

You should never be alone. Social work crossing borders and cultures in child protection and disability rights. Experiences from a current multinational research project.

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Background and purpose:

Social service providers in the Greater Region report that many children in need of special care and social assistance find themselves in cross-border situations (EUR@Qua, 2019). The legal regulations and practices for the care of children and adolescents can vary considerably from country to country. This can cause delays, breaks or deterioration in the quality of support and sometimes irreversibly worsen the child's situation. Depending on the situation, diagnoses and access to social, medical-social or legal services can change considerably. The EURQUA project (<http://www.interreg-gr.eu>), launched in 2016, deals with cross-border child protection and disability rights within a multinational perspective (within Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg on an interdisciplinary exchange basis).

Methods: study design:

Statistical data collections based on the analysis of national reports attempt to give a quantitative overview of crossing boarder cases. From this analysis a clearer understanding of the causes and patterns of crossing border situations emerge. By means of structured interviews with professionals, families, and children, patterns challenging social work will be identified. For this purpose, the interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analyses. In a triangulation of the research approaches, different perspectives have been related to each other in order to be able to distinguish certain patterns and to generate appropriate support offers.

Findings:

Initial results show, that the number of cases varies widely across the countries studied. There are distinct sending countries as well as recipient countries, with large fluctuations being observed over the years. A frequently recurring pattern, relates to a recognized lack of

adequate accommodation or treatment for a specific problem (disability) justifying a foreign placement. In Addition, by crossing borders professionals often deplored a breaking off in communication with care providers and administrations at the home country. As a result, a return to the original life context desired by the clients seems hardly feasible (EUR&QUA 2019). Furthermore, practitioners expressed concern that diagnoses and support needs were formulated with a targeted focus on care in a neighbouring country. Some cross-border placements may be derived less from optimal child protection and disability rights than from neo-liberalism, managerialism and austerity.

Conclusions and implications:

Behavioural problems and educational issues coincidently with the lack of suitable offers in one's own country are mostly cited as justification for a cross-border measure. Due to the breaks in care and service provision associated with border crossing, the number of cross-border cases should be kept to a very minimum. But even then, specific training in transnational social work is necessary in order to be able to offer optimal care and socio-educational support. The establishment of a corresponding pluri-national and multilingual university course is envisaged for this purpose. In particular, the issue of maintaining contact with the parents or guardians of the child and the involvement of parents in decisions should be addressed intensively by this international programme on social work in transnational care issues. Research on the implementation of the programme must show whether it achieves the objectives of successful cross-border social work based on the well-being of the child.