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SOCIAL WORK IN THE FACE OF REFUGEE CRISIS: A RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

The issue of the criminalisation of external migration into the European Union has been studied mostly from the legal perspective. On the one hand, the development of a non-discriminatory legislative framework affecting refugees and asylum seekers has been focused on human rights (Rabczuk, 2002). On the other hand, nowadays the EU is confronted by a new wave of restrictions, including the establishment of a new body Frontex (European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) as well as a chain of detention and reception centres for migrants. These restrictions are sometimes referred to as “Fortress Europe”.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the EU's migration policies, practices influenced by them and their relations to social work and university education of social workers, particularly in Poland. The methods used in this study are document analysis – rooted in hermeneutic tradition – and critical discourse analysis, accompanied by elements of institutional analysis.

One of the main questions is: In what context people working with asylum seekers and refugees act (how might it change?) and what educational preparation they have? A study by Dilys Schoorman and Ira Bogotch (2010) is an important reference point here. The authors raise questions about the gap between academic teacher training courses in multicultural education (their underlying ideology, content etc.) and educational practice. My study, however, indicates a gap between intercultural education, with its declarative basis of dialogue (as it is represented in academic discourse), and practices influenced by migration policy. The process of criminalisation seems to affect especially detention and reception centres and, consequently, integration of asylum seekers might be impeded if they are stigmatised and treated as criminals due to mechanisms of migration policy. For instance, studies show that in Poland, the existent alternatives to detention of asylum seekers, are rarely used (Chmelickova, 2006) – which can point toward the process of criminalisation.

What is essential, students of education faculties, both with specialisation in social rehabilitation and social work, might start their careers in all kinds of migration centres, where they will face “the Other” not on an equal ground, and not suitable for a dialogue. On the contrary, “the Other” will often be marked as a criminal, “illegal” and unwanted political problem as paths to becoming “legal” are being consecutively closed. Indeed, in these environments the future of intercultural dialogue might be established or dissolved. Such an educational context might have considerable implications for teachers of intercultural education courses, social workers and educators as well as policy-makers.

Keywords

asylum seekers, refugees, social work, migration policy, Poland, the European Union

References

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