Code (Reid, 2010).

### **Some Issues and implications**

In considering the issues and implications for this group of social workers, the following discussion will focus on the concepts of International social work and comparative welfare studies; motivations for professional labour mobility in Europe; and the professional advantages and disadvantages this relocation may entail for the individuals concerned.

#### *The concepts of international social work and comparative welfare*

Trygged (2010) explores the meaning of International social work and comments on its contestability and lack of unifying paradigms, and Weiss-Gai & Welbourne (2008) observe that although social work has 'become a global profession it has not developed into a common professional project' (281). Grey and Fook (2004) identified the dangers of international social work becoming essentially a synonym for western social work with its common tendency to assume the global applicability of social work models developed in Britain and Northern America. Apropos of this, Dominelli (2010) relates how the skills developed by Eastern European social workers to respond to the welfare needs of their societies during the Soviet era were subsequently discounted by western academics, and are only now being reframed as examples of local practice developing to respond to the needs of societies in transition.

With regard to comparative welfare studies, Healy, (2005) has argued that the delivery of social work services is affected by broader geographical and institutional contexts and Welbourne at al, (2007) suggest that, even for immigrant social workers from other

Anglophone countries, changes in international context profoundly affect how social work practice is constructed and understood. White (2006), drawing on her personal experience as an international social worker, identified a number of issues requiring consideration by social workers looking for employment in another country. These include differences in welfare systems and legislation, communication styles, organisation of social services and equivalency of qualifications, to which we would add the challenges of language differences for social workers coming from other EU countries (with the exception of Ireland). Even within the framework of the European Union, with its ambitions for harmonisation of social policies, there are significant variations in the cultures of nation states affecting educational traditions; welfare provisions; and the expectations of social workers. Social workers trained in other EU countries are therefore likely to need in-service training (Simpson, 2009) and supervision to orientate them to national legislation and local situations and resources, as well as, hopefully, demonstrating an appreciation of the strengths and perspectives which they bring.

#### *Motivations for professional labour mobility from Europe*

In considering the mobility of professional labour Standing (2009) comments on the influence of occupational regulation and professional registration authorities which have the power to define acceptable professional standards and limit the number of foreign practitioners entitled to practice, or alter qualification standards. For example, a study investigating the experience of migrant social workers in New Zealand (NZ) identified difficulties in obtaining social work registration as a factor hindering the ability of professional social workers to find suitable employment and to adjust to life in that country (Bartley, 2010). Professional social work registration is a major point of difference between the UK and some European countries. For example, Hungary has no licensing procedures or restrictions on the use of the title social worker, although in many other respects the professional status and prestige of social work in both countries is similar. However, relative to the UK the status of social work in Hungary is particularly low when compared with those of other helping professions (Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008) which may be another factor prompting professional migration, albeit the migrant social workers may not find themselves in a better position (structurally) than the ones they left and in addition may experience disadvantages associated with their immigrant status (see below).

Social workers relocate from one country to another for a range of professional reasons, some of which have been found to concern professional advancement and financial security (Firth, 2004 cited in Welbourne et al, 2007). The empirical data available exploring the mobility motivations and experience of East European doctors and scientists for working abroad (e.g. Williams and Balaz, 2008) suggest that these movements are increasingly considered normal, and likely to occur in the earlier rather than later stages of a person's career – a stereotype that does not necessarily apply to international social workers (Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b) but may be more true of social workers from many European countries, relative to elsewhere. Choice of country of destination is largely influenced by knowledge of career and job availability; language compatibility; and previous experience and knowledge of the destination country. Personal contacts also have been found to play a key role in the recruitment of researchers and PhD students from Eastern to Western European Countries, and student mobility schemes (such as SOCRATES) have provided students with opportunities to study abroad (Guth & Gill,

2008), increasing both experience of a country and potentially also confidence when considering migration and a particular destination.

The experiences of the previously mentioned East European doctors (Williams and Balaz, 2008) suggests, however, that while there is considerable scope for knowledge transfer and learning via labour mobility, professional immigrants from abroad tend to be positioned as learners rather than as sources of knowledge and ascribed a peripheral position within work groups. With reference to social work, Dominelli (2010) discusses the potential for transnational arrangements to provide learning opportunities for social workers from both sending and receiving societies. She suggests however that knowledge transfers should not be assumed to be equal, nor assumed to occur at all. Williams and Balaz (2008) p. 1926 suggest that foreign professional workers move ‘incrementally along a continuum from the domain of stranger to that of a friend’, with their social and cultural capital defined by the institutions from which they come, their seniority and their connections with individuals in their host institutions, but anecdotal evidence suggests that levels of ‘acceptance’ of international (including European) social workers, not least by those who use their services, can be varied and not always positive (Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b).

