

---

# Strangers: Current Topicalities of Refugees Youth Employment in Sweden and Nordic Countries (Reflections on Social Work Education in a local and Global Context)

*Jonas Christensen PhD, Sweden*

The purpose of this article is to problematize and detail how migration issues due to the labour market can be linked to social work education in higher education from the perspective of migration and internationalization out of a Swedish (and Nordic) context. Migration problems and challenges needs to be seen in a local and global context and the education needs to be characterized by this. In social work education, migration and internationalization means that one creates conditions for cooperation and understanding between the average nations, at home in our professional daily life and abroad through various exchanges in studies, research and practice, placements. Education in migration creates a deeper cross-border integration in which students coming from different cultures and traditions develop their skills and understanding through different pedagogical and didactic aspects. Migrations issues can thus be said to contain different levels of understanding on personal, organizational and societal levels and intervention in relation to knowledge creation. The language of migration and how we face it is to a high degree incomplete, and how we use terms and words is very much based on our contexts when it comes to the role of metaphors and stigmatization. The main conclusion is that migration issues in social work education need to be seen in practice as a concept of “acting locally and thinking globally”, and should be viewed as a major input for developing migration in higher education and social work education — a Glocal approach.

**Key words:** migration, social work, higher education, glocal, internationalization, curriculum.

## **Background**

No European country has a larger proportion of refugees in its population and in 2015 none welcomed a larger flow of asylum-seekers, proportionate to its population.

Employment rates for refugees are no lower than in most European countries, but the difference with Swedish-born workers is striking. Partly it is because many Swedish-born women work and Swedes are highly educated. Many refugees simply lack the skills for Sweden's job market. There is a what you may call The "hidden" paradox.

*"Sweden has among the most advanced refugee-integration policies. A two-year programme is meant to make refugees "job-ready", but is often too long for educated refugees and too short for those lacking basic literacy and numeracy. Only 22% of low-educated foreign-born men and 8% of women found work in the year after completing the programme" (T. Liebig, OECD).*

Even though the Nordic countries show marked similarities in terms of socio-economic and social conditions, there is much that separates them. Welfare policy ambitions may be similar, but when we examine the conditions for youths to establish themselves in the labour market and earn a living, we find significant variations. Youths face considerably less favourable labour market conditions in Finland and Sweden than in the other Nordic countries (Olofsson, 2018). Finland and Sweden offer mainly school based vocational training programmes. The other countries (Norway, Denmark, Iceland) offer apprenticeship training linked to a regulated system of trade licenses. Unemployment is high both in the refugee population and among youth in all Nordic countries compared with the general population, which is alarming not only because employment may provide the individual with an income and a way into society, but also because some countries connect employment status to a number of fundamental rights, such as permanent residence permits and family reunification (Kauffin, Lyytinen, 2017). In accordance with the Nordic tradition of active labour market policy (ALMP), integration programmes are designed to improve employability and keep the newly arrived immigrant population activated. It takes, according to the in average around 8 years (The Economist, 2016) as an immigrant to establish on the labor market. Contextual and individual factors matter for employment. The pre-migration context including educational level, health status and reason for migration make the immigrant more or less prepared for the Nordic labour markets. For the refugee population, these conditions are often poor due to wars and conflicts in countries of origin. To somewhat various degrees, the Nordic countries have experienced a transition from 'welfare to workfare' with significant implications for immigrants and their roles in society. The 'right to work' has turned into a 'demand to work', which reflects the political idea that integration takes place through labour market participation and that other aspects of integration are considered subsidiary to work. Most financial support during the integration period is conditional on participation in the labour market programs and some countries (e.g. Denmark) have experienced the development towards a parallel transfer system with lower payment rates to immigrants compared with the native population. Refugees and youth in the Nordic countries share the challenge to enter a competitive labour market with high educational demands. The Nordic labour market is already stratified with immigrants (and youth) being overrepresented in low-

status work. In addition, there is a parallel labour market on the rise characterized by limited employer liability and low-income/low-security jobs. This is an actual topic highly on the agenda, esp. in Sweden.

