Responding to the Global Economic Crisis: Inclusive Social Work Practice

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The present global economic crisis raises new concerns for social workers. One of its most visible results is the further socioeconomic decline and marginalization of excluded populations. This article suggests that the current circumstances require a much more engaged, egalitarian, and reflexive practice—a practice, based on social rights, that matches the magnitude of the crisis and its negative impact on traditional social work constituencies. Consequently, the article suggests the concept of inclusive social work practice (ISWP), a conceptual framework whose main principles respond to four processes of social exclusion closely related to the present global crisis: extreme social isolation, growing dependency, multiple deprivation, and internalized oppression. The author describes the impact of the global crisis on patterns of social exclusion and presents the methodological foundations of the ISWP framework.

KEY WORDS: *advocacy; global crisis; social exclusion; social work practice*

The present global economic crisis is defined by international organizations as a global emergency. In many countries, the crisis has imposed painful cutbacks on educational, health, and social services; put on hold justified social claims and struggles for social justice; and revived the hostile climate of the 1980s and 1990s against social welfare and social rights. As a result, some governments have responded to the crisis with austerity policies. These policies have damaged different systems of integration such as the labor market, the educational system and social services, civil society entities, and other social and economic mechanisms that in the past helped to counter the marginalization of families, groups, and communities from full participation in social life. In light of its historical importance for the future of the profession, the paucity of articles published in social work journals addressing the role of social workers in this crisis is alarming.

Social workers have been taking various roles related to the present crisis. Some have actively participated in the organization of protest movements such as the Occupy Wall Street and Uncut in the United States and other social movements in Greece, Spain, Ireland, the United Kingdom, or Israel. Despite the importance of collaborating and building links with social movements, this article suggests that the current circumstances require a deep change in social work practice: a much more engaged, egalitarian, and reflexive practice, based on social rights, that matches the magnitude of the crisis and its negative impact on traditional social work constituencies. Accordingly, this article suggests the concept of inclusive social work practice (ISWP), a conceptual framework whose main principles respond to four processes of social exclusion closely related to the present global crisis: extreme social isolation, growing dependency, multiple deprivation, and internalized oppression. The article calls for a reassessment of our practices and principles to actively respond to the challenges of the present. First, it looks at the effects of the crisis on social workers' target populations in the affected contexts. Second, it introduces a conceptual framework for ISWP (Strier, 2001; Strier & Binyamin, 2013) and previously implemented with different excluded populations. Third, it reassesses the relevance of that framework in light of the current global crisis and briefly discusses the tensions that may arise in its implementation.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The crisis has been exhaustively discussed by different scholars, and yet there remains considerable disagreement among experts concerning its roots and any possible solutions (Barth, 2009; Krugman, 2008; Stiglitz, 2009; Taylor, 2009). One of the plausible theories suggests that the crisis is part of

the cyclical inflections of the capitalist system, in which periods of expansion are followed by times of contraction (Harman, 2009; Valencia, 2012) It was precisely the unsteady nature of capitalism that constituted one of the reasons for the establishment of the welfare state, which was justified as a way to protect society against such chronic turmoil (Cantillon, 2010; Katz, 2008). However, despite the fact that the welfare state was a response to the cyclical nature of capitalism, the dominant discourse that emerged from the crisis points a finger at the costs of maintaining the welfare state as one of the main causes of the economic collapse (Garret, 2009). This emerging discourse should raise concern among social workers. Therefore, it is important for us to remember that there are many indications that the neoliberal attrition of the welfare state, rather than its expansion, created the preconditions for the crisis (De Vogli, 2011; Harding & Simmons, 2009).

Whatever the case may be with regard to its direct causes, the crisis is expanding social inequalities and accelerating processes of social exclusion (Aldridge, Parekh, MacInnes, & Kenway, 2011; European Anti Poverty Network, 2012). The poor remain poor and excluded, and the global financial crisis has restricted even further their access to mainstream society, access which should be embodied in affordable, quality services such as basic education, health care, safe water, sanitation, and housing (Correl, 2010). In the United States, unemployment has abruptly risen from 4.5 percent in 2007 to 10 percent in 2009. In the European Union, the index of unemployment was 6.75 percent in 2008 and grew to 10.7 percent in 2012. Despite some exceptions such as India and China, which have growing economies, most low-income countries saw the growth of per capita incomes fall nearly to zero (Alexander, 2010). The United Nations (UN) (2012) estimated that up to 130 million more people will fall into poverty or fail to escape poverty because of the crisis. According to international agencies, the reduction of consumer demand, the decline of remittances, the shortage of capital flows, and decreasing economic growth in many developed and developing economies are the links that connect Wall Street to the millions of marginalized people living in cities, villages, and communities worldwide (UN, 2009).

