

## **Symposium Report**

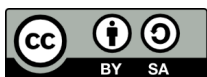
# **Human Rights and Social Work**

Critical Approaches for Social Work  
Education across Europe

### **Suggested Citation**

EASSW Special Interest Group Human Rights and Social Work (2024): Human Rights and Social Work. Critical Approaches for Social Work Education across Europe. Symposium Report.

<http://doi.org/10.58123/aliceopen-599>



This Symposium Report is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

**Symposium Report:**

**Human Rights and Social Work - Critical Approaches for Social Work Education Across Europe**

*Contributed by*

Sanela Bašić	University of Sarajevo
Marcin Boryczko	University of Gdańsk
Peter Dijkstra	Rotterdam University of Applied Science
Sharon du Plessis-Schneider	University of Applied Science Vorarlberg
Clodagh Geraghty	Atlantic Technological University
Jeannette Hartman	NHL Stenden University of Applied Science
Alex Klein	Saxion University of Applied Science
Mareike Niendorf	Alice Salomon University of Applied Science
Elke Plovie	UCLL University of Applied Sciences
Nivedita Prasad	Alice Salomon University of Applied Science
Didier Reynaert	HOGENT University of applied Sciences and Arts
Ingo Stamm	Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius, University of Jyväskylä
Michel Tirions	AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts

This project was made possible by funding from

***European Association of Schools of Social Work***

and with the kind support of

***HOGENT University of Applied Science and Arts.***

Published 20/06/2023

# CONTENTS

---

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the report .....	1
EASSW Special Interest Group: Aims and activities .....	1
Human rights (education) and social work .....	1
Symposium on Human Rights Education in Social Work at the HOGENT, Belgium, in 2022 ...	3
<b>Overview of the Implementation of Human Rights into Social Work Curricula at Selected European Universities.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Human Rights in Social Work Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case Study of Department of Social Work, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Integration of human rights in the bachelor’s study programme in social work.....	7
Integration of human rights in the master’s study programme in social work.....	8
Conclusion.....	8
<b>Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in Poland.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Teaching and curriculum in social work.....	10
Human rights at the University of Gdańsk.....	10
Conclusion.....	12
<b>Incorporating Human Rights Principles and Values in Social Work Education: Insights from the University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Foundations of rights-based education at the FHV .....	14
Bridging the dichotomy between human rights mechanisms and grassroots social work ..	17
Conclusion.....	17
<b>Introduction to the Education of Social Workers and Social Care Workers in Ireland ....</b>	<b>19</b>
Curriculum development in Ireland.....	20
Most recent update .....	20
Modules which should concentrate on human rights .....	21
Conclusion.....	21
<b>Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in the Netherlands.....</b>	<b>22</b>
Introduction .....	22
Human rights in the national educational profile social work.....	22
Integration of human rights in the bachelor programmes in social work at Universities of Applied Science.....	23
Conclusion.....	25
<b>Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin Germany .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Introduction .....	26
Human rights at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Science, Berlin .....	26
Bachelor degree social work at the ASH.....	27
Conclusion.....	27

<b>Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in Flanders .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Introduction .....	29
Qualification framework for social work education in Flanders.....	30
Human rights in the qualification framework for social work education.....	30
Human rights in educational programmes for bachelors in Flanders.....	31
<b>Human Rights Education in Social Work Study Programmes in Finland.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Introduction to social work education in Finland.....	33
Overview on human rights education in Finnish social work study programmes.....	33
Conclusion.....	34
<b>Conclusion and outcomes of the symposium.....</b>	<b>35</b>
Similarities in human rights implementation in social work courses .....	<b>36</b>
Requirements for a more comprehensive implementation in social work courses .....	<b>37</b>
Conclusion and further steps .....	<b>38</b>

# INTRODUCTION

---

## Background of the report

The present report is based on the work of a group of scholars from across Europe (supported by several scholars from outside of Europe), who share an interest in human rights and human rights-based social work, and its implementation in social work education. In the beginning, the group was formed mainly with scholars from Belgium and the Netherlands (Reynaert et al., 2018). At the European Conference on Social Work Education in Madrid 2019, the group expanded both in personnel and content. This resulted in an online symposium in September 2020 with contributions by German, Belgium, US-American and Dutch scholars. After organizing the online symposium, it was decided to apply to become an official Special Interest Group (SIG) within the EASSW, and this was established in 2022.

## EASSW Special Interest Group: Aims and activities

The primary aim of the EASSW SIG is to strengthen European-wide collaborations between social work scholars engaged (or interested in) human rights education (HRE) in social work. The objective is to share knowledge, empower each other, to promote and improve human rights teaching in social work. The SIG is directed towards social work educators and students, researchers and, potentially, practitioners. The SIG aims to assess how human rights are understood and the didactic approaches used in human rights education in social work in Europe. The work of the group includes the assessment of the current situation and promotion of the comprehensive and consistent implementation of human rights in social work transnationally. The overarching goal is the promotion of a human rights culture in schools of social work and to make a contribution towards the full realization of human rights.

The SIG holds regular online meetings and joint events, such as workshops at European social work conferences. Further planned activities are:

- to develop a database of existing approaches used in human rights education in social work that includes research and practice concepts pertaining to the nexus of human rights and social work;
- to strengthen joint teaching through exchanges and the development of joint courses; and,
- to promote cross disciplinary collaboration, engagement with civil society and social citizen/clients of social work and social service organizations.

Before we continue to describe the symposium that the report originates from, the field of human rights-based social work and human rights education in social work will be elaborated further.

## Human rights (education) and social work

Social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century goes hand in hand with human rights. Human rights and social justice are the overarching, universal principles of the social work profession and discipline. Social work is a human rights profession, as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has already proclaimed in the 1980s. For example, the centrality of human rights in social work is manifested in the IFSW and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) Global Definition of Social Work (2014), and the complementary documents: the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IFSW, 2018) and the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (IASSW et

al., 2012). Based on these international guidelines, many national social work codes of ethics emphasize human rights as the foundation of social work. Likewise, the revised Global Standards for Social Work Teaching and Training (2020) highlights the crucial role of human rights. Hence, social work educators are obligated through their professional and ethical commitment to integrate human rights principles and values into bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

The important role of human rights in social work has a long tradition that can be traced back to the roots of professional social work at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in various regions of the world. Today, social work scholars from around the world commit to the promotion of human rights in reference to certain vulnerable groups. In this sense, social workers position themselves as defenders of human rights and advocates for the rights of the people they engage with. However, at the same time, social workers can be perpetrators of human rights violations, for example, when violating the human rights of service users, e.g. through unthoughtful decisions and/or taking ethical stands that are problematic. It is at the core of the idea of social work as a human rights profession that all social workers need to critically reflect on their potential involvement in or contribution to human rights violations, especially as social workers often address people in vulnerable situations who are more likely to be affected by discrimination and other human rights violations. The diverse, and at times contested roles, social workers take on, make human rights education in social work a top priority. Thus, human rights are the fundamental ethical basis for the self-appointed third mandate of professional social work, a term coined by Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2016). This professional mandate can contrast with the mandates given by powerful parties, e.g., the state or public institutions, which could lead to ethical dilemmas for social workers in their everyday practice. Human rights are an ethical and normative framework to assist social workers in difficult situations, and in instances when they are confronted with opposing mandates. Human rights can be applied as analytical tools and used to address conflicting interests of the state and the people they work with (Prasad, 2018). For example, they offer a basis to empower the clients of social workers. Implementing a human rights perspective on social work leads inevitably to a structural perspective promoting social change on a global scale, by directing social workers towards structural problems instead of the personification of social problems or demonizing clients for alleged "deviant behaviour". Advocacy is another important aspect of human rights in social work. Advocacy for systemic change is a significant means of promoting social justice and protecting the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Through activities at the micro, mezzo, and macro intervention levels, social workers engage with individuals and communities to identify structural barriers that impede the realization of human rights and devise strategies to address them (Du Plessis-Schneider, 2020; Prasad, 2023). These activities require knowledge and skills to recognize and address how social problems are interconnected and intersect.

Human rights education is central to social work education and research. To be successful in this endeavour it requires teaching frameworks and didactical concepts that position human rights principles and values at the core of bachelor's and master's degree programmes in a way that is understandable and applicable. The relevance of human rights in social work education is clear in the view of a multitude of theoretical and professional sources (UN, 1994; Staub-Bernasconi, 2008; McPherson & Abell, 2012; IASSW & IFSW, 2020). However, human rights are not systemically integrated in social work education yet and discussions around how to incorporate human rights in social work curricula are ongoing. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN, 2011) defines Human Rights Education (HRE) as education *about* (human rights knowledge and values), *through* (educational settings that respect the rights of educators and learners) and *for* human rights (empowering persons to exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others). This model can provide helpful perspectives on how to systemically implement HRE in social work schools, not only focusing on the improvement of knowledge transfer and critical thinking but also turning social work schools into more inclusive non-discriminatory, participatory spaces as well as operationalizing human rights as a point of reference for social work practice. Especially the question of how to transfer knowledge on human rights to social work practice and, so, to real-life social problems remains mainly unanswered thus far. Accordingly, from the perspective of schools of social work, the question of how to systematize existing models for the implementation of human rights in social work education is key. Human rights require interdisciplinary collaboration and skills to strengthen and embed human rights in social work education.

## **Symposium on Human Rights Education in Social Work at the HOGENT, Belgium, in 2022**

In 2021, the group of scholars who composed the successful EASSW SIG application also received project funding from the EASSW for organizing a two-day in-person symposium. The goal of the symposium firstly consisted of presentations on different approaches to teaching human rights in social work. The second part of the symposium focused on differences and similarities among the involved scholars and European schools of social work, with the aim of identifying overarching commonalities.

The symposium took place at the HOGENT in Belgium, from September 30 to October 1, 2022, and was organized by Didier Reynaert, as main scholar in Gent, with Alexander Klein and Ingo Stamm as additional co-organizers. The symposium hosted around 17 participants from across Europe, including local scholars and students. At its core was the question of how human rights are implemented in the curricula of social work study programmes, mainly focusing on bachelor level. At the symposium, presentations were given by scholars from Poland, Finland, Austria, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The report at hand summarizes these country-specific presentations, complemented by reports on human rights education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ireland. All country-specific reports are structured along the following questions:

- Who is responsible for the presented curricula (for example, a specific university, a national/regional government board or an association)?
- When was it last updated? At what frequency is it revised?
- In which modules are human rights explicitly mentioned?
- In which modules are human rights implicitly mentioned?
- In which modules do you presume or have the impression that human rights are being dealt with? On what is this impression based?
- Do you and/or your colleagues deal with human rights in social work education? If yes, in which modules?
- According to your understanding, which modules should concentrate on human rights?

After the country-specific reports from the above mentioned eight European countries, we summarize the results and, in the concluding chapter, develop key points for a framework for the implementation of human rights in social work education.

### ***References***

- Du Plessis-Schneider, S. (2020). The social problems of marginalised child asylum seekers: Advancing critical reflection on children's rights in undergraduate social work education, In G. André & A. Jesus (Eds.), *Social work, human rights and intercultural relations* (pp. 52-74). Universidade Católica.
- IASSW & IFSW. (2020). *Global standards for social work education and training*. [https://www.iassw-aiets.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IASSW-Global\\_Standards\\_Final.pdf](https://www.iassw-aiets.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IASSW-Global_Standards_Final.pdf)
- IASSW, IFSW, & ICSW. (2012). *The global agenda for social work and social development. commitment to action*. <https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/ifsw-cdn/assets/globalagenda2012.pdf>
- IFSW. (2018). *Global social work statement of ethical principles*. <https://www.ifsw.org/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles/>
- IFSW & IASSW. (Eds.). (2014). *Global definition of social work. Commentary notes for the global definition of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>



- McPherson, J., & Abell, N. (2012). Human rights engagement and exposure: New scales to challenge social work education. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 22(6), 704-713.
- Prasad, N. (2018). Statt einer Einführung: Menschenrechtsbasierte, professionelle und rassismuskritische Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten. In N. Prasad (Ed.), *Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten: Rassismuskritisch, professionell, menschenrechtsorientiert* (pp. 9-29). Budrich.
- Prasad, N. (Ed.). (2023). Methoden struktureller Veränderung in der Sozialen Arbeit. UTB / Budrich.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2008) Menschenrechte in ihrer Relevanz für die Soziale Arbeit als Theorie und Praxis. *Zeitschrift Widersprüche*, 107, 9-32.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2016). Social work and human rights: Linking two traditions of human rights in social work. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1(1), 40–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-016-0005-0>
- United Nations. (Ed.). (1994). Human rights and social work: A manual for schools of social work and the social work profession. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training1en.pdf>
- United Nations. (Ed.). (2011). *United Nations declaration on human rights education and training*.  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/11-united-nations-declaration-human-rights-education-and-training-2011>

# **OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS INTO SOCIAL WORK CURRICULA AT SELECTED EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

---

# **Human Rights in Social Work Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Case Study of Department of Social Work, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo**

*Sanela Bašić, University of Sarajevo*

Social work education in BiH was introduced in 1958, with the establishment of the College for Social Workers (in Sarajevo) which provided a two-year study programme in social work for future professionals in social protection/welfare. The introduction of social work was part of a larger socialist/communist modernization and emancipation project within which the most important social innovation was invention/discovery of social policy/welfare state as a political and social framework for the social work profession.