#### *Professional advantages and disadvantages of relocation*

Firth (2004) proposed that career advancement is a motivation for social workers moving from one country to another. Due to the general preference for agencies to recruit and promote ‘people like us’ and a lingering suspicion of people who are different (even in a country which has loudly proclaimed an adherence to multi-cultural policies and anti-discriminatory practices), this may not be apparent in the short term in a country of immigration, such as England. However, it may be the case either in the longer term or if the international social worker chooses to return ‘home’. For instance, Welbourne et al (2007) have expressed concern about the ethics of recruiting (to the UK and other ‘prosperous’ societies) social workers from countries which have invested in their training and may not be able to afford to ‘lose’ well educated and professionally qualified people. This thinking prompted a question by one of the authors to a Romanian lecturer about the numbers of social workers coming to the UK from Romania. However, her response – that some at least of these social workers would return with additional skills and knowledge about social service systems – suggests that people who have experienced a period of employment ‘abroad’ may indeed be able to look forward to career enhancement on return – assuming that welfare systems including social services have indeed developed and new job opportunities exist.

While the notion of trans-nationalism has a certain theoretical glamour to it, the lived reality of adjusting to a different workforce and new culture of professional practice is challenging. Advantages of mobility include a different experience of social work and opportunities to broaden both personal and professional horizons. So, should social workers from other European countries come to the UK with the hope that they will find employment? This may be a realistic expectation provided they are prepared to work in statutory Child and Family Services and have the requisite English language skills and qualifications recognized in the UK. The disadvantages, however, based on anecdotal evidence, suggest that international social worker’s previous experience is often discounted; that job opportunities are limited to one particular field; and that international social workers can experience discrimination when applying for jobs and promotion

(Lyons & Huegler, forthcoming b; Reid, 2010). There are also uncertainties about the scale and future direction of child welfare services (and indeed of social services generally), which are impacting on employment opportunities for both domestic and international social workers alike. So, while the needs of vulnerable children and other client groups persist and even increase, whether employing agencies pursue a strategy of international recruitment of social workers or seek alternative ways of providing services (including through recruitment of unqualified or differently trained staff) remains to be seen.

### **Concluding comments**

The issue of international labour migration in social work, including within the European Union, is still an under-researched area. Such mobility has both structural and personal dimensions related to the global and European policies which prompt or prevent migration; the national situations which provide the 'push' for people to leave their home country and the 'pull' for them to migrate to another one; and the individual and family motivations which inspire or necessitate worker mobility. It is clear from English data about registration of internationally qualified staff that migration from all EU countries to English social work posts has been increasing over the past five years of so but there is a dearth of systematic data about the experiences of European social workers practicing in the UK or the advantages or disadvantages of their doing so. The perceived quality of their migration experience will depend on the individuals concerned, what brought them to the UK and on the purpose and duration of their intended stay, as well as their expectations of it. It has been suggested that there may be similarities between, for example, the motivations, characteristics and experiences of social work migrants and other professional migrant groups but there may be unique aspects, perhaps relating to the particular characteristics of social work and its relationship to national and ethnic cultures and its use of language and interpersonal relationships as the basic 'tools of the trade'.

With regard to the lack of comparative research in the field of international labour mobility in social work, in England it is also the case that the General Social Care Council is itself a victim of national government cuts and is due to be disbanded after handing over its responsibilities to the Health Professions Council from April, 2012. This raises concerns about the amount and quality of data about the English social care workforce (including social workers) that will be available in future and suggests that the time is right for further exploration of this topic, preferably from a comparative perspective, so that the impact of trans-national labour migration on the profession, social services and service users in both sending and receiving countries, as well as on international social workers themselves, is better understood.

### **Notes**

\*\* Dr Sue Hanna is currently funded over the next 15 months through the Nuffield Foundation Social Science Small Grant Scheme to undertake an exploratory qualitative study investigating the experiences of overseas trained and qualified social workers working in Children and Families Services in London and the Home Counties. The study is entitled "London Calling" Child & Family Social Workers as Immigrants'.

1. The General Social Care Council is the body currently responsible for maintaining a Register of everyone qualified to work as a social worker in England. It has powers to investigate complaints against social workers and remove them from the Register if necessary. More importantly for this paper, it is responsible for assessing whether the qualifications held by international social workers are deemed equivalent to the UK professional award for registration and thus employment purposes. It is an important source of secondary data (available under the UK Freedom of Information Act) and its assistance in supplying the data for this paper is

acknowledged. The analysis of the data presented here and conclusions drawn are solely the responsibility of the authors.

See also

General Social Care Website: [gsc.org.uk](http://gsc.org.uk)

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