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Integrating the Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development in the Republic of Cyprus

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Cyprus is a nation of great history, old and new, that makes up a controversial and often stressful environment in which social work is practiced. The intent of this paper is to highlight the Cypriot context and discuss how the Global Agenda is integrated in it. Drawing on the key objectives of the Global Agenda – promoting social and economic equalities; promoting the dignity and worth of peoples; promoting community and environmental sustainability; and, strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships – the paper explores the challenges and barriers that social work in the nation faces in an attempt to promote the wellbeing and growth of communities, families and individuals. With consideration to the many and rich initiatives toward increasing social solidarity, collaboration and community engagement, the paper makes suggestions to overcome the challenges that prevent social work from fully committing to the agenda.

Keywords: global agenda; Cyprus; social work; social development

Introduction

Recent conversations between many stakeholders internationally, and particularly the three global organisations of social work and social welfare (i.e. International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW); International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW); International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)) led to the Global Agenda (GA). The need for the GA has been complex and multifaceted; standards of wellbeing, health equalities, social justice, and the upholding of human rights, among other areas, are often questionable, while lack of equity and equality of opportunity are very often at the forefront of societal and individuals' experiences around the world. The GA aims to achieve social, economic and environmental wellbeing with the

principles of social justice and human rights in its centre. A core aspect of the rationale for the GA is the consensus that social work and social development should continuously attempt the incorporation of political actions into their activities; policy practice and political activism should be celebrated in the profession and become a core part of its general strategies for promoting social justice and human rights.

It is also worth emphasising the GA's four areas of concern, each of which is examined in a distinct report. The first report, published in the *International Social Work journal* in 2014 (Tassé 2014), focused on 'Promoting Social and Economic Equalities'; the report is an attempt to facilitate debates within and beyond the social work profession and its commitment to social, economic and political justice. This report is the beginning of the conclusions that follow in the subsequent. The next report (International Federation of Social Workers 2016) explored 'Promoting the Dignity and Worth of Peoples'; it reported on findings from an examination of human rights and social development across various nations, and it concluded that social work and social development are in need of more policy practice and political activism that will enable the empowerment of communities and individuals. The final and third (Jones 2018) focused on 'Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability', concluding that social work needs to invest more on community development and consider policy action as a means to promote the wellbeing of individuals and communities. At the time of writing this paper, the final area of exploration is under consultation and focuses on 'Strengthening Recognition of the Importance of Human Relationships'.

Drawing on global issues to develop this agenda, IASSW, IFSW and ICSW, alongside all stakeholders and collaborators, wish to develop a tool and a vision that can apply globally and be of interest to social work practice, research and education across the world. This said, this paper's purpose is not to discuss the GA as a standalone piece, but to present a case study of the Republic of Cyprus (henceforth Cyprus); specifically, to discuss how the varied initiatives and principles in the GA agenda have been integrated in social work in Cyprus; what barriers prevent its further development; and what are the future plans.

The social work discourse in Cyprus has been a dynamic one since the 1980s. Despite the recent history of the professionalisation of social work in Cyprus, charity work and philanthropy – not dissimilar to many other nations around the world – have for a long time contributed to the work promoting the wellbeing of communities and individuals (Carlton-LaNey 1999).

The complex and feverish socio-politico-economic context of Cyprus since 1974 (the year of the Turkish invasion) has left the nation restless and in a constantly changing state; a national context in which social work practice, research and education have struggled to find their place and develop vis-à-vis the needs of the country. In addition, the characterisation of the nation's democratic identity as flawed (Economist Intelligence Unit 2020) raises further

questions about the impact of political suppression, media infringements and populist movements. Such circumstances further highlight concerns about the challenges of meeting the goals of the GA. Although the strong ties of Cyprus with the United Kingdom (UK), the sovereign state to which it was dependent until 1959, and now a member of the Commonwealth since 1961, provides opportunities for collaborations, alliances and transnational support, and cross-country learning exchange on the grounds of social justice and human rights. All these conditions create an unpredictable environment that on one hand stresses the demand for social welfare and social work, but on the other barricades their progression.

When discussing the history of Social Welfare and Social Work in Cyprus in the following section, it becomes clearer that the same principles underpinning the GA are the foundation of social work practice; inform social work education and training; and facilitate social work research designs in Cyprus. The next three sections will discuss a brief history of the profession in this country; the way the GA is promoted and realised in the nation; and the varied challenges faced by the profession in moving forward and advancing its initiatives about *Social Work and Social Development*.

