This paper critically examines the socio-political responses of Sweden and Norway to the increasing immigration and refugees in 2015-2016. Based on a review of governmental and municipal authorities' responses to the increasing immigration to the two countries, the results show that the increasing immigration and refugees in a time of neoliberal reorganisation of society creates new conceptual, ethical and practical challenges for the practices of social work in the two countries. It is argued that the neoliberal privatisation of the reception of newcomers deteriorate the possibilities of social work to play its effective role for promoting social justice and social cohesion. Social work as a global and human rights profession should move beyond national boundaries and care nationalism in order to realise solidary goals and international commitments of social work and social workers.

**Abstract:**

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**Keywords:**

increasing immigration; neoliberalism; social justice; social work; welfare state

**Question**

Academic articles should be between 6000 and 8000 words, including abstract, notes, tables, figures and references.

**Response**

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Introduction

Social justice has been one of the most important values of progressive and critical social work. As one of the pioneers of social work and the peace activist, Jane Addams (1860-1935), stated, ‘true peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the presence of justice’. Today, the historical anti-war mission of social work needs to be related to global social justice in a time of neoliberal globalisation and increasing ‘new wars’ and conflicts, including the ‘war on terror’, ‘liberating wars’, ‘pre-emptive wars’ and ethnic conflicts with tremendous human consequences, which is putting the future of humanity at tremendous risk (Kamali, 2015). Such a world at war has not only created more than 65 million people forcibly displaced (United Nations, 2014, 2016), but also increasingly destroy infrastructures and living conditions of many non-Western countries.

As a result, many people are forced to leave their countries and regions of origin and move either to large cities and secure areas in their home countries or to neighbouring and Western countries. In such a turbulent world, social workers as agents for promoting human rights and social justice, have to challenge oppressive and unjust systems, actively participate in public discourse as a means of raising consciousness and influence global, national and local decision-makings in order to counteract increasing wars, conflicts, oppressions, and injustices (Kamali, 2015; Lavalette, 2016; McKendrick and Finch, 2016).

In a highly globalised world, it is hardly possible to not seeing the connections between national, local and global decision-makings and their consequences for human societies around the world. There is an urgent need for social work, as a profession, which is historically often marked by the states’ national perspective, to free itself from ‘care nationalism’ and to address the glocal context of social work (e.g. Hugman, Moosa-Mitha, and Moyo, 2010; Jönsson, 2014a). Social work need to influence nation states and national actors to move beyond the immediate national boundaries in order to address and reduce global inequalities, eliminate wars and conflicts and their related global social problems. Such necessary development in the profession of social work as a global and human rights profession is also supported by the strategic document ‘The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: Commitment to Action’ published by International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) (2012). The ‘Global Agenda’ serves to illustrate practical, conceptual and ethical challenges linked to the core global statements of social work including challenges for social workers to develop new methods, strategies and practices for the future global organisation of social work (Jones and Truell, 2012). The Global Agenda is closely related to the universal mission of social work based on its codes of ethics and the global definition of social work provided by IFSW (2014): ‘The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work’.

These are guiding principles for all areas of social work practices, education and research. Social work is a human right profession, which cannot ignore its global mission based on the dignity of every individual and groups irrespective of their national belonging, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age and other categories of power.

Related to the second pillar of the Global Agenda, namely ‘Promoting the Dignity and Worth of Peoples’, many social work partners and members have addressed the role of social work
facing the situation of refugees and displaced persons. IASSW declared on World Social Work Day 2016 on March 15th that:

The absence of any substantial regional or international coordination devalued the dignity of those affected by the crisis at all points during their journey and eventual integration into asylum countries or in facing the consequences of returning to a war zone. We hope that this ‘from the ground up’ initiative will act as a catalyst for governments to work with us.