In the following decades, social work in Bosnia and Herzegovina has undergone full professionalization through academization. In 1985, the College for Social Workers merged with the Faculty of Political Sciences, and a social work department was formed as a fifth department under the Faculty's roof. Since then, students have been able to study up to graduate level; with a four year degree study programme in "Diplome social worker" the university has opened new perspectives for specialist and magister studies, and also, since 1989, to postgraduate level with the opportunity of undertaking a PhD in social work.

Currently, the education system of social workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina is located within the university. In the post-war period, new schools of social work emerged: along with the Faculty of Political Sciences, there are currently three schools/departments of social work at the University of Tuzla, Banja Luka and Mostar as well as fourth school which offers a combined degree in sociology and social work at the University of Eastern Sarajevo/Pale. Each school offers BA and MA study programmes in social work, with the duration of 3+1 or 4+1 study years. The responsibility for development, preparation and implementation of educational plans and programmes in social work at bachelor, master, and doctoral levels lies within respective departments/faculties/universities (faculty staff in specific discipline). There are no national (higher) education guidelines nor a national educational profile for social work. Even though all four schools of social work have included human rights in their curricula, present analysis will focus on the experience and practice of the social work department at the Faculty of Political Sciences in the University of Sarajevo.

Unsurprisingly, human rights gained relevance and importance in the aftermath of the war, as there was a huge need to address human rights violations committed during the war (transitional justice) as well as create pre-conditions for a peaceful future built on the rule of law and culture of human rights. In the absence of other applicable models, academics at the Faculty of Political Sciences considered (higher) education as a tool for reconciliation, justice, democratization, and active citizenship, and consequently adopted a human rights perspective. To support this struggle against discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion, by the beginning of millennium, within the four year study programme (Diplome degree) in social work, a group of new courses (obligatory or elective) has been introduced, such as *Social Work with Youth in the Conflict with Law*, *Social Work with Persons with Disabilities*, *Domestic Violence*, *Social Work with Marginalized Groups* - with a strong reference to relevant national and international human rights standards applicable to referent group/category of social work service users.

The next crucial change in curriculum development occurred in the context of the Bologna reform. The "Bologna process" asked for a higher level of convergence within the European higher education area in two main aspects: a) adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; and b) adoption of a system based on three main levels of study (bachelor, master and doctoral), and establishment of a joint ECTS credit system. To meet these requirements, the University of Sarajevo fully re-organized its system of higher education from the 2005/06 academic year. The two-tier structured - first (three years) and second (two years) cycle of study - was introduced, and the curricula aligned with proclaimed European standards.

This meant, practically, that for the first time since the introduction of social work education, social work professionals were excluded from curriculum development: the changes in the study regimes were related to adjustments of the higher education system in general. This was a clear break from previous socialist periods when changes of social work curricula were proceeded by country-wide empirical research on the knowledge, skills, and competencies of social work professionals in different practice fields, and in close partnership with practice institutions.

However, there was also a positive aspect of this reform: the opportunity to develop a contemporary concept of social work education, and social work educators at the Department of Social Work seized this opportunity to actively promote an emerging global shift to a human rights approach. At the Faculty of Political Science in the University of Sarajevo, the bachelor's and master's degree programmes in social work are offered on a full-time and part-time basis, with a total enrolment rate of 300 students. The responsibility for curriculum development lies within the university/faculty/department. Since the introduction of Bologna study programmes, three major changes in the curriculum have been conducted, with the last taking place in the 2019/2020 academic year.

In her general account, Bašić asserted that the “social work curriculum offers more specialized human rights modules, which centre specific social issues (such as poverty, disability or interpersonal violence) and/or specific populations (children and youth, women, disabled, elderly) and offer a detailed review and understanding of the applicable international and domestic human rights standards used to assess the living conditions of a service users, to identify context-driven human rights violations and coping strategies, and to develop methods for action” (Bašić, 2022, p. 72).

A more detailed overview of the human rights content in social work education programmes is as follows:

### **Integration of human rights in the bachelor's study programme in social work**

In the current curriculum of the Bachelor of Social Work from 2019/2020, human rights content is explicitly mentioned in following courses:

*Introduction to Social Policy* – the course provides an overview of relevant international and regional (European) human rights instruments, including Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Convention on the Rights of a Child, European Social Charter, etc. As part of exam requirements, students are asked to select two to four rights from a chosen human rights document and examine the state of realization/violation in a national context.

*Social and legal protection* – the aim of the course is to acquaint students with theoretical knowledge and professional practice aimed at protecting the rights of social protection beneficiaries, in accordance with the relevant laws in the field of social protection, protection of civilian victims of war and protection of families with children in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*Social Work with Persons with Disabilities* – along with national legislation, international documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are presented and discussed.

*Labour and Social Law* – to acquire necessary knowledge in the field of administration, students study substantive labour law, and the basics of substantive and procedural social law.

*Family Law* – the aim of the course is to acquaint students with the content of the institute of marriage/family law in accordance with the provisions of the family legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a brief overview of the regulation of individual institutions in international documents and in the legal systems of European countries.

*Youth Delinquency* – among others, the goal of the course is for students to acquire basic knowledge about international instruments in social work with minors in conflict with the law.

Implicitly, human rights are addressed in the modules on *social work with elderly* and *social work with families*.

## **Integration of human rights in the master's study programme in social work**

In the present master's study programme, the most prominent place regarding human rights integration has the course on *Human Rights and Social Work*.

The course is intended to familiarize students with the international human rights system and introduce social work as a human rights profession from a historical perspective, and to scrutinize the opportunities of social work practice to integrate social rights along with empowerment and advocacy.

Additionally, human rights are explicitly present in the courses on:

*Poverty and Social Exclusion* – apart from relevant contemporary conceptualizations of poverty, the understanding of poverty as violating human rights is advocated. The central topic is human dignity and access to (economic, social and cultural) rights and having a voice (representation of the poor) necessary to promote freedom, well-being and dignity of individuals/families/communities.

*Domestic Violence* – whose aim is, inter alia, to prepare students for social work with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. International human rights standards of protection against domestic violence are taken as a point of departure in presenting, discussing, and evaluating a national framework for support and protection as well as social work practice in this professional area.

*Ethics in Social Work* – the course offers relevant knowledge in the field of philosophy of ethics and morality, with particular reference to the values of the social work profession, professional standards, ethics and the application of ethical principles in practice; critical consideration of contemporary challenges in practice and research in social work through the prism of social work ethics, including human rights.

*Selected Institutes of Family Law* – focus is placed on the legal study of the relationship between family members. Students are acquiring practical skills of applying legal regulations to individual cases, in accordance with the practice of the European Court of Human Rights, in safeguarding the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

*International Social Policies* – the course aims to provide basic knowledge about developing countries and the social problems they face, as well as basic knowledge about the origin and development of the European Union, its institutions, important documents, and activities in the field of welfare policy.

## **Conclusion**

As elaborated above, human rights perspective is deeply integrated within our social work curricula. This pedagogical shift towards human rights, e.g. “presenting, analysing and teaching social issues from a human rights perspective has provided a new and powerful lens through which social work educators can ask students to examine everyday injustices in the social work context” (Bašić, 2022, p. 71), has clearly contributed to socialization with and greater awareness of human rights among students. In turn, this has the potential of raising their accountability when working with victims of human rights abuses. However, a negative side effect that we could not anticipate is the widening gap between the human rights paradigm that we promote in the education system and social work professionals adhering to a needs-based paradigm. In diverse fields of professional practice, social workers feel that they are obliged to follow and implement national legislation and procedures not (international) human rights. As the welfare system within which social work is positioned is highly fragmented (policies, laws, procedures) and often openly discriminatory towards different groups of service users, social workers are trapped into situations in which they are responsible for implementing unjust and discriminatory policies, laws, and procedures that obviously contravene (international) human rights standards. When on field placement, students report on the discrepancies between what we teach and what social workers do in practice (“how social work should be done” and “how social work is being done”).

Therefore, the most important question for the future would be how to engage with this problem in a constructive and action-oriented way, e.g. how to work towards better integration of those two professional approaches to contribute to a more prosperous, inclusive, and just society. In my understanding, what is missing in the current approach to social work education that might eventually explain the limited impact our pedagogical shift has had on professional practice is a poor integration of

both micro and macro perspectives in social work. These linkages are not made in straightforward, coherent, and systematic ways as to allow students to learn how to effectively address different kinds of social issues and improve social conditions by linking micro (interpersonal practice/case work) with community work, policy development and social action.

### ***References***

Bašić, S. (2022). Pathways to a rights-based paradigm in social work. The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In V. Krasniqi & J. McPherson (Eds.), *Human rights in the age of uncertainty – Social work approaches and practice from Southeast Europe* (pp. 61–88). Springer.

# Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in Poland

*Marcin Boryczko, University of Gdańsk*

## Teaching and curriculum in social work

In Poland, social work is taught at the master's and bachelor's degree levels of higher education. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education is in charge of the curricula, and in 2006 it established mandatory criteria for all educational institutions. The social work curriculum is divided into two groups of instructional material: basic and specialized. The first category consists of information on psychology, law, economics, management, and social science research methods. The scope of the specialized content included the following subjects: an introduction to social work, social work procedures, knowledge of human development throughout the life cycle, social concerns, and social policy. Furthermore, the ministerial regulations define the learning objectives for each subject and are examined by the Polish Accreditation Committee, which should be assumed to be an independent institution dedicated to quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. The Ministry of Family and Social Policy's regulations that specify curriculum standards contain a required set of modules as well as the option for the University Curriculum Council to choose which modules to include. Human rights play a marginal role in the obligatory part of the curriculum (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2021, October 28).

On a broad scale, we note that despite the rising public awareness of the value of human rights-based social work, neither of the Polish institutions adequately integrates HR into their courses, nor do social work academics address such topics. This may come as a surprise given that the minimum programme for the first degree in social work, as stipulated by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, calls for a 10-hour module on *Professional ethics and human rights* (Rozporządzenie Ministra Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, 2012). In the case of postgraduate studies, the regulation from 2021 introduces minimum requirements for the curriculum in postgraduate studies in the methodology and practice of social work in a university pursuing studies in the field of social work is the requirement to complete the course in fundamental rights and freedoms of humans (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2021, May 8).

On a micro level, the university bodies, in this example the Programme Councils, which are the so-called bodies examining social work programmes at the university level, are accountable for curriculum development. They are composed of Faculty members (lecturers and researchers in social work), students, employers' representatives (e.g. NGOs, Social Welfare Centres), and local community representatives. The Student Parliament and the University Council should accept the final version of the curriculum or any improvements. The Polish Accreditation Committee for Social Work evaluates the curriculum; hence, the rationale for revising the curriculum may potentially be the Committee's decision. In the situation where a lecturer has to alter the syllabus's material or governmental rules affect the learning mode, it is also feasible that the curriculum will be changed as needed once a year, prior to the following school year.

## Human rights at the University of Gdańsk

The University of Gdańsk, currently the largest institution in the Pomeranian area, has a significant impact on the advancement of science and higher education as well as the development of contemporary Poland. With over 25 thousand undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate students and over 1,700 academic staff members teaching them, we have 11 faculties in such fields of study as Biology, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Oceanography, Quantum Physics, Social Work, Pedagogy, Psychology, Law and Economic Sciences. The University of Gdańsk is one of the best educational institutions in Poland.

