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Housing policies for asylum seekers and refugees: social workers' views on control and resistance

Políticas de vivienda para solicitantes de asilo y refugiados: opiniones de los trabajadores sociales sobre el control y la resistencia

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Abstract

Since 2015, Greece has been one of the main host countries for many thousands from the Middle East who have been forced to leave their countries for political reasons. In this context, social workers have been at the forefront of responding to refugee and asylum seekers' needs, facing limits to their work due to the neoliberal approach underpinning housing policies. This article discusses social workers' views about the housing policies for refugees and asylum seekers in Greece as part of a policy of power enforcement at the micro and macro

levels. For this purpose, the findings of a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews with 16 social work practitioners from non-governmental organizations serving asylum seeker and refugee populations in Greece are discussed. Thematic analysis of data highlighted work overload along with limited training and support. At the same time, it was found that social workers do not comprehend housing policies for asylum seekers and refugees as policies which encourage integration, but rather contribute to a regime of control and exclusion. Although attempts of professional resistance against the housing policy framework at an individual level were identified, collective action over these repressive practices seems to be absent according to the participants' accounts. The study constitutes an effort to provide an insight into Social Work practice and the difficulties professionals face being a part of a social control policy, problematizing managerialism as well as the anti-immigrant rhetoric underlying housing policies for refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. The article concludes by proposing that political analysis and involvement with service user groups, labor groups and collectivities' groups need to come to the fore in order to address these challenges and to stand against any oppressive practice.

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Resumen

Desde 2015, Grecia ha sido uno de los principales países de acogida para miles de personas de Oriente Medio que se han visto obligadas a abandonar sus países por razones políticas. En este contexto, las/os trabajadores sociales han estado en primera línea para responder a las necesidades de los refugiados y solicitantes de asilo, enfrentándose a los límites de su trabajo debido al enfoque neoliberal que sustenta las políticas de vivienda. Este artículo analiza las opiniones de las/os trabajadores sociales sobre las políticas de vivienda para los refugiados y los solicitantes de asilo en Grecia como parte de una política de imposición del poder a nivel micro y macro. Para ello, se discuten los resultados de un estudio cualitativo consistente en entrevistas semiestructuradas con 16 profesionales del trabajo social de organizaciones no gubernamentales que atienden a la población de solicitantes de asilo y refugiados en Grecia. El análisis temático de los datos puso de manifiesto la sobrecarga de trabajo junto con una formación y un apoyo limitados. Al mismo tiempo, se descubrió que los trabajadores sociales no entienden las políticas de vivienda para los solicitantes de asilo y los refugiados como políticas que fomentan la integración, sino que contribuyen a un régimen de control y exclusión. Aunque se identificaron intentos de resistencia

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profesional contra el marco de la política de vivienda a nivel individual, las acciones colectivas de resistencia al control y a las prácticas represivas parecen estar ausentes según los relatos de los participantes. El estudio constituye un esfuerzo por proporcionar una visión de la práctica del Trabajo Social y de las dificultades a las que se enfrentan los profesionales al formar parte de una política de control social, problematizando el gerencialismo así como la retórica anti-inmigrante que subyace en las políticas de vivienda para los refugiados y solicitantes de asilo en Grecia. El artículo concluye proponiendo que el análisis político y la implicación con los grupos de usuarios de los servicios, los grupos de trabajadores y los grupos de colectividades deben pasar a primer plano para hacer frente a estos retos y a cualquier práctica opresiva.

Introduction

The war zone situation in the Middle East, based on political and economic interests, has led a huge number of citizens, in order to escape death, to flee their country of origin in order to reach a safe environment. While migration flows from the Middle East to Europe because of the current state of war have been a common phenomenon for many years, 2015 saw the biggest forced immigration influx since World War II, with millions of people seeking asylum in European countries (Peters,2017). Approximately, 861,630 arrivals were recorded in Greece in 2015 (UNHCR, 2021). The closure of the Balkan Route which took place in 2016, resulted in more than 46,000 people being trapped within the Greek territory, which, due to its geographical location, became one of the host countries for asylum seekers (Amnesty International, 2016). It is worth mentioning that these numbers illustrate only the officially registered arrivals in Greece and the actual number of those who crossed through the country remains unknown. The Greek state, being a short-term host country for moving populations, was unprepared for settling on a permanent hosting policy framework in order to support this massive arrival of people (Kourachanis, 2018). As a result, the housing policies, implemented primarily in alienated hotspots, are being questioned for whether they target asylum seekers' integration and autonomy or are part of a control policy of a state which feels threatened of "the other".