Social workers through their social work associations, educational institutions and various voluntary organisations have been working with governments, United Nations agencies and other national and international organs to deal with the growing number of refugees. As governments have hesitated, many social workers have stepped into the vacuum left by the states and are supporting immigrants and refugees even if popular xenophobic sentiments are rising. As several articles have reported in The Guardian, many social workers are assisting refugees in refugee camps, such as in Leros in Greece and Calais in France, and are using their skills and capacities to advocate the rights and justice for refugees in many European countries (e.g. Hardy, 2015; Truell, 2015; Wroe, 2016).

The increasing refugee immigration to Europe has influenced almost all European countries. This includes the Scandinavian countries of Sweden and Norway. In total, 1 325 000 registered people applied for asylum in a European country (Pew Research Centre, 2016) Sweden was among the three countries which received the highest proportion of asylum seekers with a number of 162 877 people (Connor, 2016). This was 12 % of all registered asylum seekers in Europe during 2015. Among those 35 369 were unaccompanied children (Migrationsverkets statistics, 2015). In comparison, Norway received only 2 % of all asylum seekers in Europe in 2015, 30 110 persons. Among them 4950 were unaccompanied children (UDI, 2016a). However, the number of asylum seekers to Europe and the Scandinavian countries changed dramatically in 2016. This needs to be understood in the context of the recent decades’ neoliberal political triumph and the retreat of the welfare state in Scandinavian countries including Sweden and Norway from its traditional commitments and obligations towards people (Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming).

In this article, we critically examine the socio-political responses of Sweden and Norway to the increasing immigration and refugees in 2015-2016. The following questions guided the study: How are the right-based welfare states of Sweden and Norway reacting to the increasing immigration and the increasing demand for welfare services? How has the political debate on increasing refugees reinforced the support for welfare nationalism in the two countries? What are the challenges for social work with immigrants and refugees in a time of neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare states in the two countries?

Since early 1990s and because of the electoral success of parties guided by neoliberal ideology, both the Swedish and Norwegian welfare states have come under major pressures. Such reforms were aimed at the neoliberal parole and policy of ‘making government cheaper’ (Hylland Eriksen, 2016; Kamali, 2015). Although right wing parties in the two countries mainly advocated the neoliberal transformations, the political champions of the welfare states, namely Social Democratic Parties, adjusted themselves and continued the neoliberal reformation of the welfare state and labour market in the two countries. However, the different proportion of immigration to Sweden and Norway makes it interesting to compare the two countries with almost the same model of welfare states (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990).

**A social justice framework in a time of increasing injustices**
War and violence are dominating our world and influence all aspects of human lives, and as such are important perspectives in progressive social work promoting social justice (Allen, 2008; Kamali, 2015). In such a world, human rights-based values of social work, including the promotion of social and economic equalities and the dignity and rights of people are clashing with the reality of wars, conflicts and destruction of many non-Western local communities, as well as decreasing welfare resources in European countries resulting from neoliberal politics. The two countries of Sweden and Norway have highly been affected by neoliberal reorganisations of their welfare states since 1990s. This has resulted in ideological, political and electoral support for ‘welfare nationalism’, which has also influenced the practices and the education of social work (Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming). As a result, the practices of social work are moving towards individualised, isolated, de-politicised and formalised task-performance with minimum concern about structural and institutional dimensions of inequalities and exclusion of marginalised groups in society (Hennum, 2104; Lauri, 2016). During the recent decades, the compass of social, economic and political activities has gradually been limited to individual interventions within existing social systems and structures of inequalities (Jönsson, 2015; Kamali, 2015; Kojan, 2011). This landscape forces social work to leave its historical tradition of being a profession of human rights and social justice with structural and institutional perspectives on social problems and act in accordance with neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare state.

The concept and definition of ‘social justice’ has been, and continues to be, used variably and understood differently dependent on the different social contexts, political ideologies, and theoretical perspectives of the actors or groups involved (Miller 1976; Kamali 2015). Nancy Fraser (2007) views social justice as requiring social arrangements, which make it possible for all to participate on an equal basis in social life. She means that in the age of globalisation we cannot take the territoriality of the state for granted since we all are influencing by international organs and global forces (Fraser, 2009). The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW and IASSW 2012) break down social justice in the following five themes:

1. **Challenging negative discrimination:** Social workers have a responsibility to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, ‘racial’ or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.