### **Migration issues and Social Work Education**

In the context of migration issues and Social Work Education, internationalization means the creation of conditions for cooperation and understanding between the nations, although the focus should be on meetings between individuals. Further, a distinction is made between internationalization and globalization; globalization aims for deeper cross-border integration, while internationalization aims for cooperation between nations. According to Nilsson (2003), internationalization can be defined as “the process of integrating an international dimension into the research, teaching and services function of higher education. When referring to internationalization, it is important to make the distinction between why we are internationalizing higher education and what we mean by internationalization (De Wit, 2011). To a large extent, the language of how we deal with migration issues and internationalization is incomplete, and how we use the related terms is highly based on context and higher education in social work has got a key role in this. In the words of the French author and Nobel Prize recipient, Andre Gidé: “Man cannot discover new oceans until he has courage to lose sight of the shore”. Knight’s (2008a) definition acknowledges the various levels of internationalization and the need to address the relationship and integration between them: “The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education.” Knight (ibid) also states that it is now possible to see two basic aspects evolving in the internationalization of higher education. One is ‘internationalization at home,’ including activities to help students develop international awareness and intercultural skills. By comparison this aspect is much more curriculum oriented and prepares students to be active in an increasingly globalized world. Some examples of activities that fall under this at-home category are: curriculum and programs, teaching and learning processes, extra-curricular activities, liaison with local cultural/ethnic groups, and research and scholarly activities. The second aspect is ‘internationalization abroad’, which includes all forms of education across borders: The mobility of students and faculty, and the mobility of projects, programs and providers. These components should not be considered mutually exclusive, but rather intertwined within policies and programs. Further, De Wit (2002) identifies five broad categories of rationales for internationalization: political, economic, social, cultural and academic. These rationales are not mutually exclusive; they vary in importance by country and region, and their dominance may change over time, however these categories reflect the essence of migration issues in education.

### **Social Work education in a local and global context**

Social work is described by Lorenz (1994) as contextual, meaning it is bound to national traditions, laws, and local culture and the content of social work education in Sweden is, to a large extent, governed by national guidelines, due to the professional title of Socionom. Therefore, this needs to be taken into account when discussing migration issues. For example, at Malmö University, at the Bachelor’s level social work

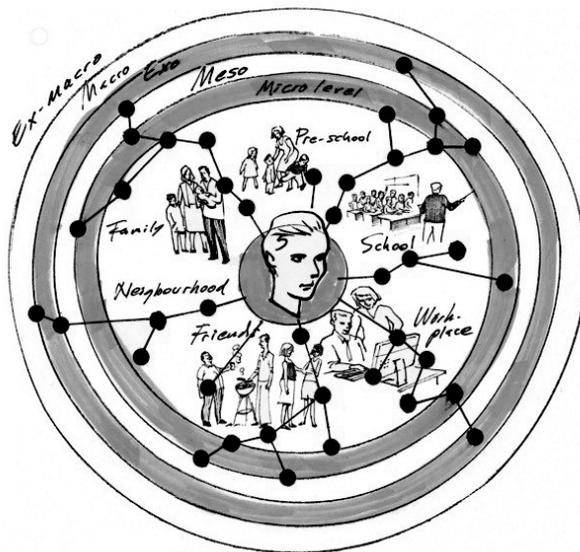
curriculum, international perspectives on migration are included as an integrated part of single lectures during the first and second semesters. The idea at the Master's level is similar, with invited guest lecturers speaking about related relevant themes and often on a comparative basis. With the exception of the programs, the individual courses Social Policies in Europe and Social Work in a Local and Global Context are offered, which integrate an intercultural perspective focusing on migration, the welfare state in comparison, and social work practice. We need to understand migration social work issues in their local context by gaining a global understanding; therefore, the term Glocal (local knowledge and global awareness) is used in this article. Parts of these individual courses are also integrated in the social work programs. The main idea behind the continuous development of internationalization in social work education and in the social work curriculum at Malmoe University in general is that social workers need to be prepared to address social work in a local and global context by studying internationally related cases and migration problems that arise in their domestic practice. These cases contribute to a mutual exchange of solving global social problems as well as gaining knowledge of other countries and their social systems when reflecting on migration. Nevertheless, it seems that although the term 'internationalization' in social work education is well established, and although the need for further international education in social work is viewed as essential, how to fully reach it is complex.

### **Theoretical frame**

According to Meeuwisse and Sward (2008a) the cross-national comparison of social work is a question of assumptions and levels. The focus could be on the macro level, where comparisons are based on social policy; it could also be focused on profession (micro-meso level) or on practice-oriented differences (micro level). This makes sense, as it may be more relevant and useful to use the term 'cross-national and global social work' instead of internationalization. To understand the complexity of international social work, we must take into account how the various sub-systems interact. The macro system, such as social policy, is therefore crucial for placing this analysis within the context of education. Both the person (the individual) and the environment change over time. Bronfenbrenner (2005) maintains that these changes are crucial to our understanding of how the different systems influence the person and his or her development. In addition, when personal development has a strong influence on family relations, this will create development on its own for the family. The same is true for institutional and cultural development; for example, the presence of strong individuals in an organization heavily influences organizational development. Resilience capacity on a mental, intra level (Christensen, 2016b) and an entrepreneurial way of building, developing, and keeping networks, gives the different levels in Bronfenbrenner's Development Ecology model a broader understanding of what stimulates learning processes and our understanding of internationalization, education, and the profession in a social context. Transformation in a welfare context can be understood from both individual and social perspectives (ibid). Migrations issues can thus be said to contain six levels of intervention: the intra-personal level (capacity of resilience), the micro-social level (person, client, focus on interaction), the meso-social level (group, institution, coherence), the exo-social level (society, institutions, educational system), the macro-social level (culture, nation, traditions, language) and the ex-macro-social level (international relations and EU influence).