This paper draws on a qualitative study based on social workers' critical views on the current housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, based on findings from 16 semi-structured interviews with social workers who work in asylum seeker and refugee housing schemes in Greece. A further significant question

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of the research relates to the challenges social workers face in these settings and how they perceive the housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees, as it is implemented in Greece. The first part of the paper reviews the housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. Then, Social Work practice with asylum seekers and refugees in Greece is described. The second part of the study seeks to investigate the experiences of SWs in order to draw conclusions in relation to SW practice in similar settings. Following a description of the research methodology, social workers' views of the housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees and their experiences in this sector are discussed. Although the findings specifically relate to the Greek context, the same challenges and experiences in asylum seeker and refugee housing schemes may be of concern in other countries as well. For that reason, this study can provide a direction for further research, contributing to the debate between European countries according to the asylum seeker and refugee housing policy framework in each country, investigating at the same time the SW role in this sector.

Asylum seeker housing policies in Greece: An overview

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In order to provide an insight regarding the hosting policy framework in Greece, some clarifications are needed. Firstly, hosting policy in Greece is based on the rationale of public-private partnership (with a significant number of private initiatives). Most of the housing programs (except housing in camps which are completely coordinated by the Greek ministry) are led and implemented by European and International actors (UN) and funded by the EU. Nevertheless, most of them follow a coordination policy with the Ministry of Migration and do not operate completely independently. In light of the above, it becomes clear that we cannot talk about a consistent hosting policy design, rather a mixture of distinct interventions by different actors that were developed to address emergencies rather than being a part of a holistic hosting policy framework.

This study adopts a critical perspective, where privatization and marketization attempts in social services must be criticized, while the role of social work is to address social and structural issues (Payne, 2017). Following this approach, the public-private partnership model (and the public sector withdrawal) raises questions as to whether it can provide a permanent social integration framework for asylum seekers and refugees.

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The case of the refugee camps

Refugee camps have gained the interest of scholars, both in terms of their moral significance and their diversity. As an effect of the ongoing political conflicts in Middle East, Greek islands have been part of a broader situation prevailing in the Mediterranean area, creating a framework for the geopolitical and biopolitical management of refugees (Hughes, Issaias & Drakoulidis, 2018).

Hotspots were established in Greece in 2015 and initially functioned as reception and identification centers and as a temporary accommodation for the asylum seeker population. However, due to the lack of political care, most asylum seekers have been trapped on the islands for two or three years, in accommodation centers whose number is disproportionate to the actual number that can be hosted (CNN GREECE, 2020). According to Amnesty International in a 2018 report, asylum seekers struggle with unsafe living conditions, including unsanitary conditions and physical violence, including violence based on gender (Amnesty International, 2018).

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Generally, the establishment of this housing policy reflected the paradigm of a more general policy observed by the European Union, based on the view of a Europe "Fortress" against anything that is not considered to express the "European" ideal (Thomas, 2014). The way reception and housing policies are drawn reflect party politics, as well as an anti-immigrant rhetoric which has been produced by the growth of a right-wing constituency in Europe as a whole. In this context, camps and hotspots reflect a housing policy which consists of the political position of the government in relation to the management of the refugee population in the Greek islands. Furthermore, their function reflects a cost-effective short-term solution, which is consolidated over time. Their consolidation mainly operates within the framework of a generalized political and "European" indifference towards the future of this vulnerable population.