2. **Recognizing diversity:** Social workers should recognize and respect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies in which they practice, taking account of individual, family, group, and community differences.

3. **Distributing resources equitably:** Social workers should ensure that resources at their disposal are distributed fairly, according to need.

4. **Challenging unjust policies and practices:** Social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practices are oppressive, unfair or harmful.

5. **Working in solidarity:** Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatization or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society.
Such progressive goals of social work are steadily challenged by neoliberal policies and ideologies.

**Immigration challenges to the right-based welfare states**

Increasing immigration during a relatively short period in 2015 created a major challenge for the retreating welfare states of Sweden and Norway. In both Sweden and Norway the policies of workfare (Arbetslinjen), which was introduced during late 1990s and early 2000s, aimed at creating incitements for vulnerable individuals to replace the subsidies of the welfare states with income from their own jobs (Lauri, 2016; Marthinsen and Skjefstad, 2011; Stjernø and Øverbye, 2012). The debate on social justice was related to individuals’ ‘responsibility’ for their living. The welfare state was considered to transform individuals into depended and passive citizens (Kamali, 2006). A strong welfare state was considered harmful to individuals to be responsible for their lives and therefore keener of being depended on welfare subsidies. Although recent decades neoliberal changes, the Swedish and Norwegian welfare states are still bounded with legal frames for helping vulnerable groups which for many decades been a well-known feature of the Scandinavian Social Democratic regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, such legal frames are increasingly under the pressure of neoliberal policies and practices. It seems that Swedish and Norwegian welfare states are becoming more of an image than a reality. The ‘abnormal’ increasing of immigration to the two countries during a short period was a major challenge to the ‘normal’ retreat of the welfare state in the two countries. Citizens’ fears for continues shrinking of welfare services increased in the face of increasing costs of immigration. Anti-immigrant and racist parties used such realities in order to mobilise political support (Kamali, 2009). The electoral success of such parties are making a major treat to the ideas and practice of the universal and solidary welfare state and increase the pressures on social workers to be the agents of a ‘nationalist welfare state’.

**The political response to refugee immigration**

Sweden had until the end of 2015 a more open-border policy than Norway and received far more refugees and asylum seekers than Norway. This was partly due to the Norwegian restrictive immigration policy influenced by the electoral success of right wing parties and groups in Norway. However, the substantial increase of refugees to Sweden forced the country to change its liberal refugee policies and introduce border control. Further, both Sweden and Norway introduced several restrictions in the right of asylum-seekers, such as temporary residence permit, increasing control of internal and external borders to prevent unwanted immigrants to cross the borders and encouraging voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin.

Opinion polls in Sweden and Norway showed that citizens utter more negative attitudes towards increasing immigration. Even mainstream parties adjusted themselves to the negative attitudes towards immigration and started to propagate for a more restrictive immigration and refugee politics. In Sweden, the Red-Green government coalition made a main agreement beyond the right-left divisions between all political parties, excluding the xenophobic Sweden Democrats party (Sverigedemokraterna). The agreement meant introducing restrictive border control, including id-control and temporary resident permit for new refugees. Such restrictive policies by which the rights of refugees were limited were not only introduced in Scandinavian countries, but also in many other European countries.
During recent decades, anti-immigrant sentiments have increased with the entrance of xenophobic parties into European parliaments and local assemblies, framing immigration as a danger to European ‘cultural homogeneity’, modernity and welfare (Kamali, 2009). Xenophobic parties increasingly influence the public debate by portraying immigrants from former colonies and other non-Western countries as ‘foreign elements’ who are abusing the welfare system of European countries and endangering European security. Xenophobic parties in Sweden and Norway have for a long time propagated for a more restrictive immigration policy and in some cases a total stop for all immigration to those countries. Such parties, as Sweden Democrats in Sweden and Progress Party (Fremskriptpartiet) in Norway have demonised immigrants and refugees as a major threat to the two countries welfare and security.

