

# Critical and Radical Social Work

## Social justice beyond neoliberal welfare nationalism: Challenges of increasing immigration to Sweden and Norway --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>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.</p>
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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 global 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

1 facing the situation of refugees and displaced persons. IASSW declared on World Social  
2 Work Day 2016 on March 15<sup>th</sup> that:

3 The absence of any substantial regional or international coordination devalued the dignity of  
4 those affected by the crisis at all points during their journey and eventual integration into asylum  
5 countries or in facing the consequences of returning to a war zone. We hope that this ‘from the  
6 ground up’ initiative will act as a catalyst for governments to work with us.  
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8 Social workers through their social work associations, educational institutions and various  
9 voluntary organisations have been working with governments, United Nations agencies and  
10 other national and international organs to deal with the growing number of refugees. As  
11 governments have hesitated, many social workers have stepped into the vacuum left by the  
12 states and are supporting immigrants and refugees even if popular xenophobic sentiments are  
13 rising. As several articles have reported in *The Guardian*, many social workers are assisting  
14 refugees in refugee camps, such as in Leros in Greece and Calais in France, and are using their  
15 skills and capacities to advocate the rights and justice for refugees in many European countries  
16 (e.g. Hardy, 2015; Truell, 2015; Wroe, 2016).  
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20 The increasing refugee immigration to Europe has influenced almost all European countries.  
21 This includes the Scandinavian countries of Sweden and Norway. In total, 1 325 000 registered  
22 people applied for asylum in a European country (Pew Research Centre, 2016) Sweden was  
23 among the three countries which received the highest proportion of asylum seekers with a  
24 number of 162 877 people (Connor, 2016). This was 12 % of all registered asylum seekers in  
25 Europe during 2015. Among those 35 369 were unaccompanied children (Migrationsverket  
26 statistics, 2015). In comparison, Norway received only 2 % of all asylum seekers in Europe in  
27 2015, 30 110 persons. Among them 4950 were unaccompanied children (UDI, 2016a).  
28 However, the number of asylum seekers to Europe and the Scandinavian countries changed  
29 dramatically in 2016. This needs to be understood in the context of the recent decades’  
30 neoliberal political triumph and the retreat of the welfare state in Scandinavian countries  
31 including Sweden and Norway from its traditional commitments and obligations towards  
32 people (Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming).  
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37 In this article, we critically examine the socio-political responses of Sweden and Norway to the  
38 increasing immigration and refugees in 2015-2016. The following questions guided the study:  
39 How are the right-based welfare states of Sweden and Norway reacting to the increasing  
40 immigration and the increasing demand for welfare services? How has the political debate on  
41 increasing refugees reinforced the support for welfare nationalism in the two countries? What  
42 are the challenges for social work with immigrants and refugees in a time of neoliberal  
43 reorganisation of the welfare states in the two countries?  
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46 Since early 1990s and because of the electoral success of parties guided by neoliberal ideology,  
47 both the Swedish and Norwegian welfare states have come under major pressures. Such reforms  
48 were aimed at the neoliberal parole and policy of ‘making government cheaper’ (Hylland  
49 Eriksen, 2016; Kamali, 2015). Although right wing parties in the two countries mainly  
50 advocated the neoliberal transformations, the political champions of the welfare states, namely  
51 Social Democratic Parties, adjusted themselves and continued the neoliberal reformation of the  
52 welfare state and labour market in the two countries. However, the different proportion of  
53 immigration to Sweden and Norway makes it interesting to compare the two countries with  
54 almost the same model of welfare states (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990).  
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### 59 **A social justice framework in a time of increasing injustices**

