

Introduction

Children, Young People and Families in a European Context

by *Maria José Freitas, Günter J. Friesenhahn,
Elizabeth Frost and Maria P. Michailidis*

This volume is the second in a series about social work in Europe. Volume One (Campanini, Frost, 2004) offered a descriptive overview of social work in 24 EU member-States. Each author briefly reviewed the dimensions of history, education and current practice. In other words, the background picture of social work across the whole of Europe was outlined. This volume seeks to go a step further by engaging with the specific topics of social work with children, young people and families. The 12 chapters still represent every region of Europe from Scandinavia to the South and the countries of the old communist block to England. However their concerns are less with an impressionistic overview and more with a thorough academic account of a particular strand within the topic.

This book, and indeed the first, is the product of an EU funded Thematic Network project, EUSW – European Social Work: Commonalities and Differences. Beginning in 2002, the Network now boasts some 50 members representing every country in the new Europe. (Since Mr Bush has called all European countries which were not in favour of the Iraq war the “old Europe”, the term “new Europe” might be ambivalent.) Contributions to the book were volunteered by member institutions with experience and interest in the field of social work with children, young people and families. As the reader will perceive, a fascinating diversity of practices and perspectives emerged, within a volume which is also able to offer insights into some of the contextualising issues of such work as well as the practice itself.

What is presented here is a radical pan-European project: a text which spans Europe within its vision of social work with child, young people and family social work. The comparative nature of the work is a particular strength. In some chapters authors representing two different countries and social work systems have written together to undertake a direct comparison of a chosen feature, whereas in others a comparative dimension is achieved by a single author drawing on social work literature to illuminate his national perspective alongside that of specific other nations. Another type of comparison deployed within the book is that of

using Europe itself (European children's rights, for example, or ethics) as the contextualising framework within which comparative dimensions are then discussed.

Social work with children, young people and families is broadly defined within the book. Our interest is in the kinds of concepts and ideas that framed such work in practice, and in the professionals who undertake these activities. In keeping with this, the book comprises three sections. Section A looks at contextual issues (relating to gender, rights, theory, and policy); Section B considers forms of practice with individuals, families and communities; Section C concerns itself with professional issues such as demarcations and definitions.

This volume is intended to advance the knowledge-base about European social work issues. It is aimed at "students" of social work and other social professions and all those still engaged in learning processes. Lecturers and trainers should find it useful for introducing a European dimension in social work curricula and courses.

For social work, a European dimension is not a value in itself. Social work has to deal with the challenges and problems which will emerge from the new European developments, e.g. the enlargement process, increasing unemployment rates, migration, poverty, and changing life conditions for families, children and young people. Social work not only has the task of supporting people to cope with these new developments, but also the task of analysing and accompanying these developments critically, and making proposals for the improvement of people's life conditions. Social work has to be aware that these tasks are embedded in a European context and beyond that. Looking at European policy and social professions in Europe there are some important structural differences which have an influence on the relations between policy and social work.

In a political sense and from certain perspectives, Europe represents freedom: freedom of movement for its' inhabitants, (social) services, goods and capital. European dimensions in this sense are connected with a decrease of trade hindrances, and with a harmonisation of structures and frameworks. This idea of harmonisation of structures also plays an important role in the context of the academic training for professions, which in many countries includes social work. The so-called Bologna process will lead to compatible university systems and degrees in more than 50 European countries. Social work, however, sometimes has more to do with dealing with diversity than with harmonisation. Social work has to respect different values, different ways of living, different concepts for someone's own life or, on a more scientific level, different approaches which analyse, explain and solve social problems and challenges, and last but not least it must respect different languages.

Even if some people hope that in the end Europe will present itself as a unity – as a homogeneous structure – we must take into account that social policy, social services and social work will remain diverse and necessarily embedded in the historical, political and social contexts of each country. It is evident that in all European countries there is at some level a transfer of power and potential to the EU. However somewhat paradoxically it seems that there is no European child, youth and family policy, which is co-ordinated, task-oriented and, in terms of approaches and concepts, unified. The challenge is not the diversity, but dealing with the diversity. In all European countries social work aims at empowerment, support, and the improvement of life conditions by delivering high quality social services provided by professionals who refer to academic findings and personal engagement.