The case of accommodation schemes

In order to manage the huge asylum seekers' inflow and to decongest the migrant flows into the islands, the UN operated the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) program. ESTIA program started its operation in the middle of 2016, as a continuance of the Accommodation and Relocation Program, operated by UNHCR in 2015, ESTIA is located in mainland Greece. The program captured an important amount of asylum seekers, reaching by September 2020 21,616 beneficiaries (UNHCR 2020a). The ESTIA program was developed through the collaboration of the UNHCR

with the Greek Government and implemented mainly by a series of NGOs (national or international). One of the main elements is the targeting of social support toward the most vulnerable populations. According to an accommodation update of July 2020, more than 1 in 4 residents have at least one of the vulnerabilities that make them eligible for the accommodation scheme (disability, severe health problem, single parent household) (UNHCR, 2020b).

In 2019 the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy announced the gradual termination of accommodation to beneficiaries of international protection living in refugee camps and accommodation programs. Realizing the danger of a massive refugee homelessness flow, and as a means to appease the protest movement that had begun to form, in the middle of 2019, HELIOS program started its operation. HELIOS program, implemented by IOM (coordinated with the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum) and funded by EC. In this program, beneficiaries become responsible for finding accommodation and presenting a valid lease agreement and then, HELIOS contributes to cover rental and move–in costs by refunding the beneficiary, depending on household size (IOM, 2020).

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While they attempted to be a part of a social integration strategy, accommodation schemes were unable to be linked with broader integration policies. The reasons for this are multiple and referred not only to the program's design, but also to structural barriers of Greek society. Field studies have shown that the ESTIA program holds an inadequate exit strategy, failing to prepare beneficiaries for their social autonomy (Kourachanis, 2018). Moreover, the fact that the ESTIA program targets mainly vulnerable groups of people (Law 4375/2016 and Law 4540/2018) has as a result the reproduction of a residual model of crisis management. The subject becomes co-responsible (or responsible) to overcome the structural obstacles (lack of language, racist behaviors, lack of employment opportunities, unfair living conditions) and to become socially independent. HELIOS program holds a similar way of thinking. While it sets out to empower beneficiaries towards social integration and autotomy in a more adequate way than ESTIA, it does not take into account severe socioeconomical factors such as language barriers or the refugee's lack of money (the beneficiary must cover the costs and, through payment receipt, he is refunded by IOM).

In light of the above, the question that should be raised is if a housing policy by itself can support vulnerable groups becoming socially independent. As the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1994:6) notes *"It is intellectually easy and often politically expedient to assume that grave problems of poverty and injustice can*

be alleviated through including people formerly excluded from certain activities or benefits. Yet, in many cases, the existing pattern of development itself may be unviable or unjust". The structural barriers asylum seekers and refugees face in Greece are numerous: the infrastructure of the housing system, the geographic location of the housing facility and the inadequate access to the social services hinder the integration process.

Social Work practice with asylum seekers and refugees in Greece

As Gray, Collett van Rooyen, Rennie & Gaha (2002: 101) note *«when we talk about policy we are talking about the way in which social workers engage with, or are influenced by, social policy in their practice».* This policy may be related to housing, education or unemployment and impacts differently on our work with service users depending on the context in which we are working (working for the government or in an NGO for example).

Within this context, Social Policy in each country echoes their sociopolitical system ideology and the government, NGOs and other organizations reproduce such ideologies. Firstly, the anti-immigration rhetoric which has taken place in almost all of Europe in the last decade cultivated anti-social policies for asylum seekers (Thomas, 2014). Moreover, the state's lack of interest to develop a holistic integration framework for asylum seekers and refugees, leaving private initiatives such as NGO's to fulfil this role, reflects the neoliberal construct where the welfare state is replaced by social welfare packages for increasingly restricted populations (Kourachanis, 2018). Palley (2018), emphasizing neoliberalism's attack on the welfare state, clarifies that neoliberalism does not focus on the welfare state's eradication, but its shrinkage, turning it into a center of profitability. The attack on the welfare state aims at privatizing, eliminating rights, reducing the size and changing the character of the welfare state, as well as replacing universal benefits with means of strict control over the provision of welfare services (Palley, 2018). All the above does not leave the Social Work profession unaffected, but raises concerns about the capacities and the restrictions social workers face in developing interventions which promote social change (Teloni, Dedotsi & Telonis, 2020).