Government regulations are reflected in the curriculum's organisational structure. The Polish Accreditation Committee's report, which outlines the standards for both the current bachelor's and master's programmes, was recently (2023) approved by the University Programme Council, which opted to revise and implement both programmes. The Human Rights-Based Social Work course, offered

at the graduate and master's levels, expressly teaches human rights. It is regarded as a 30-hour course that covers the following topics: i) the rights of citizens and the welfare state; ii) human rights - history and modernity; iii) needs and human rights; iv) the implementation of human rights through social work; v) respect for human rights in social work; vi) ethical dilemmas and human rights in social work.

The following courses address the implicit inclusion of human rights subject in BA and MA modules:

*Table 1. Implicit human rights content*

<b>Course name</b>	<b>content</b>
Philosophical foundations of social work (BA and MA)	Stoicism – universal law and individual rights Natural law as a basis of fundamental rights Social contract and natural law
Professional ethics (BA)	Human dignity and rights of the individuals
International social work (BA and MA)	Humanitarian and international law, global definition of social work, human rights as a basis of social work
Social work with identity and difference (BA and MA)	Social work with LGBTQ+ based on human rights and recognition
Social policy (BA and MA)	Human rights, and workers’ rights as pillars of the welfare state
Social work with refugees and forced migrants (BA and MA)	Refugees’ rights, right to asylum, rights of displaced people
Social work with persons with disability (BA and MA)	Rights of people with disabilities
Anti-discriminatory and antiracist social work (BA and MA)	Rights of minorities, rights for expression of identity and culture

My view is that some modules ought to emphasize human rights. Consider the following subjects as suggestions for expanding current courses with a human rights emphasis.



Table 2. Subjects to emphasize human rights additionally.

Course name	Suggested topics
Education for Sustainable Development (BA)	Environmental rights as human rights
The law in social work (BA)	Social rights
Community development (BA and MA)	Community rights
Practice with people in the homelessness crisis (BA and MA)	Rights to housing
New media and social exclusion (BA)	Digital rights
Critical and emancipatory pedagogy (BA)	Human rights as a discursive basis for critical and emancipatory practice
Theories of Poverty and Social Practices Towards the poor (BA)	Rights to a decent life, rights of the poor
Social gerontology	Rights of older people
The social consequence of climate change	Environmental and minority rights, Indigenous population rights, social rights.

## Conclusion

Although Poland has ratified a number of important human rights conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (commonly known as the European Convention on Human Rights), human rights as a central pillar of society appears to be under threat. A prime example of this is the European Convention on Human Rights, which the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, under the control of the populist government of Morawiecki, has questioned and declared to be unconstitutional (Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej RPO, 2022). There is noticeable scepticism among right-wing populists regarding human rights since, in their view, rights and liberties should be allocated by centralized political forces that represent “people”. This political attitude towards human rights is reflected in the social work curricula that generally do not include this perspective in their programmes. However, there are some exceptions such as a social work programme at the University of Gdańsk where the Human Rights-Based Social Work course has been developed and integrated within the curriculum. Furthermore, the Polish central government oversees not only the rules governing social work education but also the make-up of the Accreditation Committees, which scrutinize the programmes on the level of results. The University of Gdańsk is an example that must be seen as exceptional in the context of the Polish political situation since it stems from the pro-democratic and anti-populist political climate that is present in the Pomeranian area, where the University is located.

## References

- Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej RPO. (2022, March 11). *Trybunał Konstytucyjny ponownie orzekł o niekonstytucyjności Europejskiej Konwencji Praw Człowieka. RPO wnosil o umorzenie sprawy* [The Constitutional Tribunal again ruled on the unconstitutionality of the European Convention on Human Rights]. <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-tk-wyrok-etpcz-prawo-do-sadu>
- Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2021, October 28). *Rozporządzenie Ministra Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 22 października 2021 r. w sprawie minimalnych wymogów programowych dla studiów podyplomowych z zakresu metodyki i metodologii pracy socjalnej w uczelni realizującej studia na kierunku praca socjalna lub w zakresie pracy socjalnej* [Regulation of the Minister of Family and Social Policy of 22 October 2021 on minimum programme requirements for postgraduate studies in the field of methodology and methodology of social work in a university pursuing studies in the field of social work or in the field of social work]. <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20210001962>
- Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. (2012, May 8). *Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 17 kwietnia 2012 r. w sprawie specjalizacji w zawodzie pracownik socjalny* [Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 17 April 2012 on specialization in the social worker profession]. <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20120000486>

# **Incorporating Human Rights Principles and Values in Social Work Education: Insights from the University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria**

*Sharon du Plessis-Schneider, University of Applied Science Vorarlberg*

This report constitutes an overview of the rationale for embedding human rights principles and values in the social work bachelor's and master's degree programmes at the Austrian University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg (FHV). The areas where this focus is especially prominent will be discussed alongside the pedagogy of rights-based education to prepare social work students for their professional practice and research pathways.

## **Foundations of rights-based education at the FHV**

One of the earliest applications of rights-based social work education at the FHV was in 2006. This took place through the modification of a case management course to incorporate human rights and social diagnosis titled *Human Rights-based Case Management* (Schneider, 2006). The course was developed in collaboration with Silvia Staub-Bernasconi as a research project in the Master of Social Work Zentrum für Postgraduale Studien Sozialer Arbeit, Berlin. Since 2012, the nexus between ethical and human rights principles of inherent dignity of persons, needs as legitimation of the universality of human rights and social justice has been at the core of teaching human rights in the social work bachelor's and master's programmes.

*Table 3* outlines the duration and degree programme – bachelor's and master's - and a description of the semester, the course title, and the course offerings which commenced in 2006. *In brief:*

- human services engage with the provision of support and assistance to children, youth, and families and are positioned within in the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989).
- for ethics, social work methods such as case work and case management, culturally sensitive social work, ecological social work, and international perspectives on social work are positioned within the overarching framework of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948).
- Human dignity is a cross-cutting theme. Considering this, the significance of the pioneers of social work and their contributions to upholding human dignity is explored in the social work introductory course. Human dignity is a main area of focus in examining the role of social workers in addressing human rights violations, such as apartheid in South Africa, the colonial history of Australia (specifically the stolen generations), and the impact of Austrian fascism (UDHR).

Table 1. Human rights related courses

Duration	Degree Programme	Description
2006-2009	Bachelor	2nd semester: human rights-based case management UDHR.
2011-2013	Bachelor	2nd semester: social work and human rights services for children, youth, and families UNCRC.
2012-2020	Bachelor	2nd semester: family counselling, ethics, and human rights UDHR.
2013-2022	Bachelor	2nd semester: casework: ethical dilemmas and human rights principles and values UDHR.
2014-2022	Bachelor	4th semester: international (conducted in English and German): Social work and human rights historical overview, <i>social justice walks</i> in Ravensburg (Germany), Bragga and Lisboa (Portugal) UDHR. Transcultural dialogue - <i>lessons learned and righting wrongs</i> . Peer-to-peer action platform (service delivery concepts) UDHR. <i>Ecological social work</i> (focus on the third generation of UDHR, collective rights). Human rights as a global focus: 1) <i>truth and reconciliation commission</i> (post-Apartheid, democratic South Africa) and 2) <i>First Nations People in Australia, decolonising social work</i> (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous, 2007) (UNDRIP) (Bennett & Gates, 2022, 2021). Portuguese social work perspectives: <i>ethics and human rights</i> UDHR and UNCRC. <i>Human need and human rights grassroots</i> workshop UDHR.
	Bachelor	1st semester: theory I: social work pioneers and human dignity; Austrian fascism and social (care)workers; <i>human dignity and human rights in the second Republic of Austria</i> UDHR.
	Bachelor	3rd semester: theory III: <i>Systems theory paradigm of professional social work, three-step approach interlinked with</i> UNCRC.
	Master	1st semester: <i>social work and human rights, global theoretical perspectives, and systems theory paradigm of professional social work</i> UDHR.
	Master	2nd semester: human rights and gender UDHR.
	Master	2nd semester: <i>interdisciplinary intensive week on human rights and professional ethos</i> UDHR.

The design, content and sequencing of the courses in *Table 1* are predominately educator-led. The scope of human rights incorporated in the curricula is at the discretion of the course coordinator, thereby rendering it susceptible to modification in tandem with teaching staff changes.

At the FHV, the educational baseline of rights-based social work is scientific knowledge for professional integrity through systematically guiding students to expand their knowledge of the theory and practice in a tangible way over that of abstract or normative concepts. The aim is to provide students with opportunities to further develop their professional skills and competencies as a requirement to remedy the complexities of contemporary multifaceted social problems – a crucial area of engagement for rights-based social work education. Ethics and human rights are interwoven in the lecture content, project work and assessments (Staub-Bernasconi, 2018). Hence, human rights are taught pivotally to social workers' specific contexts and issues. To facilitate this process, practical activities such as a *social justice walk* were developed to position human rights as the linkage across different courses such as ethics, social justice and transcultural dialogue. The fundamental premise behind integrating human rights principles and values into the course content is to provide students with the opportunity to engage with the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice and policy (Gil, 2013). It is with this social and political backdrop that advocacy and activism are understood (Alinsky, 1971). This is showcased through diverse teaching approaches that span community organising efforts, legislative advocacy, and other forms of advocacy to promote social justice and protect the rights of marginalized and vulnerable peoples. The ethical principles and standards that promote social justice and defend the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations are embedded in the human rights content. These ethical principles and standards are reflected in the codes of ethics of professional organisations such as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (IFSW, 2014). The Austrian Association of Social Work (OBDS) aligns with the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IFSW, 2018) to emphasize promoting social justice and human rights in social work. This requires that social work professionals have the knowledge and skills to integrate human rights principles and values into their work.

At the FHV, students are guided in interpreting human rights to exercise professional discretion effectively. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) serves as an example of recognising the child's right to be heard in all matters that concern them. While young people's voices are paramount, when facilitating children's voices across the various developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, there are practical considerations that social workers are required to navigate. In reflecting on these concerns, students at the FHV examine Article 12 of the UNCRC and identify and explain the social structures that facilitate or hinder them from exercising their voices and being heard in a way that is meaningful to young people (Du Plessis-Schneider, 2020). For students, this process starts with reading and interpreting the UNCRC, critically reflecting on human rights protections, and promoting young people's voices. The Convention is applied to theoretical case studies to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the UNCRC and its implications. Interventions are developed on the micro, mezzo, and macro practice levels and reflected within the framework of the UNCRC. In doing so, the critical issues of social work as a human rights profession, as defined by the IFSW/IASSW (2014), can be identified, and students gain working knowledge across the international human rights documents, treaties, and mechanisms. The example mentioned earlier incorporates the need to include the UNCRC into the curriculum so that students can learn to identify and address situations where the rights of individuals and communities are at risk of violation and develop effective strategies for promoting social justice and protecting human rights.

Similarly, research in social work and human rights is to be guided by ethical principles and standards that promote social justice and protect the rights of research participants. At the FHV, students engaged in research are supported to recognize and address how research can perpetuate oppression and exploitation, and develop strategies for promoting ethical research practices that promote social justice and protect the rights of research participants. Student feedback has confirmed that this approach is helpful in identifying the root causes of social problems and developing effective strategies for addressing these issues. This extends to other research focuses, such as evaluative research, which helps social work professionals evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions and identify areas for improvement. In conducting research, students are guided to develop knowledge in social work and human rights.

## **Bridging the dichotomy between human rights mechanisms and grassroots social work**

There is debate among the educators at the FHV broadly concerning two directions in human rights education for social work students. *Firstly*, the acquisition of acknowledgement about mechanisms of global human rights developments and practices in Geneva, i.e., human rights legislative frameworks, policy applications and their implications. Limitations: while this is essential to lay the groundwork for, and to develop further, human rights, it may be removed from the reality of what is happening on the ground. *Secondly*, grassroots movements and community-based organisations are critical in promoting human rights and social justice. By working collaboratively with movements and organizations, social work professionals can better advocate for the grassroots requirements of marginalized and vulnerable populations (Ife, 2004). Likewise, social workers engage directly with individuals and communities, and can provide insights into the practical problems and opportunities for promoting and protecting human rights. In connecting human biological, psychological, and social needs (Obrecht, 2009; Du Plessis-Schneider, 2020) with human rights entitlements, the promotion and protection of human rights in social work are Ganzheitlich (holistic).

## **Conclusion**

At the FHV, the first step in teaching students about social work as a human rights profession is to work through the historical development of human rights and the overlap with social work's mandate to promote social justice as an agent of social change. To emphasize, social work's promotion of social justice and human rights requires that students integrate human rights principles and values into their assessments, project work and research and practice to enable individuals and communities to claim their human rights and promote social justice by addressing the structural barriers that prevent the realisation of human rights.