In light of this reality, this article—which is directed to social workers in countries affected by the global crisis—argues for an overhaul of the central methodological principles of social work, to help individuals, families, groups, and communities face the impact of the crisis and take the required actions to preserve their well-being (Gamble & Weil, 2010). Accordingly, the author calls on social workers to respond to the global crisis and suggests the ISWP concept as an integral part of that response. The ISWP framework, which owes its foundations to, and overlaps with, other alternative social work worldviews such as critical social work (Fook, 2012), anti-oppressive social work (Dominelli, 2002), and social rights–based social work (Ife, 2012), is specifically designed to challenge processes of increasing social exclusion. This approach is based on four main methodological principles—namely, active involvement, egalitarian partnership, policy advocacy, and reflexive conscientization—that respond to four main processes of social exclusion abruptly reactivated by the global crisis: social isolation, dependency, multiple deprivation, and internalized oppression.

IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL CRISIS ON PATTERNS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion is a form of social inequality expressed in multilayered deprivation, a low level of social, political, economic participation and a deteriorating sense of identification with the norms and values of the mainstream (Silver & Miller, 2006).

Social Isolation

The crisis has heightened social isolation among excluded populations. Because of it, tens of millions of people have fallen into, or are trapped in, extreme poverty, and the number of people living in hunger in the world rose to more than 1 billion in 2011, the highest figure on record (UN, 2012). Compared with other patterns of social inequality, social exclusion is identified with the progressive social isolation of the excluded group or community from mainstream society (Silver & Miller, 2003). This isolation stems from different processes. In addition to the marginalization caused by multilayered structural deprivation, one of the most common ways in which individuals and groups can be isolated is through processes of stigmatization. The isolation of communities through stigmatization is achieved by the creation and dissemination of social images that portray the excluded groups as possessing character traits outside of, even

threatening to, common views of "normalcy" (Taket et al., 2009). These images are deeply embedded in the institutional practices that are precisely the soil in which inequality is nurtured and reproduced (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). For example, some persistent public images around the financial crisis in Greece and Spain tend to link the crisis with the supposedly lax work ethic of the Greek and Spanish people. This is a clear example of isolation by stigmatization. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) data show that Greek workers worked in 2011 on average of 2,032 hours a year, which is almost 700 hours more than the average of German workers, and Spanish workers worked 1,690 hours, almost 300 hours more than workers in the Netherlands (OECD, 2012).

A second way in which groups and communities may be isolated is through concealment (hooks, 2003). *Isolation by concealment* means creating a tacit social order in which groups and communities become invisible to the eyes of mainstream society (Fine & Weis, 2003; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). For example, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the world must rise to the urgent challenge of creating 600 million productive jobs over the next decade, which would still leave 900 million workers living with their families below the U.S. $2-a-day poverty line, largely in developing countries (ILO, 2012). The crisis has increased the isolation and marginalization of the unemployed, migrant workers, youth workers, low-income workers, and unregistered workers, groups that usually lack social visibility. Any inclusive approach of social work practice should make visible the invisible results of the present crisis.

Dependency. The global crisis has seriously impaired the ability of families and communities to meet their basic needs and therefore deepened their dependency on social services (McLeod, 2010). In addition, many countries have launched austerity policies that affected the efficacy of social security networks. Out of 128 countries surveyed by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 90 had responded to the crisis with austerity measures that increased the exclusion of social sectors in 2011 or were planning to do so in 2012 (UNICEF, 2011). Therefore, it is clear that the crisis has exacerbated the structural dependency of the excluded on a depleted system of social services (Paperson, 2010). According to official

