Social Service Professions Towards Cross-European Standardisation of Qualifications

***Aila-Leena Matthies**, Professor of Social Work, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*

1 Introduction: social services as a growing field of business

There is no doubt that social and health services for European populations are becoming a considerable European political and economic issue. The social and health service field in general is becoming increasingly interesting to the market sector, to larger companies, and to the political and economic power structures that regulate them. The European Union's Lisbon Strategy states that the public service sector should be as open to market competition in all Member States as possible. Growth in the need for services and the simultaneous opening of services to the market indicate an enormous new potential economic shift from state, municipalities, and third-sector organisations to the market. As a consequence, national governments and ministries of trade and employment are becoming increasingly involved in the governing of welfare services that used to be part of other ministries such as family ministries or social and health care ministries. This may mean not only a shift in the power relations between different experts, but a new understanding of the issues of care, welfare and social needs. The issues that are now more in focus are sufficient numbers of qualified staff for the needs of services, development of entrepreneurship and the pre-conditions for entrepreneurship as well as the growth of productivity in services.

These themes, also rooted in the Lisbon Strategy, concern all Member States and raise questions about the qualifications of staff working in services (Kröger & Zechner 2009). Will this issue be addressed from the viewpoint of professional interest groups and service-users, from the viewpoint of employers, or according to the interests of trade and economy? How these various interests relate to each other and are negotiated is vital to the future of social services, particularly in light of the fact that the content of qualification in social services differs fundamentally from that in health services.

Entrepreneurship may need to be included in the qualifications of professionals, at least as an option for further education. The neoliberal tendency to consider personal services as 'products' whose productivity need improvement might be reflected on critically from the perspective of service users and service staff. As seen in many countries, efforts to increase service productivity means limiting individual and personal considerations in the services and increasing the size of care groups and number of cases per staff member. This also concerns staff qualifications and to what degree they can communicate a particular character of social services in relation to the industrial production of goods and services. At the same time, strong tendencies to medicalise, juridise social services and 'curricularise' childhood by 'early education' necessitate a clarification of one's own qualification profile in social professions.

In this article, which is based on a more comprehensive report (Family Platform 2010), I maintain a comparative cross-European view in order to map out the qualifications of the core

professions within the social services. *Social workers* refers here to those professionals who hold the highest academic qualification in the field of social services, and its profile might need no further definition in this context (see IFSW 2010). Secondly, *qualification of the staff in child daycare services* – i.e. child daycare centres, kindergartens and child daycare groups – will be analysed. Lastly, the current cross-European definition of *social carer* qualifications in practical work supporting people in need will be included in this discussion. Unfortunately, the analysis is limited only to more formal and quantitative dimensions of qualification; a more substantial analysis cannot be included in this paper. The analysis is based on available comparative documents on qualifications in the three comprehensive professional fields of social services and will focus on the following questions:

- is formal qualification is required at all (particularly in social care)?
- how are the various task levels differentiated with respect to qualification within the service field (particularly in child daycare)?
- is a Bachelor's (BA) or Master's (MA) level of education required (particularly in social work)?

These three central fields of tasks in social services serve to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the entire profile of social service in Europe. As Munday (2003) states, the field of social services is too ambiguous to define even from a labour market viewpoint. Terms such as 'social services,' 'social welfare,' 'welfare services,' 'social protection,' 'social assistance,' 'social care' and 'social work' are used without fixed meanings. Social services may be provided in various locations such as individual homes, day centres, residential establishments, offices, and by various organisations such as local authorities, NGOs and private agencies, administered by various staff (Munday 2003, 10). The qualifications of social service professionals may be less complicated to define than the services themselves; therefore one could ask whether a shared identity of social services in a society is easier to achieve through shared professional concepts and identities than through institutions.

2 State of the Art of knowledge on qualification – Current literature

Current comparative international literature on the qualification standards of various social service professions is neither abundant nor detailed. Some existing research does compare qualification standards in social services between two or more countries (see Boddy, Cameron, and Petrie 2006) or between countries participating in individual research projects (e.g. Kröger 2003 or Salonen 2009). Systematic comparative research has not yet been carried out, but a small number of comparative reports have been published, particularly regarding the interests of professional organisations on the one hand and the interests of policy makers and administrations on the other.