In a time of retreating welfare states and growing social problems, the xenophobic discourses have influenced many citizens of the two countries. The popularity of xenophobic discourses, which have influenced the electorates, have also influenced the mainstream parties to adopt a more anti-immigrant position (Kamali 2009). The change in the political climate in Sweden and Norway has resulted in the assaults against immigrants and refugees, such as burning refugee camps and individual mistreatments of refugees. Only in 2015, more than 40 burnings of refugee camps were reported in Sweden. In almost all the burnings, the police suspected that the camps were intentionally put on fire (Göteborgsposten, 20 December 2015). In Norway, several similar events of burning refugee camps have been reported during 2015 (VG, Newspaper 2015).

The increased refugee immigration and its related costs for Sweden and to a lesser extent for Norway occurred in a time of neoliberal reorganisation and reforms of the Swedish and Norwegian welfare states. During 2015, the welfare systems of Sweden and Norway were facing huge challenges in meeting the needs and rights of immigrant families and their children. More than 22 percent of the refugees coming to Sweden during 2015 were unaccompanied minors children under 18 years (Migrationsverkets statistics, 2015). Norway experienced a 75 percent increase of unaccompanied minors during 2015. Approximately 18 percent of the refugees were children under 18 years (UDI, 2016a). Such an increase created many challenges for the welfare states of the two countries to meet the needs of the children in general, and unaccompanied minors in particular. Earlier research have shown that there are no specific legislation policies related to immigrant children and their needs, which would entitle them to significant treatments. This is mainly due to the recent reorganisation of the welfare states and new regulations and reforms characterised by decentralisation and fragmentation of public child welfare services available for immigrant children in different countries (Skivenes et al, 2015).

The same study also shows that child welfare workers are insufficiently prepared for working with immigrant families and their children. The complex issues related to immigrant children, including children to undocumented families and to unaccompanied minors require more flexible, right-based and anti-discriminatory practice skills (Skivenes et al, 2015). Some studies criticize the exclusionary nation-based welfare state, in which many groups excludes from the exclusive rights of citizens, and advocate a more global approaches, frames and practices to the welfare policies (e.g. Dominelli, 2010; Jönsson, 2014b; Kamali, 2015; Skivenes et.al, 2015).

The nation-based challenges to many European countries, including the Scandinavian welfare states, requires to find solutions to the tensions between Global statements of Ethical Principles of Social Work, international laws and convention and the nationalised daily welfare practices with immigrant families and children.

Refugee immigration and challenges to the welfare states of Sweden and Norway
The recent decade’s neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare states of Sweden and Norway has influenced the traditional welfare regimes of these countries. A major result of the reorganisation have been privatisation of school and marketisation of housing. In this section, we will discuss the two areas of education and housing which are of major importance for the increasing immigration to the two countries.

**Immigration and neoliberalisation of the education in Sweden and Norway**

One of the most substantial educational reform of the school system in Sweden was introduced in 1990s. The reforms ended the governmental and municipal monopoly on the schools in Sweden and allowed financial elites to start private schools. The same reforms have been introduced in Norway and was formalised in early 2000s. Accordingly, many private schools were established in Sweden and Norway. Motivated students from high-income and privileged groups in society have often populated the new private schools. Most children and young people from low-income groups are nowadays concentrated in municipal schools with less high skilled teachers. This has created a school segregation with declining school performance of many children and youths in the two countries (Beach and Sernhede, 2011; Fekjær and Birkelund, 2007; Sawyer and Kamali, 2006). In Oslo, more than 30 % of pupils have immigrant parents (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). The 40 % who speak a minority language in Oslo make up a majority at 53 schools, and constitute more than 90 % at six of them (VG Newspaper, 2010). A recent research report (IFAU, 2015) shows that the application of the ‘free choice’ of schools has led to increasing school segregation between pupils with immigrant background and those of majority society (Böhlmark, Holmlund and Lindahl, 2015).

The negative effect of neoliberal reforms have been reinforced by the entrance of the new group of refugee children in need of education and special support in school.