The History of Social Welfare and Social Work in Cyprus

Cyprus is an island with a long history of conquerors. The Cypriots were part and subject of the Ottoman Empire for three centuries (1571-1878) followed by the British Rule for a further 81 years (1878-1959) (Maragkou and Koutas 2009). During the British Rule, Cypriots lived for many years in dire living conditions due to the business agreement between England and Turkey. Turkey agreed to 'turn over' Cyprus to the British with a 92,000 CY pounds annual instalment, which subsequently became a tax burden the Cypriot people were required to pay for (Stathopoulos 2005). Consequently, the Cypriot society lacked sufficient resources to develop at that time.

Two decades later the first voluntary/charity organisations were founded, and policies were drafted and implemented for providing services regarding health and education. In 1926, the English Governor ordered the conduct of the first research concerning the social conditions in the island, the findings of which led to more substantial legislation and the implementation of relevant social policies followed in the next years. Examples of such implementations include legislation in mental health, the establishment of institutions for people with disabilities and of a Council for regulating issues regarding health and welfare (Stathopoulos 2005).

The Church of Cyprus, in these years under the British Rule, had an important role in coordinating the charitable organisations and helping those in vulnerable conditions. In 1951, the convict post-institutional care program was implemented for adult offenders aiming to facilitate social rehabilitation

(SPES 2009; Neofytou 2011). In 1952, the Social Welfare Services (SWS) were established and more legislations concerning public aid (1953), adoption (1954), child protection (1956), and social insurance (1956) were passed and implemented (Stathopoulos 2005).

In 1955 the Liberation Struggle started where Cypriots revolted against the British and this resulted in the independence of the island for the first time in 1959 after centuries of external rule (Maragkou and Koutas 2009). A ceremony took place on the 16th of August 1960 and Archbishop Makarios was appointed as President of the Republic of Cyprus and Dr Fazıl Küçük as Vice President (ibid.). After the independence of Cyprus, the Government's agenda did not address social welfare issues with the exception of education and social insurance. However, on the 20th of September 1960, Cyprus became a member of the United Nations (UN) organisation and the SWS developed stronger and deeper relationships and collaborations with international and European bodies.¹ The UN would in later years play a key role in the processes of repairing relationships between Turkey and Cyprus, and negotiating peace-making following the Turkish invasion in 1974 (Bozkurt 1999).

Simultaneously, Cyprus joined the Commonwealth in 1961, an international group of countries previously colonized by the British Empire, at large. This is an alliance between the UK and its former territories (with exceptions) to promote peace-making, self-governance, national freedom and equal opportunity. Member states share values of democracy, human rights and social justice, and Cyprus's membership emphasized the need to begin developing a social welfare agenda that addressed poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and inequalities, and social injustice altogether (Blumenwitz 1999).

Following on from these events, between 1962 and 1972, SWS paid more attention to the establishment of programs which satisfied the needs of pre-school children and older people (Maragkou and Koutas 2009). This was the beginning of a series of initiatives, despite the challenges.

In 1966, a milestone was set for the social work profession. The Cyprus Social Work Association was founded and took ownership of social work training, in collaboration with the SWS and educators outsourced in Greece (Neofytou 2011). The first qualified social worker was hired by the SWS in 1967, breaking the pattern of the use of non-social work professionals in work settings, and many followed and working in State Medical and Psychiatric Services where they undertook multifaceted duties (Parlalis and Athanasiou 2015). It is worth noting one of the most significant reasons that delayed the employment of social workers by the state or elsewhere was the lack of social work schools in the country. Pursuing social work education was the benefit of the few from middle and higher social classes who could afford to relocate and study in the neighbouring country Greece or in England, while the Cypriot SWS relied in those individuals' return to the island to staff the afore mentioned state funded services (ibid.).

¹http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/dmlhistory_gr/dmlhistory_gr?OpenDocument

In 1968, community work and youth services started flourishing and contributed to the improvement of communities' health, whilst voluntary organisations strengthened community development.² In this period, the founding of voluntary organisations was significantly noticed through the movement and active participation of citizens regardless of social class (Stathopoulos 2005). These organisations facilitated the work that significantly helped to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. Therefore, the establishment of a coordinating body, like a coalition, was crucial, and in 1973, the Pancyprian Welfare Council was established which was later renamed, in 2006, to the Pancyprian Coordinating Council for Volunteering due to the passing of the Pancyprian Coordinating Council for Volunteering Law 61(I)/2006³ (ibid.).