The literature review showed that not only in Europe but worldwide, Social Work practice with asylum seekers and refugees is seen as demanding and challenging (Robinson, 2014; Bringer, Nadan & Ajzenstadt, 2020). Further research abroad investigating

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Social Work practice highlighted overload, limited training and support, increased managerialism and alienation (Carey, 2008; Robinson, 2014). In Greece, the situation does not differ. In a recent study which evaluated ESTIA implementation in Greece, Kourachanis (2018) showed that because of the country's lack of experience in social integration for asylum seekers and the subsequent lack of a skilled labor force in this field, staff experienced high levels of burn out. In spite of the challenges social workers face, attempts to stand in solidarity with refugees cannot be called into question. On 15th of April 2019, due to the announcement of the ministerial decision on refugees exiting the accommodation schemes, the NGO workers union (among them many social workers) went on strike (and protested as well) in order to condemn the government's decision, as well as NGO's decision to implement this action (Konstantopoulos, 2019). Moreover, solidarity protests have also taken place. NGO workers in Lesvos on 22 February 2020 took part in the protest against anti-immigrant rhetoric (3Points Magazine, 2020). These are only two examples of the broader social action of social workers. However, being part of an action network may have unpredictable outcomes, leading to redundancies.

In light of the above, it becomes clear that a significant number of social workers, despite the risks, tend to acquire political involvement and resistance to any exclusionary policy (Gray et al, 2002; Pentaraki, 2018; Bringer et al, 2020). Social workers, though they face a "double struggle" supporting their labor rights and service users as well, develop actions of resistance and remain committed to social justice and human rights advocacy. As Vickers (2015:667) notes *«Under capitalism, social work can help facilitate social change, through political education, building alliances between oppressed groups, and helping people to cope with the alienation and exploitation caused by capitalism while they struggle to change oppressive structures».*

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Methods

The main questions guiding the research process were a) what are the social workers' views about the current housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees and the way housing programs are designed? and b) how do social workers view their role within this context and what are the main challenges they face? The study was conducted on a sample of sixteen social workers who work in asylum seeker and refugee housing schemes in Greece. Given that there is limited literature on the practice of social work with asylum seekers in Greece, the present research attempts to be part of a debate towards new directions in social work practice.

In order to examine the study's questions, qualitative research methods were developed. The only selection criteria for the participants was to be employed at the specific time of the interview in housing schemes for refugees and asylum seekers. As a social worker who was practicing in this era (in a refugee camp), I had the opportunity to approach other colleagues who were working in the same sector. I decided to approach colleagues from different NGO's with which I had a distant professional relationship, mostly through referral pathways. Firstly, I conducted them through phone, pointing out my intent of doing a study regarding SW practice in housing schemes for asylum seekers and refugees. The social workers who responded in a positive way received through their email two forms, a paper explaining the purpose of the study and the consent form. The interview took place after work and via phone. The participant recruitment was achieved through snowball sampling method. While some scholars argue that this method does not allow the researchers to calculate the representativeness of the sample (Heckathorn, Semaan, Broadhead & Hughes, 2002), it is an effective means of seeking participants from a specialist field.

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The interview procedure lasted two months (January -February 2020). Due to the fact it was a time period prior to Covid-19 and the interviews were conducted through phone, no special measures were taken. Most of the interviewees were working in ESTIA accommodation programs as "case workers" (N=10), while some were working in hotspots located in Greek islands as well as on the mainland (N=6) as "child protection officers" or "protection officers". All of the professionals who were interviewed were employed by NGO's.