Human rights principles and values provide social workers with a framework for promoting the well-being of individuals and communities, and advocating for systemic change to address the root causes of social problems. Social work students play a critical role in human rights realisation by providing support and resources to individuals and communities advocating for systemic change to address the root causes of social problems. Likewise, students focus on the social work triple mandate as agents of social change, which involves liberating social citizens or clients (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016, 2010, 2007; IFSW, 2014). In doing so, centrality is focused on advocacy and identifying, describing, and explaining the root causes or causality of social problems to address the systemic issues and promote systemic change. Thus, advocacy is a critical component of social work and is essential for promoting social justice and protecting the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Social workers can significantly contribute to building more equitable and just societies by promoting social justice and protecting people's rights.

Social workers are guided by ethical principles and standards that promote social justice and protect the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Incorporating human rights principles and values into social work education is thus critical for promoting social justice, protecting the rights of marginalized and vulnerable people, and serving social citizens. In line with this perspective, educators at the FHV provide students with comprehensive support to acquire the scientific knowledge, know-how, and skills to integrate human rights principles and values into their practice, including research methodologies.

## References

- Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A practical primer for realistic radicals*. Random House.
- Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2022). Teaching and learning cultural humility: Lessons in knowing, being, and doing. In D. Baines, N. Clark, & B. Bennett (Eds.), *Doing anti-oppressive social work: Rethinking theory and practice* (pp. 77–95). Fernwood.
- Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2021). *Working towards cultural responsiveness and inclusion in Australia: The re-indigenization of social work education*. *Social Work & Policy Studies: Social Justice, Practice and Theory*, 4(2).  
<https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/SWPS/article/view/15288>
- Du Plessis-Schneider, S. (2020). The social problems of marginalised child asylum seekers: Advancing critical reflection on children's rights in undergraduate social work education. In G. André & A. Jesus (Eds.), *Social work, human rights and intercultural relations* (pp. 52-74). Universidade Católica.
- Ife, J. (2004, April). *Linking community development and human rights* [Paper presentation]. The Community Development, Human Rights and the Grassroots Conference, Deakin University, USA.
- Gil, D. (2013). *Confronting social injustice: Concepts and strategies for social workers*. Columbia University.
- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). (2018). *Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles*. <https://tinyurl.com/5p5w4faz>
- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). (2014). *Global Definition of Social Work*. <<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>
- Obrecht, W. (2009) *Was braucht der Mensch?* Erweiterte Fassung eines Vortrags gehalten an der Konferenz zum 100jährigen Jubiläum der Medico-Sociale Luxemburg, 1. Oktober 2008. Niederwil, (Wattwil) 5.10.2009.
- Schneider, S. (2006, May 17). *Menschenrechte und case management* [Human rights and case management] [Presentation & panel discussion]. The Euregio-Ring Conference, University of Applied Sciences Ravensburg-Weingarten (D).
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2016). *Social work and human rights—Linking two traditions of human rights in social work*. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1(1), 40–49.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2010). Human rights: Facing dilemmas between universalism and pluralism/contextualism. In D. Zavirsek, B. Rommelspacher, & S. Staub-Bernasconi (Eds.), *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work* (pp. 9-23). Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2007). Economic and social rights: The neglected human rights. In E. Reichert (Ed.), *Challenges in human rights: A social work perspective* (pp. 138-61). Columbia University Press.
- United Nations. (Ed.). (1994). *Human rights and social work: A manual for schools of social work and the social work profession*. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training1en.pdf>
- United Nations (2007). *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)*. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/512/07/PDF/N0651207.pdf?OpenElement>
- United Nations (1948). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.
- United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

# **Introduction to the Education of Social Workers and Social Care Workers in Ireland**

*Clodagh Geraghty, Atlantic Technological University*

In Ireland, the professions of social work and social care work are separate, however the broad definition of social work can apply to both professions in Ireland as there are clear similarities and commonalities between the two (Lalor & Share, 2013). As stated by the Social Care Association of Ireland (n.d.), social care practice uses shared life-space opportunities to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of clients. The approach is strengths-based and needs-led to mediate clients' presenting problems. A social care professional will typically work in a direct person-to-person capacity with clients. They will seek to provide a caring, stable environment in which various social, educational and relationship interventions can take place in the day-to-day living space of the client. The social worker's role, on the other hand, is to manage the case or cases, for example by arranging the residential childcare placement in which a child is placed, co-ordinating case review meetings, negotiating the termination of a placement and responding to child protection concerns in a given area.

In Ireland, both professions are legally regulated by a national statutory body called "The Health and Social Care Professionals Council" which is known by the shorter name of "Coru". The Council comes within the remit of the Department of Health, and it regulates 14 different health and social care professions. There is a registration board for each profession. Each registration board establishes and maintains the register of professionals. It also approves and monitors education programmes for that profession. The membership of each registration board comprises of 13 voluntary members with a lay majority as follows: six are elected by registrants of their profession (three engaged in the practice of that profession, two engaged in the management of services provided by it and one in the education and training of it). The remaining seven are appointed by the Minister for Health (one from the management of the public health sector, the social care sector or both, one from a voluntary or private sector organisation concerned with health or social care, one must be involved in the training of that profession and four representing the interest of the general public) (Coru, 2019).

This state regulator approves and monitors education programmes for both professions. A direct consequence of this national regulatory system is that Irish educators who deliver approved programmes must ensure that human rights form an essential element of social work and social care education. Students who successfully complete these programmes of education must respect and uphold the rights, dignity and autonomy of every service user, and they must understand and apply a human rights-based approach to their work. Social work and social care work educators must incorporate specified standards of proficiency into their programmes. These standards detail the skills and abilities that individuals must possess in order to be placed on the national register. They are threshold standards deemed necessary to enter professional practice. Social work and social care educators must translate the specifications of the state regulator, Coru, into their curricula and the objective is, among other things, that social workers and social care workers must acquire a set of professional skills which include the understanding and application of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to their work.

The standards of proficiency for social workers and social care workers each have five domains:

1. Professional Autonomy and Accountability
2. Communication, Collaborative Practice and Teamworking
3. Safety and Quality
4. Professional Development
5. Professional Knowledge and Skills

Human rights reside within the Professional Knowledge and Skills domain for the social work and social care professions (Coru, 2017, 2019).

In this regard, Ireland offers an interesting example of how the state is endeavouring to ensure that a human rights framework is integrated into social work and social care work education (Reynaert



et al., 2018). An important feature of this approach is that universities must comply with requirements within 24 months of the publications of standards.

## **Curriculum development in Ireland**

Each university providing an approved social work or social care programme has discretion over the format and the nature of the modules in their programmes. However, evidence must be provided to Coru that the graduates of the programmes will have acquired the proficiencies as specified in the documentation (Coru, 2017, 2019).

There are 83 specified proficiencies for the social work profession and 80 for social care. Universities can add additional material to the programme, but the proficiencies cannot be omitted or the programme will not achieve state approval, and the graduates would not be eligible for registration. Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that the curriculum is predominantly shaped by national requirements, while the relevant university retains autonomy in respect of other additional topics it may wish to include.

Curricula is revised by the university on an ongoing basis and is subject to full review through the universities quality assurance systems every five years. Alongside the university, but not necessarily at the same time, the relevant Coru registration board shall conduct a review of the programme at least every five years in order to satisfy itself as to the continuing suitability of: (a) the education, training, assessment and examination; and, (b) the clinical training and experience provided by any education and training programme approved by the Board (Coru, 2016).

## **Most recent update**

A number of universities in Ireland provide social work or social care work programmes. Atlantic Technological University (ATU) offers a Master of Arts in Social Work programme and a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Care. The Master in Social Work was approved by the University and Coru in 2018. The Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Care was updated to meet all Coru requirements in 2023.

### *Human Rights Modules*

In the Master of Arts in Social Work, human rights are addressed in a module called “Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice” and also in a module entitled “Law and Social Work”.

There is a dedicated human rights module in the Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Care. This is delivered in year four of the programme. Students also must take a module in their first year of study which introduces them to the legal framework for social care. This familiarizes new students with the concept of human rights at the outset of the programme.

### *Human Rights Themes in other modules and throughout the programmes*

As a knowledge and application of the human rights-based approach is mandated by Coru, human rights are a theme throughout both social work and the social care work programmes.

### *Human Rights in Social Care*

The author designed, and currently delivers, the human rights module in the final year of the Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Care in ATU. Students are mandated to take this module. The approach taken is to familiarize students with the principle human rights instruments and to acquaint them with the relevant enforcement mechanisms. Case studies form an integral part of this module, as students learn to appreciate how the courts, and other legal mechanisms can be used to give effect to human rights, and they can consider how a precedent can be applied to improve the rights of others.

Learners also engage in a critique of human rights, and in particular they assess the lack of protection for certain socio-economic and environmental rights. The work of Ife (2016) is also instructive as he calls on educators to look deeper into and differently at human rights. He states that the conventional approach to human rights education, with lawyers, teachers and action plans, is not sufficient to establish a culture of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of others. He regards

“human rights from above”, with some suspicion as they are generally statements by the powerful about the powerless. Students consider how individuals and groups could articulate the human rights which they need to fulfil their potential.

### **Modules which should concentrate on human rights**

Human rights merit a stand-alone module to deal explicitly with human rights concepts, instruments, and enforcement mechanisms. Human rights also deserve to be a theme and central tenet of social work and social care programmes.

Multidisciplinary teams are an integral part of the work of social work or social care workers. Multidisciplinary teamwork is very challenging due to the competing professional priorities and professional hierarchies. Human rights offer the potential for such teams to unify around the human rights of service users.

Human rights deserve greater visibility on professional programmes, and having a dedicated module or modules elevates the concept and gives students the time and space to consider the nature and application of human rights.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the state regulator has had a positive impact in foregrounding human rights in the education of social workers and social care workers. The universities also retain autonomy to further develop students’ knowledge and skill in the application of human rights. The ongoing review and quality assurance processes ensure that human rights education evolves in a manner that reflects both the law and professional practise.

There is merit in educators considering a two-step approach in the education of social workers and social care workers. A grounding in human rights instruments and enforcement mechanisms is an essential first step in embedding a human rights-based approach. Human rights education would then be optimized by a follow-on module of human rights in action whereby students could engage with current human rights cases and projects.

### **References**

- Coru. (n.d.). *Registration boards*. <https://www.coru.ie/about-us/registration-boards/>
- Coru. (2019). *Social workers registration board standards of proficiency for social workers*. <https://www.coru.ie/files-education/swrb-standards-of-proficiency-for-social-workers.pdf>
- Coru. (2017). *Social care workers registration board standards of proficiency for social care workers*. <https://www.coru.ie/files-education/scwrbs-standards-of-proficiency-for-social-care-workers.pdf>
- Coru- (2016). *Programme approval and monitoring processes*. <https://coru.ie/files-education/programme-approval-and-monitoring-processes-information-for-education-providers.pdf>
- Ife, J. (2012). *Human rights and social work*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lalor, K., & Share, P. (Eds.). (2013) *Applied social care*. Gill and McMillan.
- Reynaert, D., Dijkstra, P., Knevel, J., Hartman, J., Tirions M., Geraghty, C., Gradener, J., Lichtenberg, M., & van den Hoven, R. (2018). Human rights at the heart of the social work curriculum. *Social Work Education*. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2018.1554033.
- Social Care Association of Ireland. (n.d.). *What is social care work?* <https://socialcareireland.ie/what-is-social-care-work/>

# Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in the Netherlands

*Jeannette Hartman, NHL Stenden University of Applied Science*

*Peter Dijkstra, Rotterdam University of Applied Science*

*Alex Klein, Saxion University of Applied Science*

## Introduction

The bachelor study of social work in the Netherlands is located at the universities of applied sciences and the standard level of education is currently the bachelor's degree, the duration of which is usually four years. In addition, there is a much smaller number of master's degree programmes. Social work and its research within universities of applied sciences is understood to be practice-oriented and -driven (Metz et al., 2021). Accordingly, great importance is attached to practical relevance within the bachelor's programme, including extensive internship. The consideration here refers primarily to undergraduate degree programmes. In order to clarify the integration of human rights aspects in the study of social work, the following will first look at the content-related references of the nationwide educational profile. Afterwards, references to human rights will be illustrated using the example of the social work programme at Saxion Hogeschool in Enschede, the Hogeschool Rotterdam and NHL-Stenden in Leeuwarden.