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1 War and violence are dominating our world and influence all aspects of human lives, and as  
2 such are important perspectives in progressive social work promoting social justice (Allen,  
3 2008; Kamali, 2015). In such a world, human rights-based values of social work, including the  
4 promotion of social and economic equalities and the dignity and rights of people are clashing  
5 with the reality of wars, conflicts and destruction of many non-Western local communities, as  
6 well as decreasing welfare resources in European countries resulting from neoliberal politics.  
7 The two countries of Sweden and Norway have highly been affected by neoliberal  
8 reorganisations of their welfare states since 1990s. This has resulted in ideological, political  
9 and electoral support for ‘welfare nationalism’, which has also influenced the practices and the  
10 education of social work (Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming). As a result, the practices of social  
11 work are moving towards individualised, isolated, de-politicised and formalised task-  
12 performance with minimum concern about structural and institutional dimensions of  
13 inequalities and exclusion of marginalised groups in society (Hennum, 2104; Lauri, 2016).  
14 During the recent decades, the compass of social, economic and political activities has gradually  
15 been limited to individual interventions within existing social systems and structures of  
16 inequalities (Jönsson, 2015; Kamali, 2015; Kojan, 2011). This landscape forces social work to  
17 leave its historical tradition of being a profession of human rights and social justice with  
18 structural and institutional perspectives on social problems and act in accordance with  
19 neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare state.  
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23 The concept and definition of ‘social justice’ has been, and continues to be, used variably and  
24 understood differently dependent on the different social contexts, political ideologies, and  
25 theoretical perspectives of the actors or groups involved (Miller 1976; Kamali 2015). Nancy  
26 Fraser (2007) views social justice as requiring social arrangements, which make it possible for  
27 all to participate on an equal basis in social life. She means that in the age of globalisation we  
28 cannot take the territoriality of the state for granted since we all are influencing by international  
29 organs and global forces (Fraser, 2009). The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW  
30 and IASSW 2012) break down social justice in the following five themes:  
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35 *1. Challenging negative discrimination:* Social workers have a responsibility to challenge  
36 negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or  
37 sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, ‘racial’ or other  
38 physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs.  
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41 *2. Recognizing diversity:* Social workers should recognize and respect the ethnic and cultural  
42 diversity of the societies in which they practice, taking account of individual, family, group,  
43 and community differences.  
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46 *3. Distributing resources equitably:* Social workers should ensure that resources at their  
47 disposal are distributed fairly, according to need.  
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50 *4. Challenging unjust policies and practices:* Social workers have a duty to bring to the  
51 attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where  
52 resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practices are  
53 oppressive, unfair or harmful.  
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56 *5. Working in solidarity:* Social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that  
57 contribute to social exclusion, stigmatization or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive  
58 society.  
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1 Such progressive goals of social work are steadily challenged by neoliberal policies and  
2 ideologies.  
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## 6 **Immigration challenges to the right-based welfare states**