Elizabeth Frost and Maria José Freitas (2007) have published the comprehensive book "Social Work Education in Europe", in which different authors discuss professional issues from an educational viewpoint. The most recent report concerning comparative data of social workers and their qualifications, entitled "Standards in Social Work Practice Meeting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights", was published in 2010 by the International Federation of Social Workers, Europe. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) have also published a paper in 2004 entitled "Global Standards for the Education and Training of Social Work as a Profession."

UNICEF's *The child care transition* (2008) report provides a coherent overview of the qualifications of staff in child daycare provision in the 25 OECD Member States. The European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE, 2009) have published a comprehensive report on child care provision in the 30 European states, which includes a comparative table of the qualifications of staff in child daycare. This report is not very precise in its comparisons, as it was based on a questionnaire sent to authorities from each country. If used in connection with other reports and research, however, the EGGE report is useful for its comprehensiveness. In 2006, the OECD published a third relevant international report that included comparative information on the qualifications of professionals in child daycare – the second report in the "Starting Strong" project (OECD 2006).

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006) has conducted important research into current and future general issues regarding the care service sector in Europe, based on national reports. The first part of the "Labour supply in care services" project was based on data from six Member States: Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and the UK. The second included data from five new Member States: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia.

These reports are used as the main basis for a joint comparison of the three core social service professions in Europe in this article. Another tool for comparison is now provided by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), but it has not been sufficiently developed for use in the field of social services. As the EQF might take on an important role in cross-European comparisons, it will be briefly presented to enable later discussion in this paper.

3 The European Qualifications Framework and Social Services

In most European countries, the regulation of social service professionals started as late as the 1980s, but the requirements for the academic staff of social services, such as social workers and kindergarten teachers, had already been more clearly defined. Over the last ten years, discussions about the qualification standards of social service workers have become increasingly common, motivated in part by the increasing mobility of professional staff across Europe.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning, published by the European Parliament in 2008, is designed to ease the compatibility of different qualification systems and different fields of education. In practical terms, the EQF ranges from formally non-qualified levels of qualification to doctoral levels of formal qualification, and can be applied to both practical vocational work and highly specialised academic tasks. The European Parliament (2008) underscores that each level of qualification can be achieved by various educational and career routes. The definition of each level therefore relates to the required knowledge, skills, and competences, and not to a particular degree. However, in the practical cases of applying the EQF as a frame of reference, formal degrees will certainly play a central role.

The idea that knowledge, skills, and competences can be attained by means other than formal education is confusing in an era of knowledge society. If clear educational standards are not required, frameworks such as the EQF might even lead to the de-professionalisation of fields such as social services. Social services is vulnerable in this regard: assumptions about the 'natural talents of women' for caring still exist in many countries and have been strong since

the beginning of social work as a distinguished vocation in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century across Europe (see Kuhlmann 2000, Salomon 1927).

Table 1 presents an initial effort to apply the EQF from the perspective of social services, examining how staff qualifications in these services can be analysed and compared. I have used the EQF table, published by the European Parliament (2008), and applied the descriptions of knowledge, skills, competences and degrees to the field of social care and social work.

Table 1. *The EQF from the Perspective of Professions in Social Services (Matthies 2010)*[1]

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences	Related degree of education in national qualification frameworks
1	Basic general knowledge and social care-related knowledge based on life experience	The basic skills required to carry out simple tasks, and everyday skills in social services	Work or study under direct supervision within a structured context of social care, and layperson and citizenship competences	No formal degree (but informal qualification based on social and family life, as well as voluntary engagement)
2	Basic factual knowledge of field work	The basic cognitive and practical skills required to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems	Work under supervision with some autonomy in social services	Compulsory basic education, e.g. secondary school (at age 16, after 8 to 10 school years)
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts of field work	The cognitive and practical skills to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting basic methods, tools and information	Taking responsibility for the completion of tasks in social care, and adapting one's own behaviour to the circumstances in order to solve problems	A vocational qualification without a formal degree, with long vocational experience or short-term training
4	Broad factual and theoretical knowledge within the social	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate	Exercising self-management within the guidelines of contexts that are	A matriculation examination and a basic vocational degree or upper