This study constitutes self-funded research which is based on my work experience and my initial motivation to investigate if the SW practice in this sector bears similarities with the challenges and the ethical dilemmas social workers face every day. It is not part of a thesis or a broader research project. The interview guide questions were equally formulated through literature and my professional experience. At this point, it should be noted that this position of an insider-researcher appears to be very challenging. The position of the insider-researcher is not referred to an independent variable but to a continuous interaction between them and the research. Insider knowledge may contribute to the formation of the topic or to the methodology used (Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2015 to Finefter-Rosenbuh, 2017:2). Other researchers claim that this

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may lead to a position of strength: for instance, knowing what to ask the participants or relating to issues of current relevance (Bridges, 2001 to Finefter-Rosenbuh, 2017:2). However, self-reflection and a reflexive approach are both a necessary prerequisite regarding the research process (Darwin Holmes, 2020). Researchers must be able to identify their views as well as their influence on the design and data analysis procedure (May & Perry, 2017 to Darwin Holmes, 2020:2). As an effect, researchers need to acknowledge their own presence in the formation of knowledge and to critically self-evaluate their positionality.

It is worth mentioning that the research study did not receive ethical approval by any institution. Despite this, the study was conducted by adopting the Social Work ethics code that governs the Greek Social Work Association[2] . According to Tsiolis (2014), a main ethical aspect refers to the importance of informed and free consent. For that reason, prior to the interview the participants were informed about the study's purposes and gave their written consent which ensured their anonymity, giving at the same time the option to withdraw from the study at any time. No incentive to participate was offered, and it was made clear that their participation in the research was voluntary. Furthermore, anonymity and confidentiality issues were addressed. For that reason, any personal identifiable information, such as camp and NGO names were redacted. Moreover, it was made clear that in case the findings were presented to a wider audience, they would not contain their names or any other identifying characteristics.

Participants were asked semi-structured interview questions regarding their views according to the housing policy framework for refugees in Greece and the challenges that are faced in their practice. Every interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Through coding and systematic review of the re-occurring patterns, potential themes were identified (Liamputtong, 2013). The findings were thematically analyzed by using inductive codes. Thematic analysis refers to the procedure where the researcher systematically identifies, organizes and comprehends reoccurring themes and patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Some of the themes emerged directly from the data while others were theory-informed. As Braun & Clarke (2012:61) note *"through coding, the researcher uses the findings of previous studies as a lens to raise awareness to his scientific ability, helping him recognize patterns within the data. Thus, some of the codes which are produced emerged from participants' quotes while others emerge from the theoretical framework of the study"*.

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[2] For further information on the Ethics Code that governs the Greek Social Work Association, please see here: https://www.skle.gr/index.php/el/xrisima-arxeia/nomothesia/itemlist/category/97-askisi-epaggelmatos-koinonikoy-leitourgoy

Participants profile

In order to collect demographic data, a small-scale questionnaire was developed. Data collection showed that most of the interviewees were women (N= 13), a fact that was anticipated given the perceptions of female dominance within the profession. Moreover, the average years of social work experience was 2 and a half, and the participants' average age was twenty-nine years old. All social workers were front line practitioners. Eight out of sixteen social workers held a postgraduate degree. The average working time in the same organization-employment (when the interview was conducted) was approximately one year.

Results and Discussion

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The findings present a picture of social workers' views on the current hosting policy framework in Greece, as well as the challenges they face in their everyday working life. Social workers expressed concerns as to whether the housing policy framework encourages asylum seeker integration or contributes to a regime of control and exclusion. Also, it was found that the professionals deal with high levels of frustration, work overload along with limited training and support. The findings are presented by focusing on a) professionals' views about the current housing policy framework for asylum seekers and refugees and the way housing programs are designed, and b) how they view their role within this context and the main challenges they face.

Undoubtedly, the 1980s and 1990s bring other questions to the postcolonial era, in contexts characterized by the supposed end of colonies, the loss of the centrality of Europe, the acceptance of developed and underdeveloped peoples, the naturalization of the existence of the Third World and the historical and cultural invisibility of the colonized in the representations that the colonial metropolises have constructed as knowledge, as well as the creation of the East as a cognitive and cultural projection of what constitutes the West. The orientalism of Edward Said in 1990 and the subaltern studies of South Asia, North America and Latin America, prompted the need to review the writing of imperial and post-imperial history, questioned bourgeois and leftist nationalism and the articulations between the state, the nation and the modern project (Dube, 1999; Silva Echeto, 2016) whose main result has been the permanence in the

subaltern condition, both of peoples and territories, by the hegemonic prevalence of the West that is imposed with Eurocentrism.