When understanding social work education in migration and the role of peda-

ogy within it, we can relate to what Fayolle and Kyro (2008) describe as the interplay between environment and education. They argue that entrepreneurship is closely connected to an education perspective in which individuals, society, and institutions are all linked to each other. This interplay is surrounded by culture, and it is in this context that entrepreneurship and pedagogy meet. Entrepreneurship is when the individual acts upon opportunities and ideas and transforms them into value for others. Ties, meetings, and networks are therefore closely linked to the individual, and in the meetings where the individuals from different contexts come face to face, learning about migration takes place. Given this, a connection between the (extended) Development Ecology model and Entrepreneurship gives us the Entrecology model (see fig. 1):



**Fig. 1. The Entrecology model.**

(Source: Christensen, 2016, illustration: Ebbe Bredberg)

Each link in the Entrecology model should be seen as each person's own unique and personal network created through meetings on different levels; the starting point is the individual and the interplay between the individual and the surrounding context. When analyzing social networks as a tool for linking micro and macro networks, the strength of these dyadic ties can be understood (Granovetter, 1983). This strength (or weakness) gives dependency as well as independency in linkages. In addition, as pointed out by Cox and Pawar (2006), dimensions in migration and international social work need to have a local as well as a global face, and, the reality of globalization is that it requires a dimension of localization. Therefore, the Entrecology model can be seen as a connector in education between the individual and her or his surrounding context on different levels.

## Concluding remarks

Thinking globally and acting locally should be seen as a key concept in the development of migration and internationalization in social work education. This demands in-depth knowledge about individual driving forces and views on what is essential when it comes to international social work education. We need to explore how we can raise our mutual understanding of social work which assists us in developing a more global understanding, while at the same time, being aware of our different traditions and values. Therefore, as according to what Meuwisse and Sward (2008c) point out we must take into account how the various sub-systems interact in relation to the person. Both the individual and the environment change over time, and Bronfenbrenner (2005b) maintains that these changes are crucial to our understanding of how the different systems influence the individual and her or his development. In this, the Entrecology model can be seen as a connector in education between the individual and his or her surrounding context on different levels when understanding social work issues including migration. In relation to this model, Academic writing as a contributing factor for cultivating the understanding of social work in the international classroom in a local and global context should not be underestimated for the development of professional skills (Christensen, Hjortsjö, Wårnsby, 2017). Skills in academic writing, in this case, constitute the “glue” that is needed to promote students’ learning of the subject content. By using academic writing in this way, we strengthen the students’ perceived academic knowledge and professional confidence. Academic writing can, therefore, be seen to play an essential role in developing global skills in social work. The importance of allowing students and teachers to meet on a transnational basis in social work education is built upon internationalization at home as a part of domestic local programs with global understanding—a glocalised view on migration and social work—should not be underestimated when developing professional skills. This relates to the statement by Healy (2008) that Social workers are faced with new responsibilities, and it is important for the education to go beyond the national level. A success factor for knowledge acquisition in migration and social work is providing continuous education, where international courses can work independently, but also opportunities for integration within existing programs. It strengthens, stimulates, and develops internationalization at home, as well as attitudes toward it for both students and teachers. A main contribution is that a continuous cross-border cooperation in international education in which teacher’s work closely together with permanent meeting places, the social context in itself for students and teacher’s may create a new framework for the planning and development of a deeper understanding of migration and education in the Social work discipline. The main conclusion is therefore that migrations issues in social work education need to be seen in practice as a concept of acting locally and thinking globally, and should be viewed as a major input for developing and facing migration issues in higher education and social work education - a Glocal approach.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bronfenbrenner U. (Ed.) (2005) *Making Human Beings Human – Bioecological perspectives on human development*. CA: Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp. 3-15.
- Christensen J. (2016) A Critical Reflection of Bronfenbrenner's Development Ecology Model, Problems of Education in the 21st Century. *Scientific Methodical Centre "Scientia Educologica", Lithuania; The Associated Member of Lithuanian Scientific Society, European Society for the History of Science (ESHS) and ICASE*, Vol. 69, pp. 24-28.
- Christensen J., Hjortsjo M., Wärnsby A. (2017) Social work Education and Academic writing – a Quality assessment. In: *China Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 10, No. 1. London: Routledge. Available: <http://hdl.handle.net/2043/22515>.
- Cox D., Pawar M. (2006) *International Social Work: Issues, Strategies and Programs*. CA: Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp. 27-29.
- De Wit H. (2002) *Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe: A Historical, Comparative, and Conceptual Analysis*. CT: Westport, Greenwood Press, pp. 83-102.
- De Wit H. (2011) Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education. In: *Revista de Universidad y Sociedad del Conocimiento (RUSC)*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 241-248.
- Fayolle A., Kyro P. (2008) *The Dynamics Between Entrepreneurship, Environment and Education*. London: Edward Elgar Publ. Ltd, pp. 5-16.
- Gauffin K., Lyytinen E. (2017) *Working for integration, Cage Policy report, Centre for Health Equity Studies*. Stockholm: University/Karolinska Inst.
- Granovetter M. (2008) The Strength of Weak ties: A network theory revisited. In: *The Sociological Theory*, Vol. 1, pp. 201-233.
- Healy L. *International Social Work: Professional Action in an interdependent world*. Oxford/New York: Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 6-8.
- Liebig T. [OECD]. The Economist, Nov 2nd 2016 [cited on 03.04.2018.] Available: <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2016/11/05/seeking-asylum-and-jobs>.
- Lorenz W. (1994) *Social work in a changing Europe*. London, UK: Routledge, pp. 3-10.
- Meuwisse A., Sward H. (2007) Cross-national comparisons of social work – a question of initial assumptions and levels of analysis. In: *European Journal of Social work*, No. 4, ppp. 481-496.
- Nilsson B. (2003) Internationalization at Home from a Swedish perspective: The Case of Malmö. In: *Journal of studies in International Education*, pp. 31-32.
- Olofsson J. (ed.) (2018) *Unga inför arbetslivet: om utanförskap, lärande och delaktighet*. [Young people facing working life: about exclusion, learning and participation.] Lund: Studentlitteratur.