Cyprus's independence did not last long and in 1974, Turkey invaded and occupied the Northern part of the island, dividing it into two separate nations. SWS, during the war and in its aftermath, played a pivotal role in coordinating actions towards social cohesion and social reconstruction. The SWS supported the relief of mass distress, combating unemployment, community reconstruction and in the economic recovery. Volunteers alongside social workers played an important role in the social reconstruction of Cypriot society and especially in the relief and livelihood of displaced individuals and families. Due to the appalling conditions and the number of displaced people the Ministry of Interior in 1974 founded the Displaced Persons Welfare and Rehabilitation Service, which aimed to provide in-kind support and medical care.⁴ Following the war's end, according to Spaneas (2011), social workers paid special attention to matters pertinent to the adoption of children whose parents or guardians died during the invasion, or the authorities were unable to trace. The need for this was so great that professionals from other disciplines were employed in social work roles, due to the lack of qualified social workers (ibid.).

The 1974 invasion ignited political turmoil evident to this day, and a heated and ongoing debate for decades about the land of the island and its ownership (Menelaou 2019). Various peacekeeping attempts, with the British and later the UN, have resulted in similar situations, an ongoing dispute of terms and conditions of any form of agreement between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The most well-known example of peace-making effort is the Annan Plan, otherwise known as the Cyprus Reunification Plan (Menelaou 2019). This plan was an outcome from the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1250 of 29 June 1999 and named after the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The 'making' of the plan involved both Turkish and Greek Cypriots in consultations, while it has reached a fifth revision there has been no agreement to date, despite the decision by the Turkish Cypriot to open the borders in 2003. The plan suggested restructuring the Nation into the United Republic of

²http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/dmlhistory_gr/dmlhistory_gr?OpenDocument

³<http://www.volunteerism-cc.org.cy/Default.aspx>

⁴Derived on 26.2.2021 from http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/moi.nsf/page47_gr/page47_gr?OpenDocument

Cyprus, with two states – Turkish and Cypriot; a resolution that would harmonise the island and possibly open up routes to collaboration and coproduction of services benefiting all people in the island.

The benefits of peace plans when used as diplomatic tools to resolve conflict have been identified by Lehrs (2021) not purely on a local level, but with the potential for wider effect. The impact of the unresolved Cypriot conflict and the non-negotiable arguments in the discourse have a serious impact on SWS, as well as the development of social work on the whole. Social phenomena that influence the wellbeing of those at the receiving end of the services, equally impact on social workers, turning them into allies or opponents, with a high risk of nationalism in practice. Such risks require serious mitigations and limit research and education altogether, as well as resources, such as staffing, which consistently poses difficulties for SWS in Cyprus.

The staffing challenges in the SWS continued until 2001, when the first Social Work school was founded by a private university and the reinforcement of the profession was established with the passing of the Law on Registration of Professional Social Workers of 2000 (Law 173(I)/2000) (Parlalis and Athanasiou 2015). This helped with the social recognition and integration of social work as a profession. Similarly, the founding and establishment of the Registry Council of Professional Social Workers was imperative, the members of which are appointed by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, and is responsible for the approval of professional licenses (i.e. registration).

On October 2nd, 2019, and due to the continuous staffing issues in the SWS, a reform of the SWS was passed by the Parliament in an effort to re-organise the social welfare system. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers approved, in January 2021, a bill regarding the establishment of a State Ministry of Social Welfare. The main responsibilities of the State Ministry will be, inter alia, national policy planning and analysis – inclusive of submission, presentation and implementation – the formulation of an appropriate institutional framework to ensure social cohesion and social solidarity, social protection and support, pursuing and achieving social inclusion, and promoting equal opportunities for all.⁵

Promoting Social Work and Social Welfare in Contemporary Cyprus: Integrating the Global Agenda

The integration of the GA to social work practice in Cyprus is continuous and developing. Specifically, more recent developments (especially following recent global challenges such as COVID-19) – politically and through policy informing social work practice and initiatives – have tackled issues in six distinct areas, all of which are recognised in the GA and a call for action is

⁵Derived on 11.3.2021 from <https://www.pio.gov.cy/ανακοινωθέντα-άρθρο.html?id=18098#flat>

argued. Those areas are employment, public health, education, housing, basic needs (e.g. shelter, food), and community and environmental sustainability. This section discusses how social developmental activities in Cyprus align with those areas.