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

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38 Sweden had until the end of 2015 a more open-border policy than Norway and received far  
39 more refugees and asylum seekers than Norway. This was partly due to the Norwegian  
40 restrictive immigration policy influenced by the electoral success of right wing parties and  
41 groups in Norway. However, the substantial increase of refugees to Sweden forced the country  
42 to change its liberal refugee policies and introduce border control. Further, both Sweden and  
43 Norway introduced several restrictions in the right of asylum-seekers, such as temporary  
44 residence permit, increasing control of internal and external borders to prevent unwanted  
45 immigrants to cross the borders and encouraging voluntary return of refugees to their countries  
46 of origin.  
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50 Opinion polls in Sweden and Norway showed that citizens utter more negative attitudes towards  
51 increasing immigration. Even mainstream parties adjusted themselves to the negative attitudes  
52 towards immigration and started to propagare for a more restrictive immigration and refugee  
53 politics. In Sweden, the Red-Green government coalition made a main agreement beyond the  
54 right-left divisions between all political parties, excluding the xenophobic Sweden Democrats  
55 party (*Sverigedemokraterna*). The agreement meant introducing restrictive border control,  
56 including id-control and temporary resident permit for new refugees. Such restrictive policies  
57 by which the rights of refugees were limited were not only introduced in Scandinavian  
58 countries, but also in many other European countries.  
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1 During recent decades, anti-immigrant sentiments have increased with the entrance of  
2 xenophobic parties into European parliaments and local assemblies, framing immigration as a  
3 danger to European ‘cultural homogeneity’, modernity and welfare (Kamali, 2009).  
4 Xenophobic parties increasingly influence the public debate by portraying immigrants from  
5 former colonies and other non-Western countries as ‘foreign elements’ who are abusing the  
6 welfare system of European countries and endangering European security. Xenophobic parties  
7 in Sweden and Norway have for a long time propagated for a more restrictive immigration  
8 policy and in some cases a total stop for all immigration to those countries. Such parties, as  
9 Sweden Democrats in Sweden and Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) in Norway have  
10 demonised immigrants and refugees as a major threat to the two countries welfare and security.  
11 In a time of retreating welfare states and growing social problems, the xenophobic discourses  
12 have influenced many citizens of the two countries. The popularity of xenophobic discourses,  
13 which have influenced the electorates, have also influenced the mainstream parties to adopt a  
14 more anti-immigrant position (Kamali 2009). The change in the political climate in Sweden and  
15 Norway has resulted in the assaults against immigrants and refugees, such as burning refugee  
16 camps and individual mistreatments of refugees. Only in 2015, more than 40 burnings of  
17 refugee camps were reported in Sweden. In almost all the burnings, the police suspected that  
18 the camps were intentionally put on fire (Göteborgsposten, 20 December 2015). In Norway,  
19 several similar events of burning refugee camps have been reported during 2015 (VG,  
20 Newspaper 2015).  
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25 The increased refugee immigration and its related costs for Sweden and to a lesser extend for  
26 Norway occurred in a time of neoliberal reorganisation and reforms of the Swedish and  
27 Norwegian welfare states. During 2015, the welfare systems of Sweden and Norway were  
28 facing huge challenges in meeting the needs and rights of immigrant families and their children.  
29 More than 22 percent of the refugees coming to Sweden during 2015 were unaccompanied  
30 minors children under 18 years (Migrationsverkets statistics, 2015). Norway experienced a 75  
31 percent increase of unaccompanied minors during 2015. Approximately 18 percent of the  
32 refugees were children under 18 years (UDI, 2016a). Such an increase created many challenges  
33 for the welfare states of the two countries to meet the needs of the children in general, and  
34 unaccompanied minors in particular. Earlier research have shown that there are no specific  
35 legislation policies related to immigrant children and their needs, which would entitle them to  
36 significant treatments. This is mainly due to the recent reorganisation of the welfare states and  
37 new regulations and reforms characterised by decentralisation and fragmentation of public child  
38 welfare services available for immigrant children in different countries (Skivenes et al, 2015).  
39 The same study also shows that child welfare workers are insufficiently prepared for working  
40 with immigrant families and their children. The complex issues related to immigrant children,  
41 including children to undocumented families and to unaccompanied minors require more  
42 flexible, right-based and anti-discriminatory practice skills (Skivenes et al, 2015). Some studies  
43 criticize the exclusionary nation-based welfare state, in which many groups excludes from the  
44 exclusive rights of citizens, and advocate a more global approaches, frames and practices to the  
45 welfare policies (e.g. Dominelli, 2010; Jönsson, 2014b; Kamali, 2015; Skivenes et.al, 2015).  
46 The nation-based challenges to many European countries, including the Scandinavian welfare  
47 states, requires to find solutions to the tensions between Global statements of Ethical Principles  
48 of Social Work, international laws and convention and the nationalised daily welfare practices  
49 with immigrant families and children.  
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## 58 **Refugee immigration and challenges to the welfare states of Sweden and Norway**

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

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

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8 One of the most substantial educational reform of the school system in Sweden was introduced  
9 in 1990s. The reforms ended the governmental and municipal monopoly on the schools in  
10 Sweden and allowed financial elites to start private schools. The same reforms have been  
11 introduced in Norway and was formalised in early 2000s. Accordingly, many private schools  
12 were established in Sweden and Norway. Motivated students from high-income and privileged  
13 groups in society have often populated the new private schools. Most children and young people  
14 from low-income groups are nowadays concentrated in municipal schools with less high skilled  
15 teachers. This has created a school segregation with declining school performance of many  
16 children and youths in the two countries (Beach and Sernhede, 2011; Fekjær and Birkelund,  
17 2007; Sawyer and Kamali, 2006). In Oslo, more than 30 % of pupils have immigrant parents  
18 (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). The 40 % who speak a minority  
19 language in Oslo make up a majority at 53 schools, and constitute more than 90 % at six of  
20 them (VG Newspaper, 2010). A recent research report (IFAU, 2015) shows that the application  
21 of the 'free choice' of schools has led to increasing school segregation between pupils with  
22 immigrant background and those of majority society (Böhlmark, Holmlund and Lindahl, 2015).  
23 The negative effect of neoliberal reforms have been reinforced by the entrance of the new group  
24 of refugee children in need of education and special support in school.  
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30 Increasing immigration of children has created many challenges to the Swedish and Norwegian  
31 welfare states during 2015-2016. Many newly arrived children and youths lack opportunities to  
32 start school in Sweden and Norway due to the shortage of public schools. In addition, the  
33 substantial differences in the refugee children's educational backgrounds require more welfare  
34 resources in order to provide proper education to the refugee children in the both countries. The  
35 situation is worsening because of the workloads for schools and the shortage of educated  
36 teachers, counsellors, nurses, psychologists, and personnel in order to support the new group of  
37 pupils. The lack of educated teachers forced several local authorities to sidestep the law and  
38 hire unqualified teachers and non-skilled personnel. Some public schools have been forced to  
39 accept more students than they can handle and this has led to a deterioration of school  
40 environments and school results in a situation where many support functions in schools, such  
41 as the number of school nurses and counsellors, already has been reduced considerably in the  
42 wake of the neoliberal market adjustment and cost efficiency.  
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### 49 *Immigration and neoliberalisation of housing in Sweden and Norway*