Within the European Union the so-called principle of subsidiarity leads to a situation in which the member-States remain responsible for social and youth policy and education. Nevertheless, Europe as an entity has an increasing influence on the daily life situation of European citizens, and can also be regarded as a source of new opportunities for individual chances with regard to education, training and for jobs. “Europe has become a social and political living space for children, youth and their families” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugendhilfe, 2004, p. 13). That requires both the intervention of all social work actors in relevant European policy, and taking into consideration the European dimension of local, regional and national social services and social welfare for children, youth and families. To facilitate this, is one of the fundamental purposes of this Thematic Network.

The general aim of the Thematic Network, then, is to advance an understanding of social work, in all its diversity and similarities, across the continent. Ultimately this book seeks to promote this vision for both social work education and the profession. A common denominator and major concern for social work across Europe is the family (in all its forms), its children and the young people they grow into. It may be worth pausing now to briefly consider the general position of these groups within the EU.

I

Children in Europe

Even though the numbers are dropping not increasing across Europe as populations generally become older, the children of Europe constitute a formidable force. In some other regions of the world, e.g. in North Africa, about 40% of the population is younger than 25 years old. Com-

pared with these regions young Europeans have to cope with an aging society, which creates some specific problems e.g. with regard to social security systems, pensions etc.

Estimated at approximately 70 million under-18-year-olds in the Union prior to May 2004, children as a category have been a major focus of legislation and research emanating from the Union since its inception. For example, the European Union *Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights* (1996) simultaneously, and effectively, placed the welfare of children at the heart of the community's ethical and belief system to encourage its translation into national policies and laws. Endorsed by virtually all countries in the international community, that children, from whatever background and in whatever circumstances have fundamental rights to, for example, safety and health and equal treatment is a highly significant EU commitment and principle. Dalrymple further discusses the issue of children's rights in CHAP. 1 of this volume.

However before examining the "European child" in more detail, it might be worth noting from the outset the impossibility of discussing "children" as a coherent group. Infancy, young childhood, older childhood and adolescence can be seen as constituting distinct groups across Europe, though quite what the demarcations should be and what kinds of culturally determined behaviours might be expected within each would be subject to some variation. And as always what we know about each of these groups is limited by the available research, which in itself may reflect regional inequalities in funding support and/or research capacity.

Research reports however provide some useful information. In 2001-2002, for example, the World Health Organisation/Europe reported on the findings from a study of health behaviour in school-aged children. Covering children aged 11-15 from 35 countries (Europe plus Canada, the Russian Federation, the Balkan countries and the United States) this collaborative survey provides a rich source of comparative information on life-styles as well as health. For social work with children and families such information is crucial.

Health, then, is a determining feature of children's life trajectories and the level of support welfare State services may need to offer. Amongst 15-year-olds, between 8 and 32% of boys, and 16-63% of girls report their health to be less than good or moderate, merely fair through to poor across the survey. However parts of eastern and central Europe showed the worse rates. Latvia and Lithuania, for example, report the highest levels of poor health for girls, at 42% (WHO/Europe, 2004). As bodies such as the EU Community Health Monitoring Programme (2002) substantiate, poor health (including mental health) in children not only connects with personal suffering/deprivation and reduced life chances,

but is also part of a complex multifactorial picture of determinants, risks and outcomes. Factors such as financial support to families, day care services and social and health services form part of a protective environment for children's health in the face of family pressures such as poverty and unemployment and adverse social circumstances such as isolation and harmful environments.

Poverty is highlighted as one of the determining factors for poor health and mental health in Europe's children. Since the 1990s levels of child poverty have increased generally (Zierer, 2003) though there is wide variation across Europe. In wealthy countries such as Norway and Sweden about 15% of the population of children live in families of low affluence, whereas the proportion can be as high as 53% in eastern European countries such as Lithuania (WHO/Europe, 2004). However this pattern is not always consistent. For example of the pre-2004 EU countries, Portugal, UK, Spain, Ireland and Italy have the highest levels of child poverty. The UK managed to improve its position from having the highest levels of child poverty to fifth highest between 1998 and 2001. However Spain, Portugal and Ireland still had more than 25% of children in relative poverty (assessed as below 60% of national median income) in 2001; the EU average then was 18% (European Community Household Panel statistics, cit. in Brewer *et al.*, 2004).