Increasing immigration of children has created many challenges to the Swedish and Norwegian welfare states during 2015-2016. Many newly arrived children and youths lack opportunities to start school in Sweden and Norway due to the shortage of public schools. In addition, the substantial differences in the refugee children’s educational backgrounds require more welfare resources in order to provide proper education to the refugee children in the both countries. The situation is worsening because of the workloads for schools and the shortage of educated teachers, counsellors, nurses, psychologists, and personnel in order to support the new group of pupils. The lack of educated teachers forced several local authorities to sidestep the law and hire unqualified teachers and non-skilled personnel. Some public schools have been forced to accept more students than they can handle and this has led to a deterioration of school environments and school results in a situation where many support functions in schools, such as the number of school nurses and counsellors, already has been reduced considerably in the wake of the neoliberal market adjustment and cost efficiency.

**Immigration and neoliberalisation of housing in Sweden and Norway**

The welfare states of Sweden and Norway were traditionally based on the idea of equality, distribution of resources in order to provide the citizens basic needs such as housing. Every citizens where entitled housing irrespective of their socioeconomic status. However, the recent decades neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare states in the two countries jeopardised this entitlement and opened up the housing market and opened up for strong financial interest. Such marketisation of housing, which has led to the construction of expensive housing for the riches
segment of society and led to shortage of housing for less advantaged groups, is continuing in a time where increasing refugee immigration adds to the demand for rental and cheap housing.

An important challenge to the Swedish and Norwegian welfare systems is the rapidly growing population and the increasing need for housing. The Swedish and Norwegian governments have taken a number of decisions and initiatives to support municipalities in their work with housing for new immigrants and refugees. Increasing immigration forced authorities to use many hotels, guesthouses, camping sites and other public places as temporary housing for newly arrived refugees during 2015 and early 2016. Some municipalities in major cities, such as Malmö and Oslo were periodically forced to harbouring immigrants and refugees in large tent camps and modular homes. Placing many newcomers in already segregated areas with a majority of people with immigrant backgrounds has increased segregation and related social problems (Andersen Skifter et al, 2016; Kamali, 2006). The growing pressures on immigration and municipal authorities has created a situation in which some unprivileged groups, such as newcomers, are prioritised against some other already segregated and unprivileged groups in society. This has increased the tensions between unprivileged groups, which reinforces anti-immigrant sentiments in society. Without tackling the urgent housing problem for immigrants and refugees, there will be continuous problems of setting different vulnerable groups against each other (Swärd and Eriksson, 2015). The situation is more accurate in the large cities, such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

In Norway, the shortage of housing and segregation is increasingly creating ‘ghettos’ in major cities (Toft and Ljunggren, 2016; Turner and Wessel, 2013). Other scholars warns for the consequences of housing segregation for immigrants. They argue that poor and/or unstable housing represents challenges for family life, and for immigrants’ capacities to build social networks beyond the family and suggest that the arbitrary and potentially discriminatory selection processes in the rental market undermines the development of generalised trust (Skevik Grødem and Skog Hansen, 2015). In both Sweden and Norway, the housing is one of the most important part of a historically strong welfare state. It has been argued that housing is one of the most pillars of the welfare state (Torgersen, 1987). This is true even when it comes to the question of a successful integration of immigrants (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012; Kamali, 2005; Molina, 1997; Skevik Grødem and Skog Hansen, 2015; Valenta and Bunar, 2010).

The reorganisation of the welfare state is observable in current times of increasing immigration and in reducing the social costs of education, social and health-care for refugees. Neoliberal political actors have been frequently advocating public–private partnerships and the engagement of private and voluntary actors in the current reception of refugees. Neoliberal advocates of more hybrid organisation structures with actors from different sectors such as the public, the private, third sector and the civil society (Brandsen and Karre, 2011; Evers, 2005). This is more obvious since 2014 and the increase of immigration to the two countries. This led to that many private companies have been contracted by the social authorities to be engaged in refugee accommodation in Sweden. Reportedly, many of such private companies receive large amounts of tax money to provide housing for refugees in Sweden and Norway.