Housing policies as a tool for the reproduction of social control

Participants reflected on how they perceive the implemented housing policies for asylum seekers and whether they think these policies affect their practice. Most social workers, both in camps and the ESTIA program, perceived the housing policies as quite traumatic for those they served, citing elements of oppressive practice through the social work.

Their living conditions in the camp make their mental health worse and clearly our intervention is affected{..}many people they are asking how much they will stay here … it is difficult for them and for us as well, there are times that I feel that I do crisis management within a crisis (Social Worker, Refugee Camp, 13)

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If we do not find someone for more than 10 days, we invade the house, because they rent it to others, I do not agree with that, but I cannot refuse to do it (to invade the house). Sometimes our role is derogatory, for example to attend a disinfection, there are apartments with bad hygiene conditions, or you will do a home visit as a police officer to see if they are there, anyone who is staying there (except a beneficiary). You try to do it as politely as possible you know. But I disagree with all that. The thing is that you cannot refuse if there are others who follow this line. They will ask «why will you not go? (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 12)

The policies pursued towards these people are punishable if someone breaks the rules. It is not to punish but to work with others and not to impose. The refugee sector has begun to wear me down (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 14)

Through the experts above, the social work practices which are developed, especially in the ESTIA program, are perceived by the social workers as punishing and antithetical to the principles of the social work profession. These narratives highlight the unsuccessful role of the housing policies to support and integrate these vulnerable groups into the society. This failure might be related to two events. Firstly, it can be linked with the state's lack of interest to establish a holistic integration framework, leaving the voluntary

sector to fulfil this role (Kourachanis, 2018). Second, the housing policies which are carried out represent the dominant discourse regarding the immigrant 'threat', thus these practices of control and punishment rely on this rationale. As Pallister-Wilkins (2016) stresses, humanitarian actors, operating on the basis of dominant enforcement procedures, echo a system of exclusion. Within this context, front line social workers are frequently caught between the discourses of care and control (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) and face limits on the capacity to resist any oppressive practice (Briskman, 2009; Strier & Bershtling, 2016). Also, the findings showed that, while most social workers seemed to stand against some duties their organization had reinforced, they reported feeling powerless to oppose the administration's guidelines. This is quite important if we consider that most of the social workers claimed not to have participated in any labor union or activist group, neither had they had the appropriate support to stand against any practice they considered as oppressive.

Social work practice in accommodation settings for asylum seekers and refugees: what are the main challenges professionals highlighted?

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Questioning the working conditions: work overload, lack of training and devaluation of the professional role

Social work plays an integral role in assisting asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, both in social departments and hotspots. Although tasks and roles seem to differ in the two working environments, there seem to be some commonalities regarding the working conditions. Most of the social workers described their working conditions as challenging without adequate supervision or training provided:

It is impossible to work with 100 beneficiaries …we do not get any supervision, whatever we learn, we learn it by other colleagues. At first, I did not know what to do (Social worker, Refugee Camp, 1)

As a social worker I work on a regular basis with 60 beneficiaries. Every social worker is responsible for 22 apartments, we are like the contact person of these people hosted there. Some apartments host 6 single men, which means 6 different cases. As you understand we cannot focus on every case as much as we need to{..}I feel my work is all about number and reports (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 10)

Two main themes that emerged from the analysis were the work overload and the

lack of adequate support from the management, as well as the lack of supervision. This finding is quite crucial if we consider that half of the participants had one year of experience, while a third were working more than 2 years. The fact of an unskilled labor force in the refugee field is illustrated in other studies as well (Kourachanis, 2018). As discussed above, older colleagues were the main source of training and support for the newly qualified workers. These shortages in social worker expertise and training entail a significant risk for implementing oppressive policies without even noticing it, and generally, to come to practice without a critical view and analysis. Another dimension professionals highlighted was the focus on the reporting of their daily work. This focus on managerialism and on quantitative reports reflects the neoliberal attack on Social Work's critical role (Hyslop, 2016; Payne, 2017; Weinberg & Banks, 2019).