Traditionally there has been a link between poverty and migration, and/or being part of a single-parent family, and this still seems to be the case across Europe (Zierer, 2003). Rates of children living in one-parent families are as high as 16-20% in western Europe, for example England, but in southern and eastern Europe, for example Greece, Italy and Balkan States, more than 90% live with two parents (WHO/Europe, 2004). Anne van den Berg and Maria P. Michailidis consider some interventions with struggling single parents in the Netherlands and Cyprus, respectively, in CHAP. 6. However the assumption of a previous generation that poverty necessarily connects with parental unemployment seems to be less the case. Certainly where *no* member of the household have an income poverty exists, but the working poor, in precarious and/or exploitative work situations, are becoming more numerous as a European (and world) phenomena. This may also correlate with immigrant status. And of course the organisation of social security and benefits within countries invariably has a profound impact on child poverty. It is worth noting that "the poverty rate for children is in reverse proportion to the share of social security benefits in the social product of a country" (Zierer, 2003, p. 16).

This is also very much the business of social work, in relation to monitoring and intervening in child poverty and its determinants and out-

comes, and of social policy initiatives. Poverty, physical ill health and mental ill health, then, are some of the primary concerns that social work must engage with in relation to children across Europe. These seem to be fundamental, with “protection from abuse and exploitation” as the fourth major category of concern. It may shock many that in a UNICEF survey of 15,000 children, aged 9-17, and including central, eastern and western Europe, 6 out of 10 children say they face violence or aggressive behaviour within their families, and 11% of them says it occurs often. 1 in 6 children feels unsafe in his neighbourhoods and 2 in 10 children report having a friend or relative who has been a victim of abuse. This also shows considerable regional variation: “The proportion of children in transition countries who feel unsafe in their communities is about double that of Western Europe” (UNICEF, 2004, p. 1).

Sexual abuse of children is another important area. As well as sexual abuse within the family, a concern that has been identified and is worked with across European social work in various ways since the 1970s, sexual exploitation, including trafficking of children, has also now become a major concern. Piquardt undertakes a cross-cultural comparison in CHAP. 8 of aspects of child sexual abuse in three European countries. There is then much work for social workers in Europe, whether employed by the State or NGOs, to do with the children of Europe, to improve the basic conditions of childhood and allow them to develop their potential. Structural frameworks ratified by European countries, such as the UN *Convention on The Rights of the Child* (1989), and the European Union *Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights* (1996), suggest an overall favourable climate of intent in which to advance children's interests. Social work in education and health, with children in families and with those separated from their families, in refugee housing and on the streets, in juvenile justice and in community projects and all the other contexts existing in the Union, have a European wide mandate for children's work. Some examples of such initiatives in Spain and in Lithuania are discussed by Rodríguez, Roldán, Nogués and Zamanillo in CHAP. 12, and Večkienė and Eidukevičiūtė in CHAP. 9.

What is also being advocated, from conventions of rights to research reports, is that the old processes of adults making decisions for and doing things for and to children is no longer an acceptable position for any adults, let alone child welfare professionals, to take. Children's voices should and must be heard. Children should be active participants in their lives and changes within them. As recommended in their report on children's mental health: “Young people need to not only be consulted but have genuine power, influence and decision making over policy and practice” (Mental Health Europe, 2002, p. 12). Social work in many parts

of Europe has begun to address the notion of service user inclusion. These principles also need to be fore-grounded when the service user is a child. Dalrymple discusses some of the issues in children's participation in CHAP. 1.

2

Young People

Turning to young people in Europe, it is apparent that some European legislation is specifically targeted at them. There is art. 29 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (crime against children), art. 13 (anti-discrimination), Title XI (*Social Policy, Education, Vocational Training and Youth*) Chapter 1 (*Social Regulations*) with arts. 136-137 as well as Chapter 3 (*Education, Vocational Training and Youth*) with arts. 149-150. Beyond that the European *Charter of Fundamental Rights* puts young persons at the centre of art. 24 with the following concern: "Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. [...] In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration".