**The neoliberal market of the reception of refugees**

During 2015, there has been a huge increase of private companies that facilitates accommodations for unaccompanied minors. When the number of unaccompanied minors reached a record level during the fall 2015 also the prices for ‘jour- and family homes’ increased
substantially. There are no official national statistics in Sweden and Norway on how many of the newcomers of unaccompanied children in year 2015 (ca 35000 in Sweden and 4950 in Norway) who were placed in such homes by private companies. However, reports indicate that it was a clear majority (Sveriges radio, 19 February 2016) and to a price of 2-3000 SEK/day which meant 60-90000 SEK/month. In year, 2015 were 337 private companies activated in Sweden, compared with around 70 activated companies in year 2014. Also in Norway, private companies (UDI, 2016b) run most homes for unaccompanied minors.

Sivesind (2016) argues that the growth of commercial actors in welfare have been larger in Sweden but is also evident in Norway. Commercial actors have grown strong in particular welfare areas such as in the housing for and healthcare and social work with refugees and with unaccompanied minors in particular. One of the major commercial operator for reception of refugees in Norway is an organisation called Hero Group (which also offers services in Sweden). The organisation claims that: ‘There is a need for continuous innovation and social entrepreneurship in order to facilitate integration of new citizens effectively’ (http://hero.no).

Several reports have shown that such companies have earned huge fortunes from being involved in receiving of immigrants and refugees without any substantial control of the authorities. During 2015 and early 2016 there have been many scandals concerning private companies started and controlled by non-serious and even in some cases criminal actors in the market (Dagens Nyheter, 2015, 2016; Kamali, 2016). A major problem that target the newcomers is the lack of professionalism and adequate competency among the private profit-hunting companies, which neglect the real and long-standing needs of newcomers in general, and unaccompanied minors in particular. The triumph of neoliberalism provides many spaces for entrepreneurs, who are considered fully competent to work in healthcare and social work. Many of such companies lack almost any program for integration and theoretical perspectives and methods of practices for understanding the socioeconomic, cultural conditions which shape and influence refugees’, and unaccompanied minors’ life conditions in the new countries (Kamali, 2016). The author argues further that many ‘family-homes’ for unaccompanied minors lack adequate knowledge about the host countries’ structural and institutional arrangements and cannot help newcomers in their process of integration.

Such critics have to some extent led to enlarged concerns for better quality control of such ‘jour and family homes’. However, largely, social work authorities are, and will continue to be, the outsourcer to private companies. The neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare states has led to a major shift in the vision and mission of the welfare state, which is increasingly becoming an entrepreneurial institution benefiting and interests of private actors. Consequently, the traditional solidarity goals and aims of the welfare state have been replaced by managerial functions of the welfare state in a dominating capitalist market.

The recent decades’ neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare state in Sweden and Norway is colliding with a growing need of authorities’ intervention for a human reception of new immigrants and asylum seekers. The principle of universal rights are gradually violated as result of a weakening welfare state and is challenged by private and profitable companies in the education, health care, and other social service spheres, which traditionally were taken care of by the welfare organisations. This has also led to an increase in the establishment of charity organisations (Jönsson, 2015).

Although many laws and regulations that played an important role in the establishment of the universal rights-based social work in both Sweden and Norway still formally exist, these have
been challenged by increasing neoliberal reforms, such as privatisation of the reception of immigrants and asylum-seekers, elderly, childcare system, and the pension system. The guiding laws in Sweden and Norway still urges authorities to provide citizens with good living conditions. The Swedish Social Services Act (2001: 453) declares: ‘Society’s social services should be based on democracy and solidarity to promote people’s economic and social security, equality in living conditions and active participation in society’. Almost the same is included in the Norwegian Social Services Act (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2009), which urges authorities ‘to improve living conditions for the disadvantaged, contributing to social and economic security, including that the individual gets the opportunity to live independently, and promote the transition to employment, social inclusion and active participation in society’.