## Human rights in the national educational profile social work

The basis for the bachelor's degree programmes is a nationwide educational profile, which provides a binding framework for the individual Social Work bachelor's degree programmes at the universities of applied science. The educational profile is developed by the "Sectoral Advies- en Overlegorganen", in which, in addition to representatives of the universities, stakeholders from the practice associations are also involved. With the current education profile Landelijk Opleidingsdocument Sociaal Werk of 2017, a uniform profile for the sub-disciplines Social Work, Culturele en Maatschappelijke Vorming, Maatschappelijke Werk en Dienstverlening en Sociaal Pedagogisch Hulpverlening was written for the first time to develop a general profile. The majority of the study programmes mentioned have changed their programme to this general Social Work degree (SAHSS, 2017, p. 2). At the same time, the educational profile within the degree programme introduced three field-specific professional profiles: *Social Work - Youth*, *Social Work - Care* and *Social Work – Welfare and Community* (for simplicity, the relevant terms and direct quotations are translated into English by the authors).

The educational profile explicitly refers to the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014). The cited Global Definition also contains one of the few explicit mentions of human rights. The understanding of social work is determined by the perspective of a normative profession (SAHSS, 2017). Accordingly, the values and thus also human rights are particularly emphasized here within the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW & IASSW, 2014), which social work professionals consider in their practice (SAHSS, 2017, p.11). The educational profile describes three core tasks of social work and nine modules/core topics. Module one contains the core topic "core values and social mission of social work" (SAHSS, 2017, p.36). In accordance with the above-mentioned references to the values within the international definition of social work, "universal rights of people and children" (SAHSS, 2017, p.36) are explicitly named at this point. This placement can be understood as an emphasis on human rights as an ethical framework and programmatic goal.

In addition, module 2 addresses access to fundamental rights under the core theme of "social quality of living together" (SAHSS, 2017, p.38). At the same time, theories of citizenship and "rights and duties, norms and values" (SAHSS, 2017, p.38) are named here. In module 5, fundamental rights are further linked to the division of powers, the principle of legality and democracy (SAHSS, 2017, p.43). In the synopsis, the concept of fundamental rights here does not seem to aim at universal human rights, meaning international law, but solely at national legal frameworks.

In addition to the references mentioned so far within the educational profile, human rights references appear within the elaborations on the field-specific professional profile *Social Work – Youth*. Here, explicit reference is made to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). On the one hand, these are named in the context of positioning in relation to the other profiles (SAHSS, 2017, p.57), and on the other hand, in the profile-specific formulation of module 1, whereby reference is also made to the universal rights of people and children named above (SAHSS, 2017, p.61). Through this formulation, an emphasis on children's rights as human rights can be seen. The fact that the CRC has within the Netherlands the legal status as national law simultaneously diminishes the international perspective, because no other international human rights document is named in the educational profile.

The human rights references presented within the current educational profile thus offer universities an opportunity to implement human rights in their concrete curricula. At the same time, it can be stated that human rights references only appear selectively despite a discourse that does exist (Reynaert et al., 2018). An emphasis on the ethical perspective of human rights seems to be dominant within the educational profile. Aspects that could be linked with a political dimension of human rights are not explicitly associated with them and regarding the (international) legal perspective, a limitation to national law seems rather to be prevalent.

## **Integration of human rights in the bachelor programmes in social work at Universities of Applied Science**

At the university level, the Curriculum Committees are responsible for the content of the bachelor's degree programmes, i.e., the structural integration of human rights in the bachelor's degree programmes is the responsibility of these committees. Adjustments and minor changes are made annually as part of a review of the curriculum, whereas the development of a new curriculum takes place at greater intervals of several years and usually in conjunction with the state-wide educational profile.

Saxion University of Applied Science has the School of Social Work at its Enschede location, where the bachelor's degree programme in Social Work is offered on a full-time and part-time basis for around 2,000 students, and the master's degree programme in Health Care and Social Work is offered in combination with the Lectorat Social Work with around 25 study places.

In the current curriculum of the Bachelor of Social Work from 2016, human rights content is explicitly addressed in a number of study units and exams. For instance, human rights as the basis of professional action is treated integrally in the second-year study unit *Professional Development* and is explicitly examined in the legitimization of professional action. In the field-specific professional profiles *Social Work - Youth* according to the educational profile, explicit reference to children's rights in the sense of the CRC can be found, and is also present in various exams. In general, the focus is on the ethical dimension of human rights. In addition, there are individual project-related human rights references.

In the basic document of the new curriculum, started in the academic year 2022-23, the human rights reference is integrated more broadly. Its formulation is linked to the action programme “Human rights at the heart of social work (education)!” (Reynaert et. al., 2018), which explicitly describes the recognition of human rights as the socio-political framework of social work and the basis for a self-critical and politicizing practice (Reynaert et. al., 2018). Accordingly, human rights are explicitly mentioned in several places in the learning outcomes of the new programme. Unlike the basic document they are mainly located in connection with international social work and the global definition and as a framework for reflection on methodological action, thus without political implications. Nevertheless, human rights serve in the first year of study as a basis for a critical consideration of societal problems and the practice of social work.

In addition to the major programme which spans seven semesters, students have the option of a specific specialization within the programme, which can take place within the framework of a minor programme of one semester. Besides several interdepartmental minor programmes with human rights elements (Global Citizenship, Crossing Borders) the department offers a minor in Cultures and Human Rights<sup>1</sup>. This follows the understanding of social work as a human rights profession according to Silvia Staub-Bernasconi (2018), which includes learning *about, through and for* human rights (UN, 2011). The

perspective on the link to human rights is characterized by the triple mandate (Staub-Bernasconi, 2018) with an orientation on diversity approaches, social justice and anti-discrimination. Here, the focus is explicitly also on a perspective of action underpinned by human rights. Against this background, students carry out practical projects.

Parallel to the above-mentioned references to human rights, the curriculum at Saxion also contains a number of study units and modules that could (and should) be linked to human rights. These include, for example, courses on *policy work*, *community work* and *violence in dependent relationships*, which, from a systemic perspective, address both structural problems, addressing "social relations of dominance", and the individual suffering found within them (e.g. Staub-Bernasconi, 2019; IFSW & IASSW, 2012).

The Rotterdam University of Applied Science follows the same patterns as the Saxion University. There is no structural integration of human rights, but rather a preference on ethical perspectives when professional action is the subject matter of education and human rights is elaborated in the context of the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014) and the Global Agenda (IFSW & IASSW, 2012). Akin to Saxion, human rights as subject matter can be found in the minor programme, which for Rotterdam is the minor Human Trafficking<sup>ii</sup>. Additional to Saxion inclusion of human rights, the curriculum in Rotterdam is built on four central themes for years one and two. These themes - diversity, inclusion, quality of life and power – could be easily related to human rights but are only implicit. The Rotterdam University intends to develop a new curriculum at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year. It is currently unclear what role human rights will play in this.

NHL-Stenden University of Applied Science is located in Leeuwarden, the northern area of the Netherlands and offers a wide range of courses to approximately 24,000 students. Within the Department of Social Studies, about 1,500 students follow a bachelor's degree in social work or social pedagogy. NHL Stenden distinguishes itself because of a didactic concept based on Design Based Education (DBE). A model in which real-life issues are always central. Students work on these issues in so-called "ateliers", which can be located inside or outside the university. The transition to this didactic model took place in 2018, simultaneously with the introduction of the new general Social Work degree. Pedagogy was then detached and developed its own programme.

The starting point for the new social work programme at NHL-Stenden was the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014). However, a closer look at the course documents of first- and second-years' modules shows almost no explicit attention to human rights. Only in first year ethics are human rights briefly considered when explaining the global definition. In courses on law, links are made to human rights as a legal framework, particularly in relation to juvenile justice. In one learning outcome of the profile *Social Work – Youth* the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is explicitly mentioned. In the profiles *Social Work – Care* and *Social Work – Welfare and Community* human rights are not mentioned explicitly in the learning outcomes. It is difficult to say how far human rights is part of lecturing, irrespective whether or not it is explicitly stated. The DBE model is strongly based on demand-driven learning in line with real-life educational situations. This entails that questions that arise during the course partly determine the content, as does the expertise of the supervising lecturers. However, the profile *Social Work – Welfare and Community* focuses explicitly on the politicizing role of social work, so human rights must be part of it.

In the minor elective module International Social Work<sup>iii</sup>, a human rights perspective is more apparent. This module is accessible to both social work and pedagogy students. Parts of the module pay explicit attention to social work as a human rights profession, both as an ethical and political task. Thus, besides learning *about* human rights, also learning *through* and *for* human rights, as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training emphasizes, is pursued.

As said above, the pedagogy programme at NHL-Stenden was detached from social work in 2018 and designed its own curriculum. Human rights and the rights of the child are explicitly included in the educational programme of the first and second years. Attention to this concerns both an ethical perspective and a legal perspective.

After five years of experience with the renewed social work curriculum within the, also, renewed didactic model, it is time for further development. The lack of explicit attention to human rights in the social work curriculum is apparent. This defect will hopefully be considered in the development process.

## Conclusion

Overall, regarding both the national education profile and the course content in the bachelor programmes at the formally mentioned Universities of Applied Science, it can be stated that human rights references generally include a strong emphasis on professional ethics. Detailed human rights education aimed at social work professionals and explicitly considering their position and mission can only be found in rudimentary or optional parts. Certainly, a development that critically considers social workers as addressees of human rights claims and thus meets the demands from international documents would be beneficial (e.g. United Nations, 1994). For an understanding of social workers as human rights actors for the realization of human rights claims that goes beyond this, there is still much to be done. In particular, the explicit integration of human rights on the one hand for the assessment of social problems and the development of human rights-based approaches to action, both in connection with individual and structural problems, is to be desired. At the same time, such curricular changes can be linked to the consideration of social problems on a structural level, as it is also found in the educational profile, and to an emerging discourse on human rights and social work in the Netherlands. The corresponding initiatives such as the action programme “Human rights at the heart of social work (education)!” (Reynaert et. al., 2018) can give direction in the steps that will follow.

## References

- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) & International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW). (2014). *Global definition of social work. Commentary notes for the global definition of social work*. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW) & International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). (2012). *The global agenda for social work and social development commitment to action*. <https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/ifsw-cdn/assets/globalagenda2012.pdf>
- Metz, J., Jager-Vreugdehil, M., Wilken, J. P., & Witte, T. (2021). *Sociaal Werk Doordacht*. Uitgeverij SWP.
- Reynaert, D., Dijkstra, P., Hartman, J. H., Tirions, M., Geraghty, C., Gradener, J., & Van den Hoven, R. (2018). Human rights at the heart of the social work curriculum, *Social Work Education* 38(1), 21-33. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2018.155403
- Sectoraal adviescollege hogere sociale studies (SAHSS). (2017). *Landelijk opleidingsdocument sociaal werk*. [https://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/system/profiles/documents/000/000/212/original/Landelijk\\_opleidingsdocument\\_Sociaal\\_Werk\\_-\\_downloadversie.pdf?1494439200](https://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/system/profiles/documents/000/000/212/original/Landelijk_opleidingsdocument_Sociaal_Werk_-_downloadversie.pdf?1494439200)
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2018). *Soziale Arbeit als Handlungswissenschaft*. Stuttgart: UTB
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2019). *Menschenwürde – Menschenrechte – Soziale Arbeit*. Opladen: Buderich.
- United Nations. (Ed.). (1994). *Human rights and social work: A manual for schools of social work and the social work profession*. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training1en.pdf>
- United Nations. (Ed.). (2011). *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights education and training*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/11-united-nations-declaration-human-rights-education-and-training-2011>

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.saxion.nl/opleidingen/de/minoren/k/kulturen-und-menschenrechte>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.hogeschoolrotterdam.nl/go/stop-mensenhandel/wat-kun-je-leren/minormensenhandel/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.nhlstenden.com/minoren/international-social-work>

# **Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin Germany**

*Mareike Niendorf, Alice Salomon University of Applied Science*

*Nivedita Prasad, Alice Salomon University of Applied Science*

## **Introduction**

In Germany, state recognition as a social worker takes place after the bachelor's degree, which usually comprises seven semesters including a practical phase. The courses in social work are offered almost exclusively at universities of applied sciences and not at traditional universities. Only a small proportion of bachelor's graduates continue to study for a master's degree, and a fraction are aiming for a doctorate. Even if there have been some changes in the field of doctoral procedures in recent years, most social workers progress to do a doctorate in a related discipline, such as pedagogy or sociology.