statistics, the poverty rate in the United States rose to 15.1 percent in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), and families in Eastern Europe, Spain, Portugal, and Greece are increasingly facing severe material deprivation. In addition, more than 8 percent of people who are currently employed are nevertheless at risk of falling into poverty—the so-called "working poor" (European Commission, 2012). Approximately 205 million people were unemployed across the globe in 2009, compared with 178 million in 2007 (ILO–International Monetary Fund, 2010). Such multiple dependencies are interrelated and intensified by the present crisis. Dependency, moreover, has multiple dimensions that surpass the economic level. Auyero (2012) argued that while waiting for social services, the poor learn the opposite of citizenship: They learn to be wards of the state. However, dependency also contains the seeds for resistance, for any chronic, structural dependency contains the potential for social action (Fine, 2006; Memmi, 1984). In short, the dire situation calls for an alternative professional approach that defies the traditional unbalanced power relations between professionals and clients in social services, an approach based on an egalitarian partnership.

Multiple Deprivation. *Multiple deprivation* is one of the characteristics of social exclusion and refers to different areas of deprivation such as income, employment, health and disability, education skills and training, barriers to housing and services, living environment, and personal security (Communities and Local Governments, 2011). Research indicates that slower economic growth is affecting infant mortality rates, and preliminary studies "forecast that an average 200,000 to 400,000 more children a year, a total of 1.4 to 2.8 million, may die if the crisis persists" (World Bank, 2009). Social workers should be aware that many of the policies implemented by governments that intensify multiple deprivation constitute a violation of human and social rights. International organizations have urged governments to ensure that the austerity policies are temporary measures and that these policies are necessary and proportionate, in the sense that the adoption of any other policy, or a failure to act, would be more detrimental to economic, social, and cultural rights. In addition, governments should guarantee that the policies implemented to solve the crisis are not discriminatory and comprise all possible measures, including tax measures, to

support social transfers and mitigate inequalities that can grow in times of crisis. Consequently, governments should avoid new regulations and budget cutbacks that harm the rights of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups. Last, these new policies must take in consideration the minimum core content of rights, or a social protection floor, as developed by the ILO (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2012).

Internalized Oppression. One of the negative outcomes of the global crisis is the birth of a new austerity discourse, essentially a refurbished version of neoliberal rhetoric (Wacquant, 2012). Union claims, workers' benefits, welfare recipients' entitlements, and immigrant and minority rights are its main targets. According to Amnesty International, this rhetoric has fueled discrimination against migrant workers and violent repression of social protest movements (Amnesty International, 2012). This new discourse sets up a dichotomy between social justice and economic growth and installs a regime of fear through the vilification of social claims. It construes legitimate social claims as the main obstacles to economic recovery. In other words, the victim is blamed while the perpetrator is exonerated. The austerity rhetoric thus intensifies the internalized oppression that is one of the main characteristics of social exclusion.

By *internalized oppression*, I mean the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an excluded group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society. Internalized oppression is likely to manifest itself in self-hatred, concealment, and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for mere survival (Tappan, 2006). It is thus the mechanism for perpetuating domination not only through direct external control, but also through building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups (Pheterson, 1990).

The multiple deprivations, social isolation, and dependency in which excluded families, groups, and communities are immersed deeply affect the ways in which they develop their own identities and create a sense of self-awareness. Studies show that people living in a state of oppression may develop defense mechanisms (Pierson, 2010). Among these, we can cite denial, fatalism, and displacement. These states represent an adaptation to a life of oppression because they serve as a buffer against the pain and hardship of exclusion. Besides their defensive functions, however, such mechanisms also obstruct the ability to reflect in a realistic way on oppressive realities (Tappan, 2006). This lack of reflectivity hampers the capacity to find an authentic voice, to develop agency and thus resist the oppression (Fine & Weis, 2003). In other words, the popular, dominant social imagery is internalized and progressively evolves into a distorted form of consciousness (Pyke, 2010), a kind of dual consciousness (DuBois, 1903/2007) in which, by accepting the oppressor's perspective, the oppressed loses true self-awareness. Similarly, Freire (1994) concluded that the oppressed internalizes the sense of shame, humiliation, self-hatred, and low self-esteem that characterizes oppression. In light of the detrimental impact of internalized oppression, any social work practice oriented to counter the impact of the crisis on the social awareness of families and communities should incorporate a process of conscientization.