However, since 1990 the neoliberal changes and marketisation of the welfare state increasingly transformed many of the authorities’ responsibility for the welfare of people to those in need, which means that privileges and social problems of individuals are the results of individual choices. Freedom from poverty and other social problems, which was the responsibility of the welfare state, has becoming the freedom of being unprivileged. The increasing social problems of people has also resulted in the emergence of many civil and voluntary actors in the welfare sector and in the field of social work to compensate for the shortcomings of the welfare state (Herning, 2015; Jönsson, 2015).

The Swedish government has in 2015 given 200 million SEK to civil society organisations working with refugees and minister of culture and democracy, Alice Bah Kuhnke, declared that: ‘Without the people's voluntary commitment would the vulnerability of people who flee be much larger’ (Dagens Nyheter December 11, 2015). The same is true for Norway. The Norwegian government have declared that: ‘volunteers and other local actors to a greater extent should contribute to municipal [social] work with refugees’ (Agenda Kaupang, 2016:5; Nordisk Ministerråd, 2015).

In 2015, the Swedish and Norwegian reception system have involved many voluntary actors and organisations in managing the increasing immigration of refugees, such as the Red Cross and the Church City Mission. NGOs have come to play a central role in the debates and practices concerning refugees and many of them without any defined theoretical perspectives and methods of practices in order to understand which conditions and relations shape and influence people’s life circumstance. Notwithstanding, the contested role of NGOs is increasingly receiving acceptance by the political establishment influenced by neoliberal ideology.

The rapid increased immigration has led to huge costs for the Swedish and Norwegian state and their public expenditures. Consequently, the welfare system had to make priorities between different unprivileged groups. For example, the costs of the increasing immigration and asylum-seekers were taken from the foreign aid budgets. This led to the raise of many critical voices among aid- and solidarity organisations reacting to such policies, which put vulnerable groups against each other (Sveriges Televison, 20 October 2015; Vårt Blad, November 2015).

In addition, new political reforms were discussed and in some cases decided in order to reduce the costs of increasing immigration. One of such reforms was a proposal for allowing immigrants and asylum-seekers to work by creating ‘unskilled jobs’. The salary shall be under the level of a normal salary for a ‘normal worker’. Such jobs were ‘necessary but otherwise not get done, such as digitalisation of documents in different authorities, nature conservation (e.g. cleaning beaches) and the protection of cultural heritage. The problem of such solutions is the
homogenisation of all newcomers as ‘uneducated and unskilled workers’ and ignoring the huge competence, which arrive the two countries and should be taken care of. Although in early 2016, there has been discussions about ‘complementary courses for immigrants’ in order to make it easier for skilled immigrants to enter the labour market, the imagination of ‘unskilled immigrants’ make the focus of the political debate on immigration.

Further, when social policy is making in cooperation with private actors in a growing neoliberal care market, where refugees and asylum seekers are considered as a ‘commodity’ in the capitalist market, social work is at risk of losing its goals of promoting social justice and its global ethics and solidary practices. The focus is on then on productivity, effectivity and ‘objective’ goal achievements. In such circumstances, marginalisation and exploitation of some immigrant groups are accepted and even institutionalised by legal and institutional changes. In both Sweden and Norway, the extent of inequality has increased in relation to the growing number of immigrants (OECD, 2015).

Understanding and solutions outlined in social policy has implications for social work as a profession and practice. Social work as an integral part of a welfare state based on solidary principles have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practices are oppressive, unfair or harmful. When social problems are seen as individual problems, the practical social work is no longer a public responsibility. The professional social worker is absent, reduced to a controller and a helper with random instruments available. Social work is considered a marginal profession for working with individuals with responsibility for their own lives and problems without any concern about structural conditions.

Neoliberal changes and challenges for social work and social justice

The increasing neoliberalised welfare states of Sweden and Norway have been recently faced by growing demands of services created by increasing immigration. The current immigration called ‘refugee crisis’ are among the results of globalisation of neoliberalism, which has led to increasing wars, conflicts and socioeconomic inequalities in the world. Such transformations have led to increasing migration on a global scale. Some refugees succeed to enter European countries and are, facing increasing anti-immigrants sentiments and politics as well as welfare nationalism and protectionism (Kamali, 2015). This is taking place in a time of increasing neoliberal politics and the deterioration of many countries’ welfare states, including the Swedish and the Norwegian welfare states. The scarce resources have already limited social workers’ possibilities to meet the legal entitlements of people in need, particularly; social work faces new challenges by the growing number of recent immigrants and asylum seekers.