## **Svešinieki: Bēgļu jauniešu bezdarba aktuālie jautājumi Zviedrijā un Ziemeļvalstīs sociālajā darbā lokālajā un globālajā kontekstā**

*Kopsavilkums*

Raksta nolūks ir problematizēt un detalizēt, kā migrācijas jautājumi darba tirgus ietekmē var būt saistīti ar augstāko sociālā darbā izglītību, raugoties uz to no internacionalizācijas leņķa Zviedrijas (un Ziemeļvalstu) kontekstā. Migrācijas problēmas un izaicinājumus jāskata lokālajā un globālajā mērogā, tie ietekmē izglītības saturu. Migrācija un internacionalizācija sociālā darba izglītībā rada apstākļus sadarbībai un sapratnei starp nācijām profesionālajā darbībā ar dažādām apmaiņas programmām studijās, pētniecībā un praksē. Izglītība migrācijas jautājumos rada dziļāku un pāri robežām ejošu integrāciju, kurā studējošie no atšķirīgām kultūrām un tradīcijām attīsta savas prasmes un zināšanas dažādos pedagoģiskajos un didaktiskajos aspektos. Tāpēc saistībā ar jaunu zināšanu radīšanu migrācijas jautājumi skar dažādus izpratnes līmeņus par personību, organizācijām un intervenci. Migrācijas valoda un tas, kā mēs to uztveram, ir augstākā mērā nepilnīgi, un tas, kā mēs lietojam vārdus un terminus, lielā mērā ir atkarīgs no konteksta, sevišķi, runājot par metaforām un stigmatizāciju. Galvenais secinājums ir, ka migrācijas jautājumi sociālā darba izglītībā ir jāskata kā koncepcija “darboties lokāli un domāt globāli”, kas ir būtiski, uzņemot migrācijas jautājumus augstākajā sociālā darba izglītībā. To autors iesaka dēvēt par “glokālo” pieeju.

**Atslēgas vārdi:** migrācija, sociālais darbs, augstākā izglītība, glokāls, internacionalizācija, studiju programma.



### **Jonas Christensen**

*PhD*, assist. prof. at Malmö University, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Health and Society (Sweden).

*PhD*, doc. Veselības un sabiedrības fakultātes Sociālā darba departamentā Malmes Universitātē (Zviedrija).

E-mail: [jonas.christensen@mau.se](mailto:jonas.christensen@mau.se)