



Book review of
Gómez-Ciriano, Emilio
José, Cabiati, Elena, and
Dedotsi, Sofia (eds.) 2023.
*Migration and Social Work:
Approaches, Visions and
Challenges*. Bristol: Policy
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BOOK REVIEW

ALYSSA MARIE KVALVAAG 

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article.

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The entanglements of migration and social work across nine European countries are the focus of the edited volume *Migration and Social Work: Approaches, Visions and Challenges*. The volume is edited by Emilio José Gómez-Ciriano, Associate Professor at the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha; Elena Cabiati, Associate Professor at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; and Sofia Dedotsi, Assistant Professor at the University of West Attica. The editors are all social work academics and researchers with relevant experience as practitioners. The contributing authors are also social work academics and researchers with a range of experiences related to social work practice and activism, and most are members of the Special Interest Group on Social Work Research on Migration and Asylum of the European Social Work Research Association. The introduction, 11 chapters, and epilogue broadly address the ways social workers who work with migration and migrants may promote good practices and identify and denounce human rights violations and oppressive practices (p. 2). Collectively, the volume is successful in demonstrating how this is done in a range of European contexts.

An overarching theme throughout the volume is the transformative potential of social work in cultivating emancipatory, anti-oppressive social change for migrants, particularly considering social work's unique position as both an academic discipline and a profession. Political activism is argued as important for social workers throughout the volume. This begins with activism in social work education to cultivate critical consciousness and anti-oppressive praxis, as argued by Sofia Dedotsi and Ruth Hamilton (Chapter 10), and should thereafter be integrated in one's practice as a social work practitioner, academic, and/or researcher. Social workers are positioned as human rights professionals and important actors who can provide insights into everyday politics of migration and asylum (e.g., Debruyne et al., Chapter 6). The transformative potential of social work is also seen in the profession when social workers employ their position as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1969) as a discretionary space that

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Alyssa Marie Kvalvaag

Faculty of Social Sciences,
Nord University, Norway

alyssa.m.kvalvaag@nord.no

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allows them to provide maximum support to migrants at, for instance, reception and identification centers in Greece (Lietaert and Derluyn, Chapter 3).

One part I found particularly inspiring was Darja Zaviršek's (Chapter 2) work on participatory art as a useful way of thinking about social work theory and practice. As Zaviršek highlights, social work educators and practitioners may find themselves uncritically adopting nationalist policies and practices, making it particularly important for social work education to humanize people on the move (p. 32). Participatory art, Zaviršek argues, provides one avenue to resist 'the machinery of securitization and bureaucratization' (p. 40) that dehumanizes migrants, helping social work students think and act *otherwise* when it comes to migration.

Social work and the reception of migrants is a topic addressed by more than half of the volume's chapters. Importantly, both the experiences of social workers in reception contexts and the perspectives of migrant children and youth are included in the volume. The chapters highlight challenges—such as the dire lack of resources (e.g., Lietaert and Derluyn, Chapter 3) and more existential issues regarding the right to life (e.g., Ekström, Chapter 4)—while also considering human agency, as a social worker and as a migrant, to navigate and react to existing societal structures.

The volume highlights how societal and structural conditions in places of reception may result in oppressive practices and human rights violations while also illustrating the roles of social workers in navigating these conditions and supporting individuals and families in the process (e.g., Chapters 3, 6, and 8). Pascal Debruyne, Kaat Van Acker, Dirk Geldof, and Mieke Schrooten, for example, describe how legal and administrative regulations for family reunification create new barriers for families while also illustrating how social workers as human rights professionals provide support for families throughout a reunification process and act politically to secure families' rights (Chapter 6). This support provided by social workers is inherently transnational, and Debruyne et al. describe support at two levels: the level of family relations—near and far—and the level of politics, considering assemblages of state power. This leads the authors to conclude that 'social work has a political and social duty to take up the needs of reuniting refugee families' (p. 108).

Another overarching theme throughout the book involves challenging dehumanizing narratives and discourses related to migration and integration. I find the chapters that include perspectives of migrants to be particularly compelling, providing alternative narratives and problematizations related to migration (e.g., Chapters 4, 5, and 11). Clara Bombach's chapter on children and families' homing practices in asylum camps (Chapter 5) offers important insights on strategies accompanied children use to (attempt to) feel at home and belong to a place, as well as regulations and activities of the asylum regime that disrupt these homing practices, a phenomenon Bombach calls 'de-homing' (p. 90). By highlighting homing practices, Bombach's work humanizes discussions of asylum while simultaneously making evident the unequal power relations that saturate the field: to cultivate a sense of home in a place—a camp—under demanding and often inhumane conditions.

Elin Ekström (Chapter 4) and Susan Levy and Maura Daly (Chapter 9) provide insights relevant to the debate around the concept integration (e.g., [Korteweg 2017](#); [Rytter 2019](#); [Schinkel 2018](#)), although this is not articulated as one of the volume's goals. Ekström's chapter on the perspectives of migrant girls in Sweden (Chapter 4) highlights a disconnect between the way the general integration discourse is often operationalized in social work practice and how young refugee girls view their own situation in relation

to integration. Ekström provides much-needed alternative perspectives on integration that problematizes the general discourse and directs attention to issues of rights, worth, equality, and belonging. Levy and Daly (Chapter 9) take a different approach by describing integration as dialogical and relational, highlighting a sense of place and belonging as key aspects of migrant integration. In both chapters, the authors actualize how understandings of integration influence social work with migrants in practice, emphasize belonging as a key element, and challenge policy frameworks and discourses that problematize migrants.

Although interrelated, there are places in the volume where social work research, education, and practice are conflated, making it difficult at times to discern *who* the audience is and *in what ways* the key messages from the volume should be addressed. The volume may have benefited from articulating more clearly the takeaways for different types of stakeholders.

Overall, *Migration and Social Work: Approaches, Visions and Challenges* provides an important contribution to the literature on migration and social work. The volume is relevant for migration researchers; social work researchers, educators, students, and practitioners; and human rights advocates and professionals.

COMPETING INTERESTS

AMK has previously been a book review editor for the Nordic Journal of Migration Research, which was on a voluntary basis.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Alyssa Marie Kvalvaag  orcid.org/0000-0001-5026-4475
Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University, Norway

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