From a European perspective, taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity, child welfare and youth policy are first of all the task and the responsibility of each member-State. "The European Union can contribute with measures when defined objectives are not going to be achieved by actions of the Member states but perhaps more usefully through community actions" (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Jugendhilfe, 2004, p. 8). Examples might be action programmes like *Youth* (<http://www.youthforeurope.org>).

International networks, transnational projects and the development of international activities in the area of training are gaining more importance. This happens in the light of the globalization process, which confronts all societies with new challenges and demands. But additionally social policy and welfare models are changing their shape. The active welfare State is becoming an activating welfare State; in other words the trend can be described as: from welfare to workfare (Walther, 2003). Individualisation and privatisation of social risks are the consequences of this development accompanied by the attempt to ground youth policy (and child welfare) on market-oriented, competition-based models. However, the Council of European ministers responsible for youth did decide in May 2002 to focus on the needs and perspectives of young people in all fields of politics. It was stressed that youth policy in the EU should interface with other divisions. The standards set became the five rules of the European governance: openness,

participation, responsibility, efficacy and coherence (European Commission, 2001).

Participation has become a core issue, particularly expressed in the White Paper on youth by the European Commission (http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/download/whitepaper_en.pdf). Participation means that young people have to be involved in decisions which are important for their lives, and they have to be integrated in their communities. Young people have to be consulted before decisions are taken. Dalrymple and Baum's chapters in this book consider some of this range of issues (CHAPS. 1, 5). The Commission also highlighted the big five challenges for the future in relation to youth as (European Commission, 2001):

- demographic development;
- changing conditions/social constellation for the life world of young people;
- involvement of young people in public life;
- European integration;
- globalization.

Research on the social situation of young people in Europe (Walther, 2002; Chrisholm, Kovacheva, 2002) discovered that young people have to cope with overall trends which affect their lives, for example, the trend towards longer and more complex transitions to adult life, to which extended education and training contribute significantly. The authors also highlight that young Europeans are confronted with the fact that they are living in an aging society and therefore they will become a weaker electoral factor. Overall, they suggest, in the future the youth "phase" will be less standardised, and is becoming more open-ended and characterised by a plurality of life-styles. Chrisholm and Kovacheva (2002, p. 13) summarise:

We cannot know how young people will respond to all these trends, but rather than being problems and having problems in the areas of the polity, young people in twenty-first century Europe should be at the forefront of solving problems as an integral part of the polity. [...] This requires that social organisations and public policies are capable of meeting the challenges of responding proactively to young people as citizens with equal rights as those who will carry Europe's future.

Young people in Europe constitute an important part of the population. Many are confronted with a changing social constellation, with new trends in leisure-time activities and increasing demands on schooling and learning. Young people are forced to take decisions on their own,

because traditions and the traditional milieu no longer serve as examples in order to cope with the future. They may be alienated from extended families or cultural traditions, and/or from the rural or urban communities to which they, if only nominally, belong. Such dimensions of integration or its opposite are raised in the essays by Diekmann and Moñivas (CHAP. 7), and by Baum (CHAP. 5).

Within most societies there is some expectation that social services for young people will have a significant role to support, to assist and to empower young people. In a report written by a group of experts from different European countries on the White Paper on youth (Gudmundsson, 2003, p. 2) they state:

Education is and should be at the centre of a holistic approach to youth affairs – but not confined to schools. Learning takes place in leisure life and at work, and not only for those who are formally labelled as students or trainees. [...] We learn in non-formal and informal settings, too (in youth clubs, in the family, in political life). Moreover, what we learn formally often only becomes meaningful and useful when it is applied in non-formal and informal contexts.

Within welfare work the role of social pedagogue often addresses the “education” of young people in this very broad social sense. Friesenhahn and Kantowicz in CHAP. II discuss the comparative situation for social pedagogy across Germany and Poland. There is no doubt that in all European countries young people have been and are still a special target group for social work and related welfare professions (Volland, Porteous, 2002; IARD, 2002). Perspectives and methods have changed over the last decades but, nevertheless, young people will remain a target group because they always have special needs according to their age and the tasks (transition from school to work, establishing their independent lives etc.) which belong to youth. The variety of experiences of the life-stage “youth” and the definitional problems in themselves across Europe make it difficult to analyse “European youth” as a whole, but this book attempts to at least describe some key themes and cast an interpretative eye towards the coming decades. “Evidence-based policy-making is only possible if the evidence is available and accessible in the first place” (Chrisholm, Kovacheva, 2002, p. 69). That means for social work practice in all European countries there is a need to broaden the knowledge basis in relation to such European issues (Williamson, 2002).