Furthermore, a number of the participants linked their work overload with a low sense of reward and an increased possibility of resignation:

All the employees are about 25 to 35 years old. This is not irrelevant. Whoever is older cannot afford the pressure (Social Worker, Refugee Camp, 16)

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Burnout and the sense of frustration constitute a common experience that professionals encounter when they work directly with asylum seekers (Austen, 2016). In light of the above considerations, increased managerialism and lack of training constitute the main challenges social workers confront in daily practice. Furthermore, working conditions are considered a factor that contributes to professionals' or other colleagues' early resignation from the organization. As a social worker (16) from the camp mentioned, newly qualified social workers may be perceived more resilient to remain in the same work position for a longer period of time than an older professional (with greater work experience).

"People consider us part of what is happening": Social Workers' views on refugee evictions

Another professional challenge that emerged from the analysis was the exit of the recognized refugees from the accommodation schemes. This parameter is considered particularly important because, in the ESTIA program, social workers are the contact persons who inform the family about their exit from the program. Through their answers, it showed that most of them were opposed to the ministerial decision on refugee evictions:

It is not planned what they will do when they leave the program, how will they live? We must tell them that they will leave, why us and not those in charge? People consider us part of what is happening (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 10)

In contrast to camps, in the ESTIA program social workers are defined as the persons who announce to the people the decision of their eviction from the program. This increases the stress of professionals as they are forced to report the potential homelessness to people with whom they have developed a long-term professional relationship. Most social workers condemned the ministerial decision to evict refugees from the ESTIA program, stressing the program's inefficiency in terms of promoting the successful integration and autonomy of asylum seekers. Though most social workers did not refuse to implement this decision, some social workers tried through their role to defend the beneficiaries:

We were told that it is our responsibility to inform the families about the forthcoming exit from the program{..}.it was very difficult because I had worked with them for a year {..} In order to protect them I lied in my report about their vulnerability {..}though that way I felt like I took their side (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 12)

This finding is extremely important because it stands with Social Work's commitment to social justice and human rights advocacy (Payne, 2017; Scherr, 2015 to Heilmann & Roßkopf, 2021:24; Marmo, Pardasani & Vincent, 2021). Although professionals are in danger of coming into conflict with the management of their organization, they choose to defend the service user, protecting them and their rights. These narratives agree with other studies which showed that, despite the risk of losing their job or being targeted by the management, social workers decide to resist any unjust practice and stand against any exclusionary policy (Gray et al, 2002; Strier & Breshtling, 2016; Pentaraki, 2018; Weinberg & Banks, 2019).

Social integration failure: refugee's choice or policies' effect?

Since the majority of the respondents seem to highlight the unsuccessful role of the Greek housing policy design to support and integrate these vulnerable groups into society, a significant question that was raised was how professionals perceived integration as a process and who, according to them, is responsible for asylum seekers' integration to the

Greek society (asylum seekers, the government or both?). A significant portion of social workers seemed to view asylum seekers' behavior as a part of the successive integration plan. While respondents seemingly seem to consider the inefficacy of integration of refugees as an outcome of the failure of the programs developed by state or non-state actors, controversial beliefs about the responsibility of asylum seekers regarding their integration emerged:

NGO's did not start their operation having standard guidelines and they have not clarified their role yet. These made service users more vulnerable and more demanding towards us. In other countries, where the integration programs have strict rules, they comply with (Social Worker, Accommodation Program, 8)

The programs that have been run are not adapted to the needs of people. Even if there is housing or financial support, they do not really help them. There are service users who rest on us and constantly ask us for things (Social Worker, Refugee Camp, 7)