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

3 An important challenge to the Swedish and Norwegian welfare systems is the rapidly growing  
4 population and the increasing need for housing. The Swedish and Norwegian governments have  
5 taken a number of decisions and initiatives to support municipalities in their work with housing  
6 for new immigrants and refugees. Increasing immigration forced authorities to use many hotels,  
7 guesthouses, camping sites and other public places as temporary housing for newly arrived  
8 refugees during 2015 and early 2016. Some municipalities in major cities, such as Malmö and  
9 Oslo were periodically forced to harbouring immigrants and refugees in large tent camps and  
10 modular homes. Placing many newcomers in already segregated areas with a majority of people  
11 with immigrant backgrounds has increased segregation and related social problems (Andersen  
12 Skifter et al, 2016; Kamali, 2006). The growing pressures on immigration and municipal  
13 authorities has created a situation in which some unprivileged groups, such as newcomers, are  
14 prioritised against some other already segregated and unprivileged groups in society. This has  
15 increased the tensions between unprivileged groups, which reinforces anti-immigrant  
16 sentiments in society. Without tackling the urgent housing problem for immigrants and  
17 refugees, there will be continuous problems of setting different vulnerable groups against each  
18 other (Swärd and Eriksson, 2015). The situation is more accurate in the large cities, such as  
19 Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.  
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26 In Norway, the shortage of housing and segregation is increasingly creating ‘ghettos’ in major  
27 cities (Toft and Ljunggren, 2016; Turner and Wessel, 2013). Other scholars warns for the  
28 consequences of housing segregation for immigrants. They argue that poor and/or unstable  
29 housing represents challenges for family life, and for immigrants’ capacities to build social  
30 networks beyond the family and suggest that the arbitrary and potentially discriminatory  
31 selection processes in the rental market undermines the development of generalised trust  
32 (Skevik Grødem and Skog Hansen, 2015). In both Sweden and Norway, the housing is one of  
33 the most important part of a historically strong welfare state. It has been argued that housing is  
34 one of the most pillars of the welfare state (Torgersen, 1987). This is true even when it comes  
35 to the question of a successful integration of immigrants (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012;  
36 Kamali, 2005; Molina, 1997; Skevik Grødem and Skog Hansen, 2015; Valenta and Bunar,  
37 2010).  
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41 The reorganisation of the welfare state is observable in current times of increasing immigration  
42 and in reducing the social costs of education, social and health-care for refugees. Neoliberal  
43 political actors have been frequently advocating public–private partnerships and the  
44 engagement of private and voluntary actors in the current reception of refugees. Neoliberal  
45 advocates of more hybrid organisation structures with actors from different sectors such as the  
46 public, the private, third sector and the civil society (Brandsen and Karre, 2011; Evers, 2005).  
47 This is more obvious since 2014 and the increase of immigration to the two countries. This led  
48 to that many private companies have been contracted by the social authorities to be engaged in  
49 refugee accommodation in Sweden. Reportedly, many of such private companies receive large  
50 amounts of tax money to provide housing for refugees in Sweden and Norway.  
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### 56 *The neoliberal market of the reception of refugees*