In the future it will be important to introduce issues into the social work curriculum which show the consequences of the European integration process for the life of young people (as well as children and families) and which analyse and accompany this process from a critical point

of view. Developing a common basis for research, co-operation and training will be both the product and part of the process. In addition we must cope with relevant findings, concerning the lives of children, and youth. And it is not just the specifics of the social situations of children, young people and families that should be studied but also the broader context of this work, such as gender politics and ethical dimensions. Báñez and Ehlert, and Moussu discuss such contextualising dimensions in CHAPS. 2 and 4 respectively.

3 Families

Whether as an institution, a social network, or a system, the family has played a fundamental role as a provider of support and well-being, mainly in the education and care of children and elderly members. Of equal significance is its contribution to social cohesion, *picking up* where welfare systems often fall short. Yet, as much as it has endured over time, the family is also a dynamic entity susceptible to a changing economic, political and social environment. This flexibility can, of course, be a useful feature in a Europe of 450 million inhabitants, but it can also make the family *vulnerable* to greater, perhaps newer challenges arising in an enlarged and diversified Europe of 25 member-States.

The demographic changes in Europe have accentuated discussions on the very concept of family, its form, size and newfound connection to socio-economic struggles. And while trends like an aging population coupled with low fertility rates (European Commission, 2002), less marriages coupled with more divorces (EUROSTAT, 2003a), less young people living at home (EUROSTAT, 2003b), a growing number of single-parent homes of which 90% are women (EUROSTAT, 2004a), increased work outside normal daytime hours and during weekends (EUROSTAT, 2004b) form part of the discussion on families in Europe, the trends should not be seen as developments resulting from changes in “traditional” family models but rather as part of the same process of accommodation towards modernity.

To tackle these trends social work professionals are exploring new patterns of social welfare provision and intervention: family group conferencing and home training programmes, shifts in youth care provisions from (semi)residential care to the home, intensive aid for single parents, family preservation services and the formulation of national family policies all serve to illustrate the growing family perspective in practice. In this scenario, the family becomes not only an additional client for social workers but also a potential partner for tackling structural inadequacies – a de-

velopment that places considerable pressure on social workers to intervene in ways that are as diverse and complex as the issues at hand. Some of these issues are elucidated in this volume by Večkienė and Eidukevičiūtė (CHAP. 9), Rodríguez, Roldán, Nogués and Zamanillo (CHAP. 12), and by Fortunato (CHAP. 3).

The list of problems facing family life today is long and grows in pace with the demands for economic development and global competition. The entangling of economic and social policies becomes ever more apparent and is further evidenced by the current trade-offs being made between work and family. Likewise, a conclusion of the recent European surveys on “Quality of Life in Europe” states that, of all the policy measures to support families and children, European citizens identify the reduction of unemployment and an increased employment rate as the best (social) policy for everyone – families included (Krieger, 2004).

On the whole, the pressure to *be* and *do* more in a lifetime is leading to a redefinition of values (e.g. individualisation *vs* social responsibility), to changed roles (e.g. men *vs* women) and to a further consideration of life choices (family *vs* career). These same issues pose a difficulty for policy-makers and social work professionals alike, as personal choices are sized up against risks and as differentiated policy areas try to come together. Against this backdrop and coupled with social ills the likes of child and spouse abuse, youth crime, and poverty, it becomes more and more difficult to maintain the remnants of any kind of family life. In the face of these predicaments, issues affecting families are visible on current political agendas; systems are being adapted to consider the changing face of the family, namely, more women in the labour market, care-sharing responsibilities and provisions, nurturing environments for children. The potential of the family, regardless of form, is being acknowledged as an ally to tackle the effects of a declining welfare State.