ISWP: A FOUR-DIMENSIONAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I briefly present the ISWP framework. ISWP is based on four methodological principles (involvement, partnership, advocacy, and conscientization) responding to the main features of social exclusion.

Involvement

Against a background of social isolation, ISWP offers the principle of involvement. In other words, helping individuals, families, groups, and communities overcome the distance, solitude, and estrangement imposed by social exclusion requires heavily involved social work practice (Muir, Fisher, Abello, & Dadich, 2010). Unlike the other methodological components of the ISWP, the concept of involvement has not received enough attention (Carlisle, 2010). Most studies have focused on the definition of involvement, seen as a continuum of indicators including participation in community events, activities, and institutions (Garland, Myers, & Wolfer, 2008). Involvement is an ambiguous term with both positive and negative connotations (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2010). The word *involvement* (2005) comes from the Latin word *involvere*, meaning to enwrap, to roll in, to turn. As its Latin root indicates, involvement reflects a developmental and progressive process, an active move,

something not linear, but rather circular. Involvement implies movement, a certain degree of loss of control. To be involved also means "losing distance," "being impure," "biased," "contaminated," namely, losing neutrality, taking a stand. An approach based on the principle of involvement contradicts approaches calling for professional distance, separation of personal from professional domains, boundaries, and emotional detachment (O'Leary, Tsui, & Ruch, 2012).

Involvement is a complex concept that is manifested at four different levels: emotional, moral, intellectual, and behavioral. The first level, the emotional, means that the social worker brings his/her emotions into the work being done. This dimension implies an emotional investment in the process of building a personal relationship with the community members, a relationship that matters emotionally to the worker and then to the community. According to Beresford, Croft, and Adshead (2008), community members highlight friendship as a key positive element in their relationship with social workers, alongside qualities such as warmth, empathy, respect, and listening. Exclusion erodes the social capital of communities and undermines their belief that social services, institutions, and professionals can really help. In light of this mistrust, a personal, warm, affective relationship is critical to the establishment of trust, the basic condition for breaking the circle of isolation. Emotional involvement entails self-disclosure, giving up on professional distance, and showing personal identification with the client (Adams, Dominelli, & Payne, 2005). A second level of involvement is moral (Banks, 2010). Involvement with excluded communities entails a moral identification with the cause and suffering of the client, in other words, taking a definite moral stand against exclusion. Such a level of involvement would be congruent with many voices that support the moral and ethical dimension of professional work with excluded and marginalized populations. The third level of involvement, the intellectual one, entails being an informed participant. Exclusion is a highly complex phenomenon the eradication of which implies, and indeed requires, an understanding of its specific foundations and dynamics. Therefore, working with excluded populations requires permanent intellectual inquiry (Fook & Gardner, 2012). Last, but not least, an involved community practice entails the practical, instrumental dimension of involvement: behavior.

Inclusive community practice means intensive practice. Against the background of social isolation, involved, inclusive practice should display a high level of intensity, able to trigger action, to ignite the hearts and to illuminate the minds, to inspire a sense of hope. According to cyclical theory of capitalism, excluded communities are simply potential reserves of labor supply to be used during growth and left idle during a downturn. This imposes economic, political, and social inactivity on such communities. Against this background of drowsy lethargy, a committed, engaged, involved practice should provide a counter-rhythm, a contrasting pace, and a dissonant pulse. The principle of involvement implies working at high levels of intensity, acting under conditions of ambiguity for extended periods of time and persevering even when there are no quick results. Involvement entails feeling, to the full extent, the multifarious personal and professional experience of helping. Processes of involvement, despite their time- and all-consuming character, renew the joy of creativity (Strier, 2001). However, social workers sometimes withdraw from involvement because of fear of the unknown, apprehensions about excessive personal exposure, loss of control, and the assault of overwhelming emotions. Despite this complexity, the process of involvement has far-reaching therapeutic values. Shared involvement between workers and clients creates a closeness that is the basis for a relationship based on trust and intimacy. These processes diminish the social isolation of clients living in poverty and the professional isolation of those social workers who work with them. In sum, we can characterize this concept as a continuum of emotional, moral, intellectual and practical professional engagement in the process of breaking the circle of exclusion.