57 During 2015, there has been a huge increase of private companies that facilitates  
58 accommodations for unaccompanied minors. When the number of unaccompanied minors  
59 reached a record level during the fall 2015 also the prices for ‘jour- and family homes’ increased  
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1 substantially. There are no official national statistics in Sweden and Norway on how many of  
2 the newcomers of unaccompanied children in year 2015 (ca 35000 in Sweden and 4950 in  
3 Norway) who were placed in such homes by private companies. However, reports indicate that  
4 it was a clear majority (Sveriges radio, 19 February 2016) and to a price of 2-3000 SEK /day  
5 which meant 60-90000 SEK/month. In year, 2015 were 337 private companies activated in  
6 Sweden, compared with around 70 activated companies in year 2014. Also in Norway, private  
7 companies (UDI, 2016b) run most homes for unaccompanied minors.  
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9 Sivesind (2016) argues that the growth of commercial actors in welfare have been larger in  
10 Sweden but is also evident in Norway. Commercial actors have grown strong in particular  
11 welfare areas such as in the housing for and healthcare and social work with refugees and with  
12 unaccompanied minors in particular. One of the major commercial operator for reception of  
13 refugees in Norway is an organisation called *Hero Group* (which also offers services in  
14 Sweden). The organisation claims that: ‘There is a need for continuous innovation and social  
15 entrepreneurship in order to facilitate integration of new citizens effectively’ (<http://hero.no>).  
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18 Several reports have shown that such companies have earned huge fortunes from being involved  
19 in receiving of immigrants and refugees without any substantial control of the authorities.  
20 During 2015 and early 2016 there have been many scandals concerning private companies  
21 started and controlled by non-serious and even in some cases criminal actors in the market  
22 (Dagens Nyheter, 2015, 2016; Kamali, 2016). A major problem that target the newcomers is  
23 the lack of professionalism and adequate competency among the private profit-hunting  
24 companies, which neglect the real and long-standing needs of newcomers in general, and  
25 unaccompanied minors in particular. The triumph of neoliberalism provides many spaces for  
26 entrepreneurs, who are considered fully competent to work in healthcare and social work. Many  
27 of such companies lack almost any program for integration and theoretical perspectives and  
28 methods of practices for understanding the socioeconomic, cultural conditions which shape and  
29 influence refugees’, and unaccompanied minors’ life conditions in the new countries (Kamali,  
30 2016). The author argues further that many ‘family-homes’ for unaccompanied minors lack  
31 adequate knowledge about the host countries’ structural and institutional arrangements and  
32 cannot help newcomers in their process of integration.  
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39 Such critics have to some extent led to enlarged concerns for better quality control of such ‘jour  
40 and family homes’. However, largely, social work authorities are, and will continue to be, the  
41 outsourcer to private companies. The neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare states has led to  
42 a major shift in the vision and mission of the welfare state, which is increasingly becoming an  
43 entrepreneurial institution benefiting and interests of private actors. Consequently, the  
44 traditional solidarity goals and aims of the welfare state have been replaced by managerial  
45 functions of the welfare state in a dominating capitalist market.  
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48 The recent decades’ neoliberal reorganisation of the welfare state in Sweden and Norway is  
49 colliding with a growing need of authorities’ intervention for a human reception of new  
50 immigrants and asylum seekers. The principle of universal rights are gradually violated as result  
51 of a weakening welfare state and is challenged by private and profitable companies in the  
52 education, health care, and other social service spheres, which traditionally were taken care of  
53 by the welfare organisations. This has also led to an increase in the establishment of charity  
54 organisations (Jönsson, 2015).  
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58 Although many laws and regulations that played an important role in the establishment of the  
59 universal rights-based social work in both Sweden and Norway still formally exist, these have  
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1 been challenged by increasing neoliberal reforms, such as privatisation of the reception of  
2 immigrants and asylum-seekers, elderly, childcare system, and the pension system. The guiding  
3 laws in Sweden and Norway still urges authorities to provide citizens with good living  
4 conditions. The Swedish Social Services Act (2001: 453) declares: ‘Society’s social services  
5 should be based on democracy and solidarity to promote people’s economic and social security,  
6 equality in living conditions and active participation in society’. Almost the same is included  
7 in the Norwegian Social Services Act (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2009), which  
8 urges authorities ‘to improve living conditions for the disadvantaged, contributing to social and  
9 economic security, including that the individual gets the opportunity to live independently, and  
10 promote the transition to employment, social inclusion and active participation in society’.  
11