These social workers' illustrations place more emphasis upon asylum seekers taking responsibility and seeing service users' behavior as an additional factor for their prevention of being integrated and not as a policy effect. Similar views are mirrored in the 'culturization' frame which uses refugees' culture as a factor which influences the way they interact with difficulties (van der Haar, 2015). These perspectives tend to stand in favor of an individualistic rationale rather than providing a critical analysis to social problems' construction. As an effect, these discourses echo the neoliberal rationality which focuses on the individual, promoting service user blame (Choudhury, 2017; Morley, Macfarlane & Ablett, 2017; Weinberg & Banks,2019). Furthermore, the preponderant discourse produced by the dominant system is a factor that influences social workers' views towards asylum seekers and refugees (Masocha, 2013). To this effect, these social workers' reflections which are seen above, may be affected by these variables. The absence of critical thinking concerning the impact of structural causes and power relations on trust building with the service user, could entail the risk of blame culture reproduction. Taking this stance, social workers need to acknowledge the impact of restrictive policies (and the power relations which are reproduced in this context) during their everyday practice (Farmer, 2017; Birger & Nadan ,2021).

Based on the above, it becomes clear that the practice of social workers with asylum seekers in Greece, influenced by the prevailing ideas for surveillance and control which are indicated in the public policy agenda, is in conflict with the moral values

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that the profession stands for. Most of the participants discussed facing high levels of frustration, a low sense of reward, work overload and limited support. Additionally, while they view Greek hosting policy design as a policy which contributes to a regime of control and exclusion, some controversial beliefs according to individual responsibility came to light raising questions on social workers' capacity to deal with the underlying neoliberal rationality within the Social Work practice.

However, a significant finding of the study is how social workers deal with duties which were perceived as controversial or repressive. While most social workers seemed to stand against some duties their organization had reinforced, they reported feeling powerless to oppose the administration's guidelines. Others, such as a social worker from the accommodation program (12) reported that they attempted to resist at the individual level by bending the structural rules of the organization. However, collective actions of resisting control and repressive practices seem to be absent. Despite that, it is crucial that a significant number of social workers, even if not a member of an activist or labor group, tend to remain committed to an anti-oppressive approach and human rights advocacy.

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Social work in a system that produces and reproduces inequalities and segregation will not be able to easily form a relationship of trust with the service user and support them to bring real changes in their life. For that reason, one of the main duties of social work is to promote the transformation of the structural and institutional policy framework. Resistance actions can be expressed through multiple ways. Self-reflection on practitioners' prejudices and the need to develop anti-oppressive practices through forums which promote reflective group discussion could constitute some of these actions (Anis & Turtiainen, 2021). Furthermore, resistance can be expressed through 'illegal actions', such as supporting undocumented migrants to gain political and social rights (Jonsson & Kamali, 2019). But the most important for social workers is to cultivate a collective stance and action towards any form of oppression. Participation in employee groups or unions, activist groups or service user groups are some of the actions that need to be developed in social work practice with asylum seekers and refugees. In Greece, unfortunately, these attempts are not so wide, though are starting to be extended in recent years. Last but not least, as mentioned above, front line worker support and defense in actions of resistance when they refuse to cooperate with antithetical practices is crucial. Related to this, professional bodies of social work must play a significant role in advocacy actions as well as in promoting the participation of social workers in the decision-making process for social policy.

Conclusion

This study explored social workers' views on housing policies for asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, as well as their practices within the accommodation schemes. The results of the research showed that social workers face demanding working conditions and ethical dilemmas which contradict the ethics of their profession. Most of them seem to view Greek hosting policy design as contributing to a regime of control and exclusion. However, some controversial beliefs according to individual responsibility when it comes to the integration process came to light, raising questions about social workers' capacity to deal with the underlying neoliberal rationality within Social Work practice. Despite that, a significant number of interviewees mentioned their intent to resist NGO's oppressive guidelines. Nevertheless, any action of resistance remained at the individual level. Research findings have shown that Social work practice with asylum seekers and refugees faces two major threats: the first one refers to the neoliberal (segregating) rationality in which social work adopts managerial elements and becomes responsible for setting vulnerability criteria; the second one refers to the anti-immigrant rhetoric which reinforces policies of control and surveillance, resulting, as Agamben claims, in asylum seekers' exclusion. Practitioners' voices in the policy making process are vital and the role of the professional body of social work on the defense of the social worker's actions of resistance needs to come to the fore. In taking this stance, social work needs to be active in the development of practices to resist neo-liberal and anti-immigrant policies that favor control and to develop collective actions along with labor unions and service user groups.

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