Social work studies in Germany do not have a binding core curriculum, but the German Association of Social Work (DGSA)<sup>iv</sup> has defined a curriculum for social work studies which can serve as a “reference for the identification of the main curricular contents for social work studies in higher education”<sup>v</sup>. It was developed “as a standard syllabus for teaching the scientific foundations of social work and published in response to the degree diversification prompted by the Bologna reform. It is intended to serve as a framework, broadly regulating the study content covered by social work degree programmes” (DGSA, 2016, 1). The DGSA recommends including human rights in the core curriculum under the study areas “Normative Foundations of social work” (DGSA, 2016, 6f.) and “General societal and institutional conditions for social work” (DGSA, 2016, 7). It is surprising that human rights are not explicitly mentioned under the study area “The scientific foundations of social work”, in which the history of social work is embedded (see DGSA, 2016, 5).

As mentioned above, this core curriculum is not binding, so all universities create their own curricula. Yet, some German universities that offer a degree in social work are known to have a focus on human rights. This also includes the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin, in particular through its specialized MA programmes (see below)<sup>vi</sup>. Other universities are, for example, the Würzburg-Schweinfurt University of Applied Sciences, which offers an annual theme week for teachers, students and practitioners on various human rights issues to coincide with Human Rights Day<sup>vii</sup>, or the Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences whose research centre for human rights practice carries out application-related research, teaching and further education.<sup>viii</sup>

## **Human rights at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Science, Berlin**

In this article, however, the focus is exclusively on the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences (ASH) in Berlin. The ASH is the largest SAGE<sup>ix</sup> University in Germany with nearly 5,000 students and offers two BA programmes and seven MA programmes in social work. The main focus of this analysis is the curricula of the BA social work programme. However, two MA programmes also need to be explicitly mentioned, as they concentrate on social work as a human rights profession: one in German<sup>x</sup> and the other in English<sup>xi</sup>. In both MA programmes human rights and human rights education are central in every module (e.g. research, vulnerable groups, or organisation development). The MA programme “Intercultural Conflict Management”<sup>xiii</sup> has one module named “Global Justice and Human Rights”. It is presumed that human rights are also taught in other modules, but this is not explicitly identifiable.

These specialized MA programmes play an important role in shaping the discussions around human rights and social work in Germany. Nevertheless, it is crucial that human rights are implemented in the BA programme, as it is the common degree for social workers to leave university within Germany and specialized MA programmes are only undertaken by a small number of social work graduates.

## **Bachelor degree social work at the ASH**

The BA programme of the ASH was recently reaccredited for the period 2021-2029. Therefore, the programme was re-evaluated and some minor changes were implemented. This was done by a group from the social work faculty of the ASH, that was founded for this process, consisting of members from all groups – but mainly professors. Module convenors were invited to contribute, when their respective modules were evaluated. Prior to this process the lack of presence of human rights as a core issue in social work studies at the ASH was communicated to this group. The new module handbook has been available since October 2022. It appears that human rights were informally declared to be a cross-sectional issue that does not need an explicit module, but should be included in various other modules. The outcome of the module description casts doubt on this approach, as human rights are explicitly mentioned only in three modules (Law & Social Work, Disability & Ableism and Ethics in Social Work). Even though not identifiable in the module descriptions, teachers at the ASH do teach human rights in various other modules such as: Methods of Social Work, Introduction to the field of Social Work, practical reflection, International SW and the project-module. The latter and the module Introduction to the field of SW are modules that enable the inclusion of a broad variety of themes and issues into social work education. Following the idea of cross-sectionality, human rights would be needed to be included in several other modules explicitly, e.g.:

- History & Theory of Social Work
- Health & Social Work
- Gender & Queer
- Racism & Migration
- Research Methods
- Theories and methods of Social Work
- Youth welfare
- Delinquency and deviant behaviour
- Poverty
- Gerontology

## **Conclusion**

The current (non)visibility of human rights in the BA curricula shows what can happen if issues such as human rights or gender are declared to be cross-sectional issues. In the eye of the public, it could appear as if the ASH is not following the Global Definition of Social Work and other international and regional core documents, in which human rights play a prominent role. This is particularly surprising as the ASH is generally known for its human rights focus.

Nevertheless, human rights are being taught in this study programme in various modules, but this can only be guaranteed with the present staff who cover a wide variety of human rights topics and approaches. A structural placement of human rights is a core issue in social work. Therefore, it would not only be necessary to implement an additional module on social work and human rights, but also to ensure that human rights are explicitly mentioned in all other relevant modules and therefore guarantee that human rights are taught regardless of the current staff members.



## References

DGSA. (2016). *Core curriculum for social work studies. A treatise by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit* (DSGA/German Association for Social Work).  
[https://www.dgsa.de/fileadmin/Carousel/en/DGSA\\_Core\\_Curriculum\\_final.pdf](https://www.dgsa.de/fileadmin/Carousel/en/DGSA_Core_Curriculum_final.pdf).

- 
- iv Any person or corporate entity engaged in practice, teaching and research of social work who would like to address issues in the field of the subject on a scientific basis is invited to participate in shaping the future of this discipline and profession.  
<https://www.dgsa.de/home/about-us>
- v Even the banner above its front door reads “Human Dignity, Human Rights, Humanity”.
- vii <https://fas.thws.de/fakultaet/menschenrechtswoche/>
- viii <https://soz-kult.hs-duesseldorf.de/forschung/forschungsaktivitaeten/einrichtungen/menschenrechtspraxis>
- ix SAGE stands for social work, health and childhood education.
- x together with KHSB and EHB, the two other Berlin universities of Applied Sciences that offer Social Work Studies:  
<https://www.mrma-berlin.de//MRMA/>
- xi <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/studium/studiengaenge/master-social-work-as-a-human-rights-profession/profile/>
- xii <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/studium/studiengaenge/master-intercultural-conflict-management/profile/>

# Human Rights (Education) in Social Work Programmes in Flanders

*Didier Reynaert, HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts*

*Elke Plovie UCLL University of Applied Sciences*

*Michel Tirions, AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts*

## Introduction

In Belgium, the regions or “communities” are responsible for organizing (higher) education. Belgium consists of three communities, divided by language: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. In this overview, we only focus on the organisation of social work education in the Flemish Community or Flanders.

Since the end of the last century, the Flemish educational landscape has been structured in line with European policy frameworks. As a result, the educational landscape for social work in Flanders consists of five levels:

*Table 1. Levels of higher education in social work*

Level 4	the third grade of secondary education or the so-called seventh year of vocational secondary education. Since these programmes are not specifically profiled as social work courses (they exist under the name of “carer”, “child carer” or “educator”), they are not included in the analysis in this contribution.
Level 5	associate degree or higher professional education (HBO5)
Level 6	bachelor's degree
Level 7	master's degree
Level 8	PhD

In Flanders, HBO5 social work education (level 5) has been offered at various institutions from 2019. These programmes have different names (social work, socio-cultural work) and last two years (120 EC). The HBO5 programmes in social work are aimed at vocational training to become “ready-to-start” professionals or to start a bachelor's degree. Specific reduced learning paths were developed to continue a bachelor's degree.

The bachelor's degree (level 6) for social work consists of a professional and an academic bachelor. The professional bachelor is organized at a university of applied science and takes three years (180 EC). Professional bachelors are trained to become competent professionals who are more theoretically trained than an HBO5, but likewise an HBO5 are ready-to-start professionals. There are 11 universities of applied sciences in Flanders, each of which offers a professional bachelor's degree in social work. Graduates with a bachelor's degree automatically acquire the legally protected title of “social assistant”. Acquiring this title is a condition to access a number of official functions in the social domain.

The academic bachelor also takes three years (180 EC) and prepares for a master's degree. There are no specific academic bachelor's degrees in social work, although some are closely related. At Ghent University, for example, students can follow an academic bachelor in educational sciences and then choose the option “social welfare” in the third year. Other academic bachelor's programmes also offer access to the master's programme in social work.

After obtaining a professional or academic bachelor's degree, one can continue doing the master's degree in social work. In Flanders, there are three universities that offer a master's degree in social work: Ghent University, University of Antwerp and KU Leuven (the latter offers the “Master in Social Work and Social Policy”). The master's programme consists of one year (60 EC) which is preceded by a

preparatory phase. Professional bachelors in social work first complete a preparatory programme of one year (60 EC), in which special attention is paid to research competencies. Academic bachelors follow a one-year preparatory programme (60 EC), mainly focused on practical subjects. After completing the preparatory programme, students can start the master's year in social work. The same trajectory is provided for professional and academic bachelor's degrees other than social work, albeit with a more profound preparatory programme (for example, for the professional bachelor's degree in nursing or the academic bachelor's degree in political science).

Finally, the Flemish universities also offer the possibility to obtain a PhD in social work. This can be regarded as the final piece in a fully mapped out academic trajectory for social work.

## **Qualification framework for social work education in Flanders**

Within the framework of the Flemish qualification structure, elaborated in 2009, all programmes for higher education must determine their joint learning outcomes per domain (e.g. social work) and per level (HBO5-bachelor-master). Learning outcomes include outcomes students are expected to achieve at the end of their education.

Although the domain-specific learning outcomes have been developed in a Flemish-wide consensus, each programme can keep its autonomy to specifically translate these domain-specific learning outcomes in its own programme via programme-specific learning outcomes. It was only recently, in 2019, that the domain-specific learning outcomes for the HBO5 social work education were established. This framework consists of 14 domain-specific learning outcomes. Three years earlier, in 2016, the domain-specific learning outcomes for the professional bachelor's in social work at the universities of applied sciences were established. This framework contains 15 domain-specific learning outcomes. A year later, in 2017, the domain-specific learning outcomes of the master's programmes in social work were also adopted and contain eight domain-specific learning outcomes. By defining domain-specific learning outcomes, the Flemish qualification's structure is explicitly linked to the European qualifications framework, making it easy to compare different training systems from the European Union.

## **Human rights in the qualification framework for social work education**

Both the HBO5 and the bachelor's degree refer to human rights in their domain-specific learning outcomes. The first learning outcome of the HBO5 programme makes an explicit reference to the framework of human rights: *The HBO5 graduate puts the client centre stage, promotes empowerment, emancipation, and social cohesion, based on and respecting human rights, equality and diversity.* Other learning outcomes contain a rather implicit reference to human rights, such as, for instance, learning outcome 2: *The HBO5 graduate consciously acts within a professional ethical and legal framework.*

The domain-specific learning outcomes for the professional bachelor's contains of 15 learning outcomes, divided into five parts. The first learning outcome reads as follows: *"The professional bachelor in social work uses human rights and social justice as standards and perspective for their actions. They can account for their actions on the basis of a (professional) ethical discourse. They are always aware of this their position."* Other learning outcomes remain more implicit in relation to human rights: *"The professional bachelor in social work informs stakeholders about relevant legal frameworks and guides them to suitable organizations, services and initiatives"* (learning outcome 7). Or: *"The professional bachelor in social work takes up a signalling function and takes steps towards change. To this end, they critically analyse social and international developments and challenges and interpret them on the basis of relevant knowledge, sources and research results"* (learning outcome 9). Finally, learning outcome 10 states: *"The professional bachelor in social work helps to connect people with society and vice versa."*

The domain-specific learning outcomes for the master's programme do not include a specific reference to human rights. Rather, reference is made to "social justice".

## Human rights in educational programmes for bachelors in Flanders

Based on the qualification framework with domain-specific learning outcomes for bachelor's degrees, universities of applied sciences in Flanders have included human rights in their curriculum in very different ways.

At the HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts, the curriculum commission, which consists of lecturers of the social work programme, complemented by a representation of students, in 2017 developed its own framework of 11 learning outcomes, based on the Flemish framework. Learning outcome 11 states that the bachelor's degree aims at educating students to "*Act from a social political awareness based on human rights, social justice, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities*". This learning outcome was inspired by the international definition of social work. Based on this learning outcome, a "learning line" on socio-political frameworks was developed that traverses the curriculum and includes human rights. Accordingly, human rights are gradually developed throughout the three years, and they are included in different courses of the curriculum (e.g. "*Study of Social Work*", Ba1; "*Social Work and Social Justice*", Ba2; "*Human Rights and Community Development*", Ba3; "*Children's Rights*", Ba3). With the inclusion of human rights in the social work curriculum at HOGENT, the professional bachelor's degree materialized the outcomes of a research programme on human rights in social work that was already running for several years within EQUALITY//ResearchCollective, one of the 12 research centres of the HOGENT. The focus of this research was an approach of "human rights from below", in contrast to top-down approaches, often of legal nature. This from below perspective was elaborated in a handbook, published in collaboration with AP University of applied Science (Antwerp) and UCLL University of Applied Science (Leuven).