12  
13 However, since 1990 the neoliberal changes and marketisation of the welfare state increasingly  
14 transformed many of the authorities’ responsibility for the welfare of people to those in need,  
15 which means that privileges and social problems of individuals are the results of individual  
16 choices. Freedom from poverty and other social problems, which was the responsibility of the  
17 welfare state, has becoming the freedom of being unprivileged. The increasing social problems  
18 of people has also resulted in the emergence of many civil and voluntary actors in the welfare  
19 sector and in the field of social work to compensate for the shortcomings of the welfare state  
20 (Herning, 2015; Jönsson, 2015).  
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23  
24 The Swedish government has in 2015 given 200 million SEK to civil society organisations  
25 working with refugees and minister of culture and democracy, Alice Bah Kuhnke, declared  
26 that: ‘Without the people’s voluntary commitment would the vulnerability of people who flee  
27 be much larger’ (Dagens Nyheter December 11, 2015). The same is true for Norway. The  
28 Norwegian government have declared that: ‘volunteers and other local actors to a greater extent  
29 should contribute to municipal [social] work with refugees’ (Agenda Kaupang, 2016:5; Nordisk  
30 Ministerråd, 2015).  
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33  
34 In 2015, the Swedish and Norwegian reception system have involved many voluntary actors  
35 and organisations in managing the increasing immigration of refugees, such as the Red Cross  
36 and the Church City Mission. NGOs have come to play a central role in the debates and  
37 practices concerning refugees and many of them without any defined theoretical perspectives  
38 and methods of practices in order to understand which conditions and relations shape and  
39 influence people’s life circumstance. Notwithstanding, the contested role of NGOs is  
40 increasingly receiving acceptance by the political establishment influenced by neoliberal  
41 ideology.  
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45 The rapid increased immigration has led to huge costs for the Swedish and Norwegian state and  
46 their public expenditures. Consequently, the welfare system had to make priorities between  
47 different unprivileged groups. For example, the costs of the increasing immigration and asylum-  
48 seekers were taken from the foreign aid budgets. This led to the raise of many critical voices  
49 among aid- and solidarity organisations reacting to such policies, which put vulnerable groups  
50 against each other (Sveriges Television, 20 October 2015; Vårt Blad, November 2015).  
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54 In addition, new political reforms were discussed and in some cases decided in order to reduce  
55 the costs of increasing immigration. One of such reforms was a proposal for allowing  
56 immigrants and asylum-seekers to work by creating ‘unskilled jobs’. The salary shall be under  
57 the level of a normal salary for a ‘normal worker’. Such jobs were ‘necessary but otherwise not  
58 get done, such as digitalisation of documents in different authorities, nature conservation (e.g.  
59 cleaning beaches) and the protection of cultural heritage. The problem of such solutions is the  
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1 homogenisation of all newcomers as ‘uneducated and unskilled workers’ and ignoring the huge  
2 competence, which arrive the two countries and should be taken care of. Although in early  
3 2016, there has been discussions about ‘complementary courses for immigrants’ in order to  
4 make it easier for skilled immigrants to enter the labour market, the imagination of ‘unskilled  
5 immigrants’ make the focus of the political debate on immigration.  
6

7 Further, when social policy is making in cooperation with private actors in a growing neoliberal  
8 care market, where refugees and asylum seekers are considered as a ‘commodity’ in the  
9 capitalist market, social work is at risk of losing its goals of promoting social justice and its  
10 global ethics and solidary practices. The focus is on then on productivity, effectivity and  
11 ‘objective’ goal achievements. In such circumstances, marginalisation and exploitation of some  
12 immigrant groups are accepted and even institutionalised by legal and institutional changes. In  
13 both Sweden and Norway, the extent of inequality has increased in relation to the growing  
14 number of immigrants (OECD, 2015).  
15  
16