The financial crisis of 2008 affected the entire world and Cyprus was no exception; the nation was affected between the years 2013-2018. Through this global economic crisis, human relations could not be unaffected. During this period thousands of people and families lost their jobs and this had a major impact on their income. In 2014, the House of Representatives approved the Law on Minimum Guaranteed Income which pushed for the creation of a new social welfare system in order to ensure a minimum standard of living for each family in need, avoiding in this way economic misery, poverty and deprivation. Concomitantly, measures were implemented aiming at the activation, integration or reintegration into the labour market (The Directorate-General for European Programs, Coordination and Development 2020). Moreover, social workers collaborated with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the local authorities to create *social stores*, which provided food and clothing to those under vulnerable circumstances. In addition, schools provided food to children from households under the poverty line targeting in particular those children whose parents/guardians were unemployed, the church provided food to individuals and families, and many private organisations offered financial assistance to support these local efforts.

One of the main objectives of the state is to support and enhance employment. Thus, emphasis is placed on people belonging to vulnerable groups of the population, such as the long-term unemployed, people living with disabilities, immigrants, refugees, and people who remain dependent on SWS due to continuous lack of opportunity to (re)enter the labour market. The support that the state and NGOs offer to these groups of the population is seen as necessary to prevent the risk of social marginalisation. However, in times of crisis, the Cypriot society, individuals, organisations, the government and social workers were supportive and managed to build a more humane environment in order to satisfy the basic needs of vulnerable populations. Despite the uncertainty and complexities in the context in which social work is practised, all four pillars of the GA are evident in current practices. Socio-economic equalities, dignity and worth of people, community sustainability, as well as emphasising the importance of human relationships are central to Cyprus's agenda moving forward.

The abovementioned initiatives faced disruptions since March 2020, when the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) was first recorded in Cyprus, a pandemic that threatened public health and affected the entire world population (World Health Organization 2020). Feelings of fear, anxiety and despair became commonplace among individuals, while the labour market was impacted by business closures. The government managed to subsidize businesses and employees during the first lockdown where families and individuals had to

quarantine in their homes. Following a year of varied – national and regional – lockdowns and further restrictions to social life, human relationships have been affected and social interaction has changed drastically due to the mandatory physical distancing (Hadjicharalambous, Parlalis, and Erotocritou 2020). Perhaps the GA's fourth report focusing on human relationships could not arrive at a more fitting time. The restrictive measures and the closure of organisations forced social workers to work from home, via online platforms, without face-to-face contact with those at the receiving end of the services, or colleagues, which affected the quality-of-service provision negatively, both on an individual and structural levels. At the same time, online services were established to support and empower members of the public to deal with mental health issues to improve their quality of life. During this period, human and family relationships were undermined, and reports of domestic violence have increased risking a new public health crisis (Kumar 2020). The State was largely unable to provide prevention and empowerment interventions to families. An exception is the line 1440,⁶ where those experiencing domestic abuse can report pertinent incidents, while shelters for women and children who experience domestic abuse became available.

In the beginning of 2021, the Ministry of Interior announced a package of social policies to support young people and families to acquire housing. The state provided financial support to young couples, single-parent families, individuals and families with children to reside in rural areas of Cyprus aiming at 'rural regeneration'. Social workers support this effort of the government by developing social support programs for families and children, kindergartens, youth and counselling centres which will empower and support parents/guardians to enter or re-enter the labour market, with an emphasis on single mothers. In addition, the government is trying to reform the SWS aiming to provide accessible, friendly and personalised in a human-centred approach, holistic, multidisciplinary and effective social services. The main objectives of this reform are the promotion of dignity and worth of people, to strengthen and ensure the rights of vulnerable groups of the population who are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, to improve their quality of life, to magnify integration and maximize their potential development (The Directorate-General for European Programs, Coordination and Development 2020).