Partnership

Against the background of dependency, ISWP proposes an ideal of partnership. Whereas dependency means unequal, asymmetrical, and sometimes paternalistic relations, partnership means creating a relationship based on equality, mutual respect, joint activity, and joint learning. Rosenfeld and Tardieu (2000) pointed to partnership as a means of overcoming the impasse between excluded populations and social services professionals.

Partnership building with excluded populations is a complex experience, an ongoing process in which social workers and community members

explore ways to work together toward shared goals. Typically, these relationships are not characterized by equality. For people living in exclusion and poverty, the need to apply for economic help is sometimes experienced as a humiliation that exposes their feeble personal and social status (Strier & Binyamin, 2013). This sense of exposure and dependency is only further intensified by the bureaucratic nature of the exchange with social services offices, which symbolize the excluding regime. As a result, forging a partnership with excluded communities requires the creation of an appropriate professional and institutional space in which power relations can be discussed. Partnership building also suggests a warm, supportive, nonbureaucratic, and nonhierarchical approach. Therefore, social workers should be aware of their privileged status. An equal partnership is based on the assumption that different types of knowledge, belonging to practitioners and community members, are of the same value and together make a unique contribution to the partnership and consequently to the efforts to include excluded communities (Krumer-Nevo, 2008).

Advocacy

Advocacy is an important principle that promotes policies to reduce multiple deprivations and enhances the inclusion of socially marginalized communities. The field of advocacy has changed over the years, and it is now widely employed in other helping professions such as psychology, education, and nursing. The goal of advocacy is to help marginalized communities voice their claims and concerns and plan and carry out effective strategies to counter their social exclusion. Advocacy is an umbrella concept that has many definitions. It includes attempts to change policies or influence the decisions of government and state institutions through the enhancement of civic participation to promote a collective goal or interest (Ezell, 2001). In addition, advocacy means joint action to influence political, economic, or social policy and resource allocation decisions that directly affect people's lives. Professionals should take active steps to allow the beneficiaries of the advocacy process—in this case, families and community members—to play an active role during the advocacy campaign, including planning, performing advocacy roles, and evaluating the effectiveness of the process (Kenkel & Couling, 2006). According to Reid (2000), such

advocacy activities can include public education, influencing public opinion, research into interpreting problems and suggesting preferred solutions, public mobilizations, agenda setting and policy design, lobbying, policy implementation and monitoring, and election-related activity. Nicholson-Crotty (2007) draws distinctions between the different advocacy strategies that groups might pursue, including grassroots lobbying, direct lobbying of government, or collaboration with overtly political groups. According to McConnell (2004) there are several types of organizational advocacy, besides the more well-known kinds of lobbying: *administrative advocacy*, which is designed to influence a governmental program or law by administrative means; *program advocacy*, which is designed to change organizational practice to improve quality of and access to services for a specific population; *issue advocacy*, which is designed to mobilize public opinion in support of a specific policy change; and *legal advocacy*, which uses the courts to bring about social or policy change. Advocacy strategy typically evolves over time, and activities and desired outcomes can shift quickly (Coffman, 2007). Given the present crisis, the ISWP conceptual framework proposes that social services professionals should undertake advocacy as an essential, not marginal, part of their daily practices on behalf of their clients.

Conscientization

According to Apple (2010), the economic crisis has helped to launch a market-centered discourse that prioritizes the economy and uses prominent catchphrases such as *choice, competition, performance management,* and *risk management*. This discourse, based on the fear of an imminent economic calamity, marginalizes and silences alternative ideas, claims, and practices, and therefore results in the exclusion of those who are socially and economically disadvantaged (Klein, 2007). The crisis facilitates the establishment of a new regime of what Foucault (1978) calls "governmentality." This mode of governance is a subtle way to discipline the poor and silence unrest by the massive internalization of neoliberal premises. In other words, the same premises that provided the ideological and practical rationale for what precipitated the crisis are now offered as its ultimate cure (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). In light of this, we maintain that social work practice cannot ignore the discursive aspects of the crisis and propose to include the practice of consciousness-raising, or

