Comparing the social service workforce across Europe: Current Trends

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Background

- Population ageing, demographics and societal changes
- Growing diversity and complexity of needs
- Increased demand for a competent, flexible and compassionate workforce
- Fiscal and economic challenges
  - Implications on the workforce
- Differences between and within countries
- Social Care Policy dynamics and successive reforms – starting from a ‘social protection’ perspective, personalisation and marketisation
- A context of free labour mobility
European Welfare Models—how different, how similar?

- Classic distribution of welfare models - based on political ideology
- However most models are now converging into similar models towards a mixed economy of care
  - Fiscal pressures more than change in ideology
  - Some models retain elements of classic welfare model
- Implications of LTC model on workforce structure
- Regulations and skills’ requirements vary significantly between countries (Hussein 2011; Boddy & Stratham 2009)
Social Services Activities in Europe

- A range of services and activities ranging from
  - Social work activities
    - Children’s and families
    - Adults and older people
  - To ..
    - Personal care and support for adults and older people in need of care
  - Provided over a range of settings from people’s own homes to residential or institutional care
  - With the personalisation agenda a tendency to extend care into people’s own environment
  - Implications on the organisation and delivery of services
The Social Services Workforce

- A labour intensive and emotionally taxing line of work
  - Increases in demand are likely to require an almost equal increase in workforce supply (Fujisawa & Colombo 2009)
  - Burnout and stress issues and management strategies
- Predominantly female
  - Both horizontal and vertical structural differences by gender
- Wages, high turnover and vacancy rates; working conditions and structure & delivery of work
  - Supervision; training opportunities
- Flat hierarchy of work, little room for career development/progress
Example: Burnout among social workers in the UK affected by the client group

Source: Hussein (forthcoming)
Structure of the workforce

- Generally two tiers professional groups
- Highly skilled – professional qualifications (e.g. social work; occupational therapy etc.)
  - Their roles revolve around: Assessment of users’ needs; Multi-agency working; Reducing and managing risk; case management
- Less skilled – lower threshold of skills requirement at point of recruitment (direct care workers; support workers etc.)
  - Five key components of work: 1-Providing personal care; 2-Coordinating services; 3- Empowering users; 4-Help creating an inclusive community; 5- Build relationships with/ support informal carers
Skills and competency requirements

Professional group:
- Usually require university level qualifications which are in general regulated by national or regional bodies
- Could be specialist at the undergraduate or postgraduate levels
- The profession itself could be regulated and licensed and could be not

Less-skilled group
- A focus on personal attributes and ‘soft skills’
- Increased emphasis in involving service users in recruiting and training workers
Workforce Shortages: Recruitment and Retention

- Offering on-job tailored training and qualifications opportunities
- Initiatives to broaden the pool of recruits (e.g. attracting more men; targeting younger people at school/college fairs; People with disabilities; those from second generation migrants or new communities of refugees)
- Increase the contribution of migrant workers (e.g. through managed-migration routes in shortage areas of work)
- Existing tool kits to improve recruitment to the sector
- Create opportunities for current workers to act as ‘care ambassadors’
- Agency or bank workers

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The Role of Migrant Workers and Workforce Mobility

- Large scale mobility within Europe- ‘care chains’ and beyond
- Large proportion of both the professional and less qualifies workforce are migrants in many European countries
- Much higher prevalence in the capital and large cities (e.g. 40% in London)
- European and country-specific immigration policies
- Increased role of Central and Eastern European migrants
- Skills, qualifications and language transferability
Example: Migrant workers entering the English social care sector

Example: Migrant workers in the Norwegian care sector

Source, Christensen, Hussein & Ismail (in press)
Technology and Workforce Implications

- Increasing importance of assistive technology and digital platforms
- Advantages and challenges
- Training of workers and users
- Sharing information (changing culture)
- Changing work structure (remote working, reduced face-to-face working time)
- Skills’ requirements?
Discussion Points

- Population and demographic changes require innovative ways to address escalating demands on social services.
- Interactions of services and increased complexities of needs – social protection for wider groups: homelessness, refugees, mental health, substance misuse, ageing, dementia and others.
- Rethinking service structure and delivery options.
- The interplay between the individual, family, community and the state.
- Migrants as part of the solution and challenge.
References


Hussein, S. (forthcoming) Determinants of job burnout: A comparative analysis of Adult and Children social work professionals in England
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