An important pillar of social equality is education. In the last two decades, a large number of immigrants and refugees have resided in Cyprus (amounting to more than 17% of the overall population) (The Directorate-General for European Programs, Coordination and Development 2020). Especially, in the last two years, the turbulent situation in the Middle East, Syria and African countries has led to an unprecedented influx of refugees into Cyprus. A lack of sufficient support mechanisms and smooth integration into the educational system appears to be the case for a significant number of refugee and migrant children in schools. Social workers employed in NGOs facilitate, through their

⁶<https://domviolence.org.cy/en/1440-2/>

role, the social integration of migrant and refugee families with an emphasis on children and their (re)integration to education.

Such circumstances re-highlight an underdeveloped area of social work practice in Cyprus, one which is of concern to the frontline workers and educators, but not yet included in political agendas. The attainment of social work goals within school settings is not a new debate; Costin (1969) has long argued the benefits of direct practice in schools, while the more contemporary Massat and Kelly (2015) argue that school social work can be a preventative measure from child exploitation, neglect and abuse, as well as overall wellbeing and improved outcomes. To return to Cyprus, avenues like school settings and immigration work that would further facilitate the negotiation of the four pillars of the GA, remain in an embryonic stage, if not undeveloped. Another such example is health social work.

The health sector in Cyprus is undergoing a period of fundamental reform, which seeks to ensure a humane health system through the continuous upgrading of services which are provided equitably and with professionalism and respect. The implementation of this reform promotes actions aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of hospitals and service provision in any health setting, as well as disease prevention and control. Despite the social work practice coming through in the voluntary (i.e. NGOs) sector, social work in hospital settings is not an established area of practice. Similar to school based social work, this lack of establishment causes further barriers in meeting the GA's goals.

Community and environmental sustainability are also crucial to the GA's agenda. Nowadays, there are tremendous environmental risks due to the environment's intensive exploitation and the extreme centralization of population (Jones 2018; Parlalis et al. 2021). Some of the major problems that have been observed are the habitat destruction, the lack of biological diversity, pollution of land and water resources, and destruction of cultural heritage (Economou et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the protection of the environment is one of the major issues of our century (United Nations 2017). Even though it is recognized that environment is one of the major factors of human prosperity, the long-term consequences of local interventions do not appear to be directly understood by involved stakeholders (Parlalis et al. 2021). Local communities are increasingly being requested to evaluate the risks, benefits, and costs of environmental protection and more specifically, they are asked to make decisions that interchange local environmental quality and ecological values (such as wildlife, natural habitat, etc.) for improvements in local economic quality (Parlalis et al. 2018).

In Cyprus, in less than a decade, some environmental projects were developed considering the following pillars: (a) partnership development between interdisciplinary organisations, (b) social work community-based interventions (community groups, local resources and citizen participation), and (c) awareness raising campaigns. The aim of the above social policies is to improve

quality of life for all and reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, as well as to provide holistic psychosocial support to vulnerable groups and actively facilitate their (re)integration into the labour market and society.

Challenges and Barriers

According to Parlalis and Athanasiou (2015), public authorities might lack capacity and/or the organisational maturity to adequately respond to the population's more topical social needs; with emphasis on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on various parts of the population, which transforms need and places further pressures on services (Lavalette and Ioakimidis 2020). In this modern environment, the practice of social work presupposes professionals who understand the political and social context of their time and seek social justice (Goldberg 2012). Though, the intricacies of the context in some nations may be less straightforward than in others, while those in leadership positions may not always share the same level of understanding about the crisis. As Ferguson, Ioakimidis, and Lavalette (2018, 1) put it:

‘The 10-year depression and ‘austerity politics’ have also had the effect of eroding public confidence in ‘mainstream’ politicians and state actors. This has been particularly acute with regards to the crisis of social democracy, which increasingly looks like a universal phenomenon. The politicians of the centre, across the globe, act as if little has changed’.

Cyprus is endeavouring steadily to continue to challenge tensions between economic-political wants and social demands, all of which create barriers to the successful integration of the GA. Unlike other nations, where neoliberal politics are interfering with the implementation of the GA (Pentaris 2021; Ferguson, Ioakimidis, and Lavalette 2018), the Cypriot context is founded in a flawed democracy (also see Ragonesi 2019) that is not aiming at the marketisation of social work, but consequentially at its undermining or its negation. Specifically, social work education, research and practice in Cyprus is almost disenfranchised in the political arena, but yet essential to the social development of communities and personal cost to, and wellbeing of individuals.