At UCLL University of Applied Sciences, 14 learning outcomes were defined (in 2015) and divided into five distinct different roles. The first learning outcome directly refers to the global definition of social work and puts human rights and social justice at the heart of social work. In the five roles, there are several – although more implicit - connections to a human rights perspective: being responsive to the needs of people, working in close contact with people, research and analyse the needs and challenges in terms of social problems and learn to bring about change. Since the last curriculum development in 2018, human rights have a more central position, especially in the general courses (e.g. "*The Basis of Social Work*", Ba1; "*The Fundamentals of Rights*", Ba1; "*Working on Human Rights*", Ba2). This last course – "*Working on Human Rights*" – is a one-year course of seven credits and is organized around two main questions: where do we see violations of human rights?; and, what is the role of social work in realizing those human rights? A small group of students work around a specific topic, e.g. the right to housing, the right to work, the right to care. According to the framework that is shown in the handbook already mentioned, an overview of current challenges in realizing human rights is presented. In this course, an expert by experience is included in the team of lecturers. They are able to put an extra focus on human rights based on their experiences of having lived in poverty.

AP University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Antwerp offers both course programmes on level 5 (associate degree) and level 6 (bachelor's degree). The associate degrees in social work and social cultural work, established in 2019, build upon the domain specific learning outcomes based on the Flemish framework and are currently in the process of developing a set of Specific Learning Outcomes. The emphasis on human rights is, among others, part of the driver statements that support the current process of curriculum innovation.

The 180 credits bachelor's degree programme has Human Rights, Social Justice and Solidarity as pivotal concepts in its vision/mission. Building on seven Specific Learning Outcomes and 22 indicators, formulated in 2022, the course programme puts human rights and social justice as two birds of a feather at the heart of the programme.

In the recently established new and generalist course programme, the first year puts the emphasis on conceptual building blocks for a human rights approach. Two courses on the identity of social work link human rights to the mission and practice of social work. Law courses introduce the formal framework of human rights. In two integrative learning weeks, students learn how to connect the concepts with themes of solidarity and inclusion. In the second year, a three credits-course "*Realizing Human Rights*" introduces a social-constructivist framework for practice and interventions. This course connects to and inspires courses on social policy, politization in social work and international

perspectives on diversity, and also has an international comparative focus, in close collaboration with partner universities in the Netherlands and Germany.

In the third year, students deliver a “*Personal Professional Portfolio*” as part of their graduation path in which they are challenged to relate and argument their professional growth from a human rights and social justice perspective. In their third-year practice placement students are challenged to tackle topics of human rights they encounter both on micro, meso and macro level through the method of critical reflection.

# Human Rights Education in Social Work Study Programmes in Finland

Ingo Stamm, Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius, University of Jyväskylä<sup>xiii</sup>

## Introduction to social work education in Finland

In Finland, social work is a research-based, scientific discipline that includes all three levels of educational achievement. To become a social worker at least five years of studying, completed with a master's degree, at one of the six university schools of social work is necessary (University of Helsinki, Eastern Finland, Jyväskylä, Lapland, Tampere and Turku). Social work therefore is strongly research-oriented in Finland and doctoral studies play a significant role in social work education (Kokkonen & Turtiainen, 2018; Lähteinen & Matthies, 2021). In Finland, professionals working in the field of social welfare are summarized as (licensed) social welfare professionals (according to the Act on Social Welfare Professionals). Next to social workers, practice-oriented professionals who usually work directly with clients in the field of social welfare hold the title of *socionomi*, which is often translated into English with social service professionals or social instructors. To become a *socionomi*, students have to study at a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) on the bachelor level (BA in social services). In conclusion, the educational requirements to become a social worker in Finland are higher than in many other countries. Professionals in the field of social welfare, who would be considered social workers in most other European countries, often do not have the qualification of a social worker in Finland. Usually social workers (MA degree at universities), *socionomi* (BA degree at UAS) and other professionals work together in multi-professional teams.

In this chapter, I follow the Finnish classification and discuss human rights education in social work programmes at Finnish universities, which are obligatorily on the MA level. Due to the rather small number of social work study programmes in Finland, I will refer to all curricula in Finland and not discuss one explicitly.

## Overview on human rights education in Finnish social work study programmes

Implicitly, human rights education is part of all study programmes. Yet, it is not compulsory and to what degree and in what way it is taught still depends on the university and its curriculum. Curricula are usually revised and updated every four years. In 2017, the Finnish National University Network for Social Work (Sosnet) has formulated a framework on knowledge and skills that must be gained through social work education in Finland (Lähteinen et al., 2017; sosnet.fi). These areas of expertise are social scientific expertise, research expertise, interaction expertise, working methods expertise, service system expertise, development and change expertise, leadership expertise, ethical expertise, as well as legal and structural social work expertise. Even though human rights could be explicitly taught in all areas of expertise, in the whole of Finland there is only one course at the University of Helsinki that explicitly addresses human rights. The course is named "Social Work and Human Rights" (MA level) and gives a general overview and introduction to human rights and their importance for social work. In the course description it says that the course would familiarize students "with human rights thinking and the foundation of human rights in social work from various viewpoints" (University of Helsinki, 2023). The course addresses the history of human rights, the international human rights system and has an additional focus on control mechanisms. At the University of Helsinki, human rights are also part of the general introduction course on the BA level. Here, Jim Ife and his concept of human rights-based social work is taught in one of the seminar units. In other universities, human rights are implicitly taught mainly in courses on welfare law and social rights/rights of social welfare clients, on social work ethics, on child protection/children's rights and migration and diversity issues (for example in Lapland and Helsinki).

Furthermore, in 2018, a programme for international social work students and to promote English-speaking study skills among Finnish social work students was implemented. The programme named DEOT (Developing Online Social Work Courses in English) was initiated by Sosnet and currently serves as an open source for all six Finnish universities with social work programmes. The aim of the

programme is to provide new online courses and teaching material in English (Svenlin, Panić, & Lunabba, 2020). The programme consists of six study modules. Each of these modules provides students with numerous recorded lectures and further material. Human rights education has been implemented explicitly in three of the study modules: Multicultural Social Work, Social Work in Ecosocial Transition and Global Perspectives in Social Work. In the latter module, one course element focused at first on education *about* human rights, i.e. it introduces the approaches by Silvia Staub-Bernasconi and Jim Ife, but secondly also on education *for* human rights, by addressing human rights issues for vulnerable groups, for example Sami people in Nordic countries, and the connection between poverty and human rights. Based on the DEOT project and its study material, a course on ecosocial work was established at the University of Jyväskylä (MA level; open to students from other universities, including international students). The course includes links between ecosocial work and human rights-based social work, i.e. the environmental dimension of human rights and its importance for social workers.

## Conclusion

Human rights are an important part of social work education in Finland. However, in most cases its inclusion in courses is somewhat hidden and not explicitly mentioned in course descriptions. Only one course in Helsinki officially deals with social work and human rights. Regarding the areas of expertise, at least in the areas “leadership expertise, ethical, legal and structural social work”, human rights seem to be of high importance and could gain more weight in social work education and could be explicitly addressed in course descriptions.

Overall, knowledge on human rights education in the Finnish context is still limited. Following the global definition of social work, which highlights human rights as one of the guiding principles of social work, they should play a more prominent and visible role (see also Turtiainen et al., 2020). As a starting point, research on its implicit integration in study programmes across the six universities in Finland that offer social work study programmes would be important.

## References:

- Kokkonen, T., & Turtiainen, K. (2018). Social work education in Finland. In M. Kamali & J. H. Jönsson (Eds.), *Neoliberalism, Nordic welfare states and social work. Current and future challenges* (pp. 171–181). Routledge.
- Laging, M., & Žganec, N. (Eds.). (2021). *Social work education in Europe: Traditions and transformations*. Springer.
- Lähteinen, S., & Matthies, A.-L. (2021). Research-Based Social Work Profession in the Finnish Welfare State. In M. Laging & N. Žganec (Eds.), *Social work education in Europe: Traditions and transformations* (pp. 43–63). Springer.
- Lähteinen, S., Raitakari, S., Hänninen, K., Kautila, A., Kekoni, T., Krok, S., & Skaffari, P. (2017). *Social Work Education in Finland: Lapin Yliopistopaino*.  
<https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/232351/loader2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Sosnet - Finnish National University Network for Social Work (2023).  
<https://www.sosnet.fi/EN/Sosnet> .
- Svenlin, A.-R., Panić, G., & Lunabba, H. (2020). *SOSNET Kevätwebinaari/SOSNET Spring Webinar*. University of Helsinki. (2023). Course unit SOSM-ST305. Social Work and Human Rights. Teacher: Maija Jäppinen.[https://studies.helsinki.fi/courses/cu/hy-CU-118277077-2021-08-01/SOSM-ST305/Social\\_Work\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights](https://studies.helsinki.fi/courses/cu/hy-CU-118277077-2021-08-01/SOSM-ST305/Social_Work_and_Human_Rights)

## CONCLUSION AND OUTCOMES OF THE SYMPOSIUM

---

The first objective of the symposium in Gent was to gain insights on how human rights are implemented into social work programmes and how human rights education takes place in the individual programmes through the inputs of social work lecturers and researchers. The second objective was to promote exchange among the participants from across Europe. First and foremost, it became clear how wide the scope is regarding the implementation of human rights in social work study programmes. This wide scope has various causes, which are primarily related to the contexts of the curricula presented. A more prominent role is played by the following distinctive aspects:

1. The formal and contextual framework of teaching at the schools of social work (see also the presentation of the individual countries involved).
2. National traditions and the organizational embedding of social work practice.
3. The understanding of social work and its (national) discourses.

Within the presentation of the specific implementation of human rights in the curricula of social work study programmes and the subsequent discussion, several questions became obvious, which were taken up in the further discussion of the topic: 1. Is a theory-based or a practice-based approach more appropriate for integrating human rights into social work curricula; 2. Should human rights be offered more as a cross-sectional topic in the individual courses or be designated as explicit content of course(s)?; 3. How can human rights related learning outcomes be integrated into the curricula?

In their study on the implementation of human rights components in social work programmes, Steen and Mathiesen (2008) use a structural gradation into three levels. At the first level, integration is optional within the framework of elective courses; at the second level, human rights content is part of compulsory courses; and for the third level, original social work perspectives on human rights and their practical relevance are required (Steen & Mathiesen, 2008). Since human rights topics are at least part of the compulsory courses in all the degree programmes presented here, following this simple distinction, one can at least speak of a second level of integration. Far more interesting remains the question of the extent to which original social work approaches to human rights work are represented.

The diversity of the curricular integration already shows the range of possible answers to these questions. In the discussion it became clear that there are both clear overlaps and differences in the positions of the participating lecturers and researchers of social work. In connection with the above-mentioned last distinctive aspects, the differences in the understanding of the connection between human rights and social work play a significant role here. These result in differences regarding the necessities and ways of integrating human rights into the curricula of social work courses. Without being able to fully present these positions in their understanding here, central features of two positions that became particularly clear within the symposium shall be stated here.

One perspective is that of social work, which starts from a lifeworld understanding, is oriented to grassroots approaches and places human rights "from below" at the centre. Here, the connection between social work and social movements plays a vital role, with legal aspects and instruments taking a background role. Such a perspective is more focused on community work. In contrast, another prominent perspective on the link between social work and human rights focuses on knowledge of the human rights regime and its instruments to combat discrimination and oppression. In this context, a dedicated knowledge of the existing international human rights documents, their legal embedding and the related possibilities for the practice of social work plays a central role. Such a perspective follows the positions of central human rights actors such as the UN or the Council of Europe. Nevertheless, certain necessary foundations for the integration of human rights content can be named.



## Similarities in human rights implementation in social work courses

Unsurprisingly, regardless of the distinctive aspects, there are a number of similarities regarding the necessities for implementing human rights into social work curricula. Several aspects appear to be of particular importance, which are both uncontroversial and obvious: 1. The explicit reference to human rights in study units; 2. The link with structural approaches; 3. The relevance of human rights to practice; 4. The integration into the underlying curricular specifications; and, 5. The ability and the will of lecturers to take up and clarify human rights references within the study units described in this way.