Consequently, social workers in Sweden and Norway are facing a dilemma in their daily works. The dilemma constitutes of many social workers’ intentions to promote social justice and the rights and dignity of peoples irrespective of their legal status, ethnicity, class, gender and other dividing categorisations on the one hand, and, the political and organisational demands and categorisations, on the other. This creates a challenge between the global statements concerning social justice for everybody, ethical principles underpinning social work, international laws, conventions, and actual daily welfare practices with refugees, displaced persons, migrant children and their families (Jönsson, 2014b; Skivenes et al, 2015).

Historically social work in Sweden and Norway, as part of the Scandinavian model of welfare regimes, has been organised by the nation state as an inseparable part of their welfare policies.
Therefore, the influences of the Social Democratic governments on organisation of society and the creation of strong welfare states have traditionally influenced the practices of social work and made it a duty of the state and municipal authorities. Social problems have mainly been considered as national problems, which could be solved by the nation states within its national borders. The ‘refugee crisis’ is an illustration of how neoliberal globalisation and increasing migration challenge the national basis of social work in a time of retreating welfare state. Social workers are increasingly left with uncertainty around their responsibilities in a ‘market of care’ out of, but paid by, the state.

This has created a major challenge for social workers who are facing different social problems, which needs increasing engagement of the state. Social workers are often left by an individual choice of either being a solitary social worker who move beyond the neoliberal political and organisational demands and boundaries, or function as ‘a cog in the bureaucratic machine’.

The current pace of globalisation and global socioeconomic transformations should also influence the education and practices of social work as a matter of adjustment to such global conditions influencing our societies. This should influence social work to move beyond its national boundaries, which force social workers to make difference between the problems of ‘our citizens’ and ‘the others’. The problems of the neoliberal political and organisational demands on social workers and the increasing immigration of refugees have created new practical, conceptual and ethical challenges for the practices of social work. Creating an equal society for everybody and improving social justice needs critical knowledge and commitment to working in change-oriented ways. Social work practices under neoliberal pressures need new knowledge bases and practices, which can counteract the neoliberal policies and ideologies, which lead to increasing otherisation of immigrants and refugees, racism and discrimination.

As educators and researchers we need to be engaged in raising critical questions and generating critical knowledge about the global changes and dealing with the so called ‘refugee crises’ in order to respond to the needs and rights of migrant children and their families. We believe that this requires a more politically engaged, critical and radical theory-informed education and practice of social work (e.g. Ferguson, 2016; Garrett, 2013; Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming; Kojan and Storhaug, 2015; Lavalette, 2011; McKendrick and Webb, 2014; Morley, 2016). As social work practitioners, we need to work with representation through service user’s organisations, trade unions, professional bodies, political parties and other actors who are aware of the destructive consequences of increasing neoliberalisation of society and weakening of the welfare state. Promoting social justice in society requires a broader understanding of social work beyond the dominant nationalised and micro-individual perspective to the more structural and socio-political understandings. Such perspectives could be implemented in the curriculum of social work education, including its professional and field training (Flem et al, 2016; Gray and Webb, 2015) as well as in the daily practice of social work in the differentiated societies of Sweden and Norway.

Increasing immigration and glocal social problems in Sweden and Norway, as well as in other European countries, are not temporary, but a long-standing phenomenon created by global neoliberalisation of the word by Western countries, which create wars, conflicts, natural disasters, and socioeconomic disintegration in many non-Western countries, where refugees are originated from (Kamali, 2015). Such global and national conditions urges social work to resist increasing neoliberal reorganisations of the welfare state and in cooperation with civil society actors and organisations mobilise resistance to further dismantlement of the traditionally strong welfare states of Sweden and Norway.
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