This said, the barriers are not simply foundational, organisational or contextual. Such unique circumstances and political tensions call for action on a professional level, too. Therefore, social workers have to update their skills and knowledge continuously and in various areas like unemployment, poverty, migration, and others, and enhance their competencies which are interlinked to their academic studies, such as critical thinking, constant theoretical training and systematic action (Goldberg 2012). In other words, ever-changing contexts logically mean ever-changing needs, and, thus, the demand for renewed skills on a constant basis.

Following on from the above, it is worth returning to the point that SWS in Cyprus are understaffed (Mavronikola 2013). This results in (a) increased workload, (b) high levels of burnout, and (c) ineffective responses to people's needs (Parlalis and Christodoulou 2018). In addition, the SWS hire employees under the title 'Welfare Workers' consisting of varied disciplines. The challenge for the social work profession, due to the above title, is that various professionals employed by the SWS, e.g. psychologists, social workers, sociologists, to name a few, have similar duties and responsibilities. Therefore, professional boundaries are not clear, professionals' responsibilities are blurred, and multidisciplinary teams cannot work effectively, posing risks of poorer outcomes for people with lived experience.

Social workers in Cyprus have faced many challenges and barriers over the years. Generally, the profession of social work is disenfranchised, and the public may hold a questionable impression or understanding of a social worker's professional identity, duties and responsibilities. Further, current statutory mechanisms do not recognize the social work profession. For example, the SWS is the only public authority employing social workers, while there is no requirement for other public authorities to do so (Parlalis, 2015). In other words, there is no representation of social work in services related to mental health or criminal justice, while local authorities' services are understaffed. Along the same lines, social work is currently excluded from policy planning and analysis, where only the State and trade unions are involved. Despite the social work legislation in 2000,⁷ the profession may be still undermined.

With new legislative frameworks, private practice, professional supervision and an updated code of ethics, the social work profession in Cyprus can be solidified and promoted, while it will be strengthened to successfully integrate the GA in the next decade.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Following on from this critical exploration of the integration of the GA to social work in Cyprus, the following recommendations are inferred. Those are neither exhaustive nor a panacea that will solve all issues, but areas that can potentially benefit the furtherance of practice in the context of the GA.

A call for action among social workers is necessary to enable professionals to regain control of their skills and knowledge in macro practice. This will set a foundation that is needed for policy practice, ensuring that social workers become active in political and policy debates which directly affect the well-being of individuals and communities. Further, social work education and training can be enhanced to include expert knowledge about more contemporary issues, and specifically regarding disaster social work, death and losses in social work practice, and social work during war and irreparable crisis. Such

⁷http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2000_1_173.pdf

areas require specialist skills that are needed to ensure effective practice that responds to contemporary needs more efficiently.

In addition to the above, policymaking in Cyprus may benefit from more evidence-informed decision-making, as well as a collaborative approach to the process. An alliance between policy makers, social workers, and other key stakeholders in the community, including people with lived experience will provide the right framework of practice and policy; a framework designed with the beneficiaries, for the beneficiaries.

Conclusion and Future Plans

At a time of political, social and economic instability, a migration crisis, and a global pandemic, social work continues to thrive in small but meaningful ways, all of which are evident in the improved outcomes of those receiving the services; of those receiving social work education; and of those benefiting from social work research in the nation. It would be naïve to claim full control of the context wherein the GA is implemented, when control is no-one's to claim. Yet, it would be wise to claim an identity which will benefit the goals and objectives of any plan that aims to promote social justice and human rights.

Among many, Rogowski (2020) recently asked the question, 'What is a profession'? Drawing on Durkheim's sociology of work (see Habenstein 1963) and Johnson's work (1993), a profession is recognized because of the specialist skills and knowledge associated to its actors. Perhaps social work in Cyprus is facing a challenge that requires it to renew its identity not based on what is lacking, but in the proviso of the specialism it can offer to support communities, families and individuals to respond to the crises discussed in this paper. New reforms and the recently developed focus on empirical evidence will offer a new legislative framework which can protect and inform social work practice, as well as the knowledge to promote evidence-based practice.

Lastly, policy practice remains to be developed. Involvement of social workers in policy planning, analysis, advocacy, political action and networking (see Pentaris 2021) is crucial when refining and regaining professional identity, while refraining from feelings of disenfranchisement. The GA is evidently integrated, but the resources and socio-politico-economic context remains unstable and poses more risks than it currently offers opportunities; a challenge that needs overcoming with more active development of capacity in policy action.

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