The adaptation of the Treaties of the European Union has seen a gradual development in the provision of competencies for the European institutions on policy issues including social policy. And, while the challenges of family life in post-modern societies are drawn into EU social policy, there is no legal provision for, i.e. an EU family policy. For the most part, family issues are merged with issues of social exclusion, health care, (un)employment, and equal opportunities, while remaining delicate, *non-public* matters, which may partially explain the lack of explicit European provisions. There is of course also a wide range of existing measures tackling family concerns in the various 25 European member-States that are bound to the national context, i.e. the type of welfare regime. Such policy measures take into account the member-State’s specific level of economic development as well as the perception of its citi-

zens (Fahey, Spéder, 2004), hence the limited prospective for a single, all-embracing family policy for Europe's 25.

Needless to say, the lack of a defined European policy in this domain does not preclude the efforts of the sovereign member-States on matters of the family. The importance of a family life across Europe is not really questioned but its multidimensional character and embeddedness in various areas of welfare makes it less likely to be addressed on its own merit. In the end, the family question may be nothing else but the quest for ways to encourage members of society to contribute to the quality of life in Europe more fully.

4

The Social Work Profession

How we define social work is of course contentious and subject to much regional variation. Issues common to much of Europe are for example the boundaries of the profession. Who should be called a social worker? A volunteer in an NGO? A foster parent? Only someone with a master's degree in applied social sciences? This kind of debates is familiar and addressed in this book in CHAPS. 3 and 10, by Fortunato and by Dellgran and Höjer.

There are also region-specific issues to do with terminology and tasks; for example, the notion of social pedagogy is undergoing transformation. Parts of Europe have never adopted this as a category, whereas in other areas it is securely embedded, for example: "The German tradition of social pedagogy has become associated with social work" (Smith, 1999, p. 1). In addition, the meaning and the function of the term "social pedagogy" is subject to considerable variation in the countries in which it is used e.g. the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Hungary and the Baltic States and others. Friesenhahn and Kantowicz discuss this in CHAP. 11 with regard to Germany and Poland.

Social work is not just comprehensible via a consideration of its service users or indeed its policy context; social work also exists as a diverse profession in various states of development across Europe. Issues concerning generalism within practice *vs* speciality; professionalism *vs* "anti-expertism"; the rightful location of social work in State (statutory) or voluntary organisations or as market- and profit-oriented bodies are some of the key themes in European debates. Essays such as those by Dellgran and Höjer (CHAP. 10), and Fortunato (CHAP. 3) discuss this at more length. In relation to the status of professionals for example, the desirability and indeed possibility of addressing clients as equal partners

in the helping process is an aim realised to various degrees across Europe. Empowerment of service users is becoming a reality which both challenges and redefines professionalism in social work.

The conditions and context in which social work is undertaken are also a concern in this volume in terms of its status, gender issues, economic arrangements and organisational framing, all of which affect the delivery of social work. Gender issues, for example, still connect to the (low) status and the “maternal” expectations of social work in several European countries, as discussed by Báñez and Ehlert in relation to Spain and Germany (CHAP. 2). Professional issues also include the education and training of social workers. The relationship of theory to practice and the kinds of theory that can be drawn on have been a major pre-occupation of social work for many years and across national boundaries. Each generation discovers new ways of approaching social problems and currently ecological systems theory, evidence-based practice and critical social work are in the ascendance, although this varies across Europe. However an overall trend from input-based education (where the focus is on what students will be taught) to competence-based learning (where the focus is on the achieved outcomes) can perhaps be discerned more generally in social work education across Europe.

5 Conclusions

As is evident from the above, then, within the book’s three sections – contextual issues, practice issues and professional issues for social work with children, young people and families – many of the current debates within a European context are examined and discussed. This book, then, is very much the product of an ideological commitment to social work education in Europe, supported by the European Union’s educational funding initiatives, and reflecting the aim of increasing mutual understanding and integrated proactive development in this field. In some ways this follows an easy logic. Social work is an international activity, with many of the kinds of difficulties it attempts to ameliorate being of a universal nature. However it is the differing conditions of its delivery that make pan-European engagements of this nature stimulating, enlightening and mutually beneficial. The editors and authors maintain the hope that the volume will stimulate the desire for further enquiry into commonalities and differences in social work with children, young people and their families, as it has within the Thematic Network.

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