conscientization, as central to inclusive social work practice (Freire, 1972; Torres & Morrow, 2002). *Conscientization* is a concept developed by Freire (1972), by which excluded communities learn to read and name the world in their own words. It is based on critical dialogue in which social workers and community members jointly enter into a process of reflective discovery of the generative themes that the community decides to discuss. In the process of this egalitarian dialogue, social workers and family and community members reflect on social issues that relate in a fundamental way to their well-being. In the conscientization process, participants start deconstructing internalized assumptions about the world. As a result, participants can develop and test new modes of relation to the social world. In such new relational modes, participants begin to perceive themselves as agents, as historical subjects, once again able to take possession of their own history. The process of conscientization is progressive and developmental. However, it is not just an educational process; it depends on a real "praxis," meaning, upon the action–reflection dialogue in the process of changing reality. This process is twofold. First, it entails discovering the impact of social exclusion on families and communities and looking for ways to allow participants to imagine an alternative existence, overcome victimization, and become agents of change (Giraux, 2010). Second, it requires developing self-reflection, in other words, the capacity to reflect on internalized patterns that were acquired as a result of being excluded. Consciousness-raising thus implies purging the images of violence, exploitation, stigmatization acquired by the community as part of their exclusion. Freire defined conscientization as a process in which humans, as knowing beings, achieve a deep awareness of the social and cultural context of their world and of the ways in which they can transform it (Freire, 1972). Conscientization is thus built through critical dialogue and reflective action against the reality of oppression. Freire defines three levels of consciousness of the oppressed. The first stage is the *culture of silence*. People understand their world primarily in terms of fate and destiny. The second stage is the *naïve consciousness*, which involves an incipient analysis of the world. The third level is *critical consciousness*, in which the oppressed transform themselves into historical agents. Conscientization, achieved through reflective and critical dialogue, is a critical component of any attempt to overcome exclusion, because the impact of exclusion goes beyond its

merely economic consequences; it affects participants' identity as a whole (Freire, 1994; Ledwith, 2001). It exposes families and communities to the dominant views, images, myths and assumptions of how the social world is constituted (Carroll & Minkler, 2000). In Bourdieu's words, exclusion leads to the introjection of the oppressive regime (Bourdieu, 1999; Garret, 2007). However, because of their inferior position in the society, excluded communities tend to progressively adopt and internalize the rationale of exclusion and to see it as justified. Accordingly, there is a need for a new critical consciousness not only toward the world, but also toward the self.

DISCUSSION

This article suggests the concept of ISWP, a conceptual framework whose main principles respond to four processes of social exclusion closely related to the present global crisis: extreme social isolation, growing dependency, multiple deprivation, and internalized oppression. This conceptual framework has been previously implemented in Israel with different excluded populations, such as unemployed Arab workers (Amash & Evroni, 2008); families living in poverty (Habbassy, 2006; Savaia & Weissman, 1997; Strier & Binyamin, 2013; Zeira & Ben-Harush, 2007); low-income elderly groups (Strier & Doron, 2010); parents of young children, fighting for educational rights (Evrani & Shapiro, 1997); low-income families with intellectually challenged children (Mizrachi, 2004); students with learning disabilities (Roer, 2002); and university–community partnership programs with excluded populations (Strier & Doron, 2010). ISWP was also implemented with different low-income ethnic groups (secular and ultra-Orthodox Jews, Ethiopian Immigrants, Arabs), in various institutional settings (public social services, nongovernmental organizations, community centers) and in a variety of micro and macro social work levels of practice (direct practice with individuals and families, social work practice with groups, community practice, and community-based policy practice).

The global crisis that is dangerously precipitating processes of social exclusion urges a reshaping of traditional social work principles. The global economic recession has inflicted harm on individuals, families, communities, and societies in many countries. It has deepened social isolation, dependency, multiple deprivation, and stigmatization of excluded populations and has delayed the prospects for the

inclusion of the younger generation. It has enlarged the caseloads of social services and has surely worsened the working conditions of the social workers themselves. We know, for example, that the increase in workloads intensifies pressures on social workers, increases the likelihood of negative effects on their mental health, and destroys the work–family life balance for practitioners (Vyas & Luk, 2011). In light of these developments, social workers should respond to the current circumstances with a much more engaged, egalitarian, social rights–based and reflexive social work practice. **SW**

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