### *Explicit Reference to human rights*

Regardless of the distinctions, explicit references to human rights in the modules of the degree programmes appear to be indispensable, irrespective of whether they are explicit human rights modules or other modules with explicit human rights content. For both options, a wide range can be found in the presented curricula of the participating universities. For example, the curriculum of the University of Gdańsk includes a module that explicitly teaches human rights, while the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences (ASH) in its bachelor's programmes address human rights implicitly in study units.

In view of the multitude of professional sources that explicitly name human rights as a core of the profession of social work, an explicit reference to human rights within any study programme of social work seems to be self-evident (IFSW, etc.), no matter whether these references are taken up in a separate module or cross-sectionally. Regardless of distinct positions, there is consensus that explicit knowledge of and insights in human rights are needed to recognize and critically reflect on human rights issues in social work. First and foremost, the foundations of the concept of human rights are undoubtedly necessary for this. How profoundly or with what degree of differentiation this must take place, e.g. regarding human rights narratives, is presumably different against the background of different perspectives. An implementation only in the form of elective modules, such as Steen and Mathiesen (2008) describe as the first level, no longer seems sufficient almost 20 years later. On the other hand, with reference to the different position named before the question of whether explicit human rights modules are needed within social work programmes to implement the necessary references continues to be discursive.

Nevertheless, in addition to the integration into compulsory modules, as is the case at the participating universities, the possibility of embedding human rights references into elective modules can also be observed. Such elective modules can be a useful addition to a compulsory basis in the context of deepening human rights references in social work studies. Examples are the minor programmes or semester at Dutch Universities of Applied Science, which allow for a more in-depth study of the contents of the major programmes.

### *The Link with structural approaches*

The need to link human rights content with the political constitution of social work also becomes clear. The relevance of political action for human rights driven social work is emphasized, which is derived from a critical perspective towards existing (domination) systems and the discrimination mechanisms they contain. This involves linking human rights content with structural approaches to social work, to make clear that users' problems are often not only individual matters but public issues. In view of the different historical and organizational contexts, such an orientation within the courses of study is more or less preconditional.

### *Relevance of human rights to social work practice*

Another consensual aspect related to the implementation of human rights contents in social work courses is the necessity of the reference to practice. For a profession, practical relevance is fundamental and the significance of human rights for social work is logically derived from its relatedness to practice. The meaning of human rights for practice must therefore be developed in the study modules in addition to theoretical foundations. In parallel to the significance presented in this way, the students' practical experience, e.g. in the form of internships, and their supervision, plays a vital role in developing the relevance to practice and social action (Deweese & Roche, 2001; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2021).

The different national and local framework conditions play a role here. On the one hand, this concerns the scope and nature of the existing practice elements in social work studies. These aspects vary in the countries involved and thus have an influence on the possibilities for linking human rights content with practice. On the other hand, specific national problems play a role in the different countries in addition to human rights topics that are relevant in Europe generally, i.e. the practical relevance varies depending on the context. And, finally, it must be considered that social work practices are organized and set up differently. For example, the degree to which practice is located within state institutions and/or NGOs differs from country to country. Against this background, it seems important to enable practical experience of local, real, social problems and to open up the relevance of human rights references here, regardless of whether they are subject of governmental actions or not.

#### *Integration into the underlying curricular specifications*

Although an embedding of human rights exists to a greater or lesser extent at all participating universities, there are doubts about a continuous embedding in view of the diversity of the study programmes, sometimes even within one country. For a structural implementation of human rights in all social work curricula, their binding integration into the underlying educational framework or curricula guidelines is therefore certainly desirable. Such a reference appears particularly clear in Ireland, for example, where human rights-related expertise is anchored within the national framework programme (The Health and Social Care Professional Council) within the domain Professional Knowledge and Skills. In contrast, human rights references appear rather vague in the Dutch educational profile (Landelijk Opleidingsdocument Sociaal Werk).

#### *The ability and the willingness of the lecturers*

And, finally, linked to the formally mentioned aspect, the ability and the will of the lecturers represents a relevant point. This is necessary if the human rights content within the study programmes is not to remain a mere paper tiger. In principle, the ultimate responsibility for such personnel staffing lies with the universities. However, with reference to the distinction described above, explicit modules on the one hand and integration of the content in other modules on the other, it can be assumed that the first has a significantly higher binding force here. The takeover of a course on human rights content tends to presuppose a degree of closeness to it on the part of the relevant lecturers. In the case of integration into a module with other content focuses, on the other hand, the instructors can weight the content and minimize the human rights content according to their own preferences.

## **Requirements for a more comprehensive implementation in social work courses**

Although the basic goal of the project is to improve the implementation of human rights in social work programmes, some aspects became clear in the discussion that need to be further addressed. A closer look at these aspects will help to clarify the different approaches of human rights oriented social work and at the same time to provide a more stringent possibility for the implementation of human rights in study programmes. Even though such a fundamental discussion was not and is not intended within the project, some discussion points on the embedding of human rights in the curricula will be presented below, which need further elaboration and will be taken up in future cooperation.

Even though the need for explicit human rights content is unquestioned, there is still a need for discussion regarding the necessity of explicit human rights modules within the curricula. Examples of both the integration of explicit human rights content into other social work modules and explicit human rights modules can be found in the curricula presented. If the connection between human rights and social work is understood with an explicit reference to the human rights regime and human rights instruments, an explicit human rights module seems to be reasonable in order to present it in its complexity and to open up the use of human rights instruments. From a perspective of human rights reference “from below”, the focus appears less on human rights instruments than on people's experienced discrimination and injustice. Although explicit knowledge of human rights is also necessary

here to recognize the experiences of injustice as such, the approaches are aimed more at supporting those affected in their options for action in the face of structural disadvantage. Explicit human rights modules in the curriculum can of course also be useful from the latter position, but linking them to other political and ethical references, such as social justice, is more evident.

Basically, against the background of the different approaches, their difference regarding the relevance of ethical, political and legal aspects of the human rights discourse and the respective connection to social work and its practice is crucial and in need of discussion. In addition to the indisputably necessary basic knowledge of human rights, the question of the human rights references that are to be opened up for social work courses remains to be clarified. This concerns, for example, the question of how intensively the (critical) examination of human rights narratives is necessary in undergraduate courses, usually at the bachelor's level.

Of course, there is a need for clarification not only in terms of content, but also in terms of didactics. Following a common model of human rights education (UN, 2011), this not only requires learning “about” but also “for” and “through” human rights. In the case of social work courses, the “for” can be described with practice and the “through” with the practical parts or internships. In principle, a distinction can be made between deductive approaches, in the sense of applying human rights norms and instruments to the practice situation, and inductive approaches, in the sense of developing human rights awareness from the problems of people in practice.

## **Conclusion and further steps**

In summary, it can be stated based on the presentation of the colleagues that in all participating universities human rights are taken up within the curricular. Admittedly, the degree of implementation shows a wide range, the reasons for which are to be judged differently from the point of view of the project. On the one hand, it can be stated that the implementation of human rights in the social work curricula is not consistently sufficient from our perspective. On the other hand, there are different perspectives on the connection between social work and human rights, which is also expressed in differences in the degree and focus of the implementation of human rights in the study programmes.

Nevertheless, at this stage of the analysis, some necessary aspects for the implementation of human rights content in social work programmes can already be identified. The focus here is primarily on the undergraduate degree programmes as a Europe-wide basis for access to social work. On top of that, in line with the project design, we focus on statements about curricular, e.g., the above-mentioned necessity for a lecturer's expertise for the implementation in possible study units is not considered here in the sense of staffing as opposed to curricular conditions. For now three starting points for further considerations on the requirements for the implementation of human rights in social work curricula in general can be named:

### **1. Explicit human rights references**

The most obvious issue is explicit references to human rights in compulsory courses in undergraduate programmes. These explicit references must necessarily include the fundamentals of human rights in their multiplicity. The required implementation of human rights references can by no means be covered by elective courses but must be covered within compulsory courses.

### **2. Connection of human rights to political aspects**

The human rights content must be linked to the political context within the social work study programmes. On one hand, this means contextualization in the sense of adaptation to the respective national and local framework of the study programmes. On the other hand, human rights must be opened up in their significance for the (professional) political and structural action of social work.

### 3. Making human rights accessible for the practice of social work.

Human rights must be made accessible within the courses of study in their significance for the practice of social work. This concerns both the practical relevance of the theoretical foundations of human rights within the study units as well as the human rights components within the accompaniment and discussion of the internships within the studies. A restriction to the sole examination of theoretical models misses the necessary practical relevance for the profession; a sole consideration based on social problems from practice does not do justice to the complexity (also) of human rights.

In addition to the issues named above in the discussion of the various forms of curricular integration of human rights, the question of best practice examples also became apparent. Given the various perspectives represented, such a determination is by no means trivial. In principle, some borrowings from the curricula presented, which integrate human rights more clearly than others, can serve to develop human rights-based social work curricula. However, further discussion remains fundamentally necessary to systematize the different possibilities of implementing human rights into social work curricula in a transparent and comprehensible way.

This includes, on one hand, to further develop the already mentioned different perspectives regarding the connection between social work and human rights (within the SIG) and to make clear their meaning for the curricular of social work. On the other hand, existing approaches beyond the working group must be accessed.

Practical examples such as existing study programmes with a focus on human rights can certainly make a valuable contribution here. This includes for the European Qualifications Framework and the two master programmes of the ASH (Social Work as a Human Rights Profession; one in German and an international one in English), which are also represented here, but also the master's programme of the University of Gothenburg or the bachelor's programme at Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius (both social work and human rights). In addition to these elaborated practical examples, there are various theoretical models and drafts for the implementation of human rights in social work courses (e.g. Staub-Bernasconi, 2008; Meinhold, 2006; McPherson & Abell 2012), with non-"Western" approaches to be accessed here as well.

All these considerations will bear little fruit unless they are echoed within educational politics and administration. Only if the implementation of human rights is stipulated or at least supported by educational frameworks and in accreditation procedures, will it have a long-time impact. Otherwise, the implementation might be up for negotiation in the next round of curricula development. Even if this was not the primary goal of the project and the working group, we hope to have made a contribution for the implementation of human rights as an essential pillar of professional social work education.

## References

- Deweese, M., & Roche, S. (2001). Teaching about human rights in social work. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 21*(1/2), 137-155
- Ife, J. (2008). *Human rights and social work: Towards rights-based practice* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Ife, J., & Fiske, M. (2006). Human rights and community work: complementary theories and practices. *International Social Work, 49*(3), 297-308.
- McPherson, J., & Abell, N. (2012). Human rights engagement and exposure: new scales to challenge social work education. *Research on Social Work Practice, 22*(6), 704-713.
- Meinhold, M. (2006). Auf dem Weg zum postgradualen Studiengang "Master of Social Work – Soziale Arbeit als Menschenrechtsprofession" (pp. 110-119). In Schmocker, B. (Ed.). *Liebe, Macht und Erkenntnis. Silvia Staub-Bernasconi und das Spannungsfeld Soziale Arbeit*. Lambertus-Verlag: Freiburg.
- Noyori-Corbett, C., & Moxley, D. (2021). Research informed competencies for human rights field education in social work. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work, 6*, 59-66
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2008). Menschenrechte in ihrer Relevanz für die Soziale Arbeit als Theorie und Praxis. *Zeitschrift Widersprüche, 107*, 9-32.
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2018). *Soziale Arbeit als Handlungswissenschaft* (2nd ed.). Verlag Barbara Buderich: Opladen
- Staub-Bernasconi, S. (2019). *Menschenwürde – Menschenrechte – Soziale Arbeit*. Verlag Barbara Buderich: Opladen
- Steen, J., & Mathiesen, S. (2008). Human rights education – Is social work behind the curve. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 25*(3/4), 143-156.

## **Human Rights and Social Work - Critical Approaches for Social Work Education Across Europe**

Project responsibilities:

Didier Reynaert

Nivedita Prasad

Ingo Stamm

Michel Tirions

Alex Klein

Project duration:

15/04/2022 – 15/07/2023

Content Editing:

Ingo Stamm

Alex Klein

Language Editing:

Sarah Metcalf

Layout:

Päivi Vuorio

Funded by *EASSW*

Symposium Venue *HOGENT University of Applied Science and Arts, Gent/Belgium*