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

32  
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34 The increasing neoliberalised welfare states of Sweden and Norway have been recently faced  
35 by growing demands of services created by increasing immigration. The current immigration  
36 called ‘refugee crisis’ are among the results of globalisation of neoliberalism, which has led to  
37 increasing wars, conflicts and socioeconomic inequalities in the world. Such transformations  
38 have led to increasing migration on a global scale. Some refugees succeed to enter European  
39 countries and are, facing increasing anti-immigrants sentiments and politics as well as welfare  
40 nationalism and protectionism (Kamali, 2015). This is taking place in a time of increasing  
41 neoliberal politics and the deterioration of many countries’ welfare states, including the  
42 Swedish and the Norwegian welfare states. The scarce resources have already limited social  
43 workers’ possibilities to meet the legal entitlements of people in need, particularly; social work  
44 faces new challenges by the growing number of recent immigrants and asylum seekers.  
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48 Consequently, social workers in Sweden and Norway are facing a dilemma in their daily works.  
49 The dilemma constitutes of many social workers’ intentions to promote social justice and the  
50 rights and dignity of peoples irrespective of their legal status, ethnicity, class, gender and other  
51 dividing categorisations on the one hand, and, the political and organisational demands and  
52 categorisations, on the other. This creates a challenge between the global statements concerning  
53 social justice for everybody, ethical principles underpinning social work, international laws,  
54 conventions, and actual daily welfare practices with refugees, displaced persons, migrant  
55 children and their families (Jönsson, 2014b; Skivenes et al, 2015).  
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59 Historically social work in Sweden and Norway, as part of the Scandinavian model of welfare  
60 regimes, has been organised by the nation state as an inseparable part of their welfare policies.  
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1 Therefore, the influences of the Social Democratic governments on organisation of society and  
2 the creation of strong welfare states have traditionally influenced the practices of social work  
3 and made it a duty of the state and municipal authorities. Social problems have mainly been  
4 considered as national problems, which could be solved by the nation states within its national  
5 borders. The ‘refugee crisis’ is an illustration of how neoliberal globalisation and increasing  
6 migration challenge the national basis of social work in a time of retreating welfare state. Social  
7 workers are increasingly left with uncertainty around their responsibilities in a ‘market of care’  
8 out of, but paid by, the state.  
9

10 This has created a major challenge for social workers who are facing different social problems,  
11 which needs increasing engagement of the state. Social workers are often left by an individual  
12 choice of either being a solidary social worker who move beyond the neoliberal political and  
13 organisational demands and boundaries, or function as ‘a cog in the bureaucratic machine’.  
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16 The current pace of globalisation and global socioeconomic transformations should also  
17 influence the education and practices of social work as a matter of adjustment to such global  
18 conditions influencing our societies. This should influence social work to move beyond its  
19 national boundaries, which force social workers to make difference between the problems of  
20 ‘our citizens’ and ‘the others’. The problems of the neoliberal political and organisational  
21 demands on social workers and the increasing immigration of refugees have created new  
22 practical, conceptual and ethical challenges for the practices of social work. Creating an equal  
23 society for everybody and improving social justice needs critical knowledge and commitment  
24 to working in change-oriented ways. Social work practices under neoliberal pressures need new  
25 knowledge bases and practices, which can counteract the neoliberal policies and ideologies,  
26 which lead to increasing otherisation of immigrants and refugees, racism and discrimination.  
27 As educators and researchers we need to be engaged in raising critical questions and generating  
28 critical knowledge about the global changes and dealing with the so called ‘refugee crises’ in  
29 order to respond to the needs and rights of migrant children and their families. We believe that  
30 this requires a more politically engaged, critical and radical theory-informed education and  
31 practice of social work (e.g. Ferguson, 2016; Garrett, 2013; Kamali and Jönsson, forthcoming;  
32 Kojan and Storhaug, 2015; Lavalette, 2011; McKendrick and Webb, 2014; Morley, 2016). As  
33 social work practitioners, we need to work with representation through service user’s  
34 organisations, trade unions, professional bodies, political parties and other actors who are aware  
35 of the destructive consequences of increasing neoliberalisation of society and weakening of the  
36 welfare state. Promoting social justice in society requires a broader understanding of social  
37 work beyond the dominant nationalised and micro-individual perspective to the more structural  
38 and socio-political understandings. Such perspectives could be implemented in the curriculum  
39 of social work education, including its professional and field training (Flem et al, 2016; Gray  
40 and Webb, 2015) as well as in the daily practice of social work in the differentiated societies of  
41 Sweden and Norway.  
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48 Increasing immigration and glocal social problems in Sweden and Norway, as well as in other  
49 European countries, are not temporary, but a long-standing phenomenon created by global  
50 neoliberalisation of the world by Western countries, which create wars, conflicts, natural  
51 disasters, and socioeconomic disintegration in many non-Western countries, where refugees are  
52 originated from (Kamali, 2015). Such global and national conditions urges social work to resist  
53 increasing neoliberal reorganisations of the welfare state and in cooperation with civil society  
54 actors and organisations mobilise resistance to further dismantlement of the traditionally strong  
55 welfare states of Sweden and Norway.  
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