[1] According to the European Parliament (2008), referring also to the Ministry of Education Finland (2009); to Boddy; Cameron and Moss 2006

	services field	solutions to specific problems in the social services field	usually predictable, supervising the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation of and improvements in social services	secondary vocational qualification (e.g. 3 years after compulsory basic education)
5	Comprehensive, specialised factual and theoretical knowledge within the social services field and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to creatively solve abstract problems	Exercising management and supervision in social service contexts in which there is unpredictable change, and reviewing and developing performance of self and others	An upper or specialised vocational degree
6	Advanced knowledge of social services and social work, involving critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of social services and social work	Managing complex professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work in social services and social work, and taking responsibility for managing the professional development of individuals and groups	A BA degree from a university or polytechnic/ university of applied sciences
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in social services and social work field, as the basis of original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues	The specialised problem-solving skills required in research, innovation or both in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Managing and transforming work in social services and social work that is complex, unpredictable and requires new strategic approaches; taking responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or reviewing the	An MA degree from a university or a polytechnic/ university of applied sciences

	in social services and social work and the interface between fields		strategic performance of teams	
8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of social services and social work and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrating substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity, and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of social services and social work contexts, including research	A doctoral degree or licentiate degree

4 Current Standards of Qualification in Comparison

a) Social Workers

The social worker's profession is probably the most clearly defined, standardised social services profession in the Member States. The social work professionals in local child and youth protection hold positions of authority in which they are responsible for significant expertise and decisions, based on the Child Care Act. They, in particular, have seen an increased need to meet clear and comprehensive requirements of qualification. For those in the field of child protection, most Member States require an academic qualification achieved at a university or even post-graduate specialisation; few accept a social work qualification achieved at a university of applied sciences. While most countries already require an MA degree in social work from a university or are moving towards it, other countries require at least a BA degree in social work, achieved at a university of applied sciences, as a minimum qualification for social workers. An increasing number of countries are offering doctoral degrees in social work and many of them are involved in joint cross-European and international doctoral programmes in social work (see, for example, *www.indosow.net*, *www.sosnet.fi/ NBSW.iw3*, and *http://www.tissa.net*).

Due to the Bologna Process of the European Higher Education Area, nearly all European countries are now applying – or moving towards – a two-step model of education consisting of Bachelor's and Master's degrees in social work. The Bologna Process has been a success in the social work profession insofar as nearly all social work education programmes in Europe are now fully integrated into the national systems of higher education (see Martínez-Román 2006, 28). Some countries that prior to the Bologna process required a four-year university degree in social work are now either requiring a four-year BA degree – for example, in Slovenia and Poland – or accepting a legal professional qualification at the MA level only, while a BA is not regarded as relevant to the labour market, as is the case in Finland. Other countries that previously had no clear definition of social work qualifications, or accepted social work education below the BA level, are now up-grading their social work education to

at least the BA level at a university or a university of applied sciences. But countries that used to have a three-and-a-half or four-year diploma degree in social work at college, polytechnic, or universities of applied science level – including Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands – have partly reduced their previous, longer diploma degrees to a three-year BA degree as the basic qualification required for social work.

Regardless of how the Bologna Process is applied, significant differences across EU Member States remain in the qualifications of social workers due to differences in previous educational systems, in traditions of understanding the professionalisation of social work, and in the structure of higher education institutions, such as having – or not having – a dual system of universities and universities of applied sciences. For instance, the new Bachelor's degrees vary quantitatively between 180 and 240 ECTS (see Martínez-Román 2006, p. 28). Over fifty percent of social worker education in Europe is now offered at a university level only, in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Outside universities, education in social work is offered by accredited higher education institutions, polytechnics and universities of applied sciences (*Hogeschol, Fachhochschule)* that adhere fully to a tertiary education system, although in most national languages, they are not called 'universities'. (Martínez-Román 2006) The profile of social work studies at these non-university institutions is more practically than academically oriented, typically unconnected to research and often not clearly distinct from the education of social carers, social educators, social pedagogues or youth and community workers. Some universities of applied sciences now offer an additional, optional and specialised MA degree, but not all students continue to this level as it is not demanded in the labour market.

The implementation of the Bologna Process, the two new BA and MA degrees, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and the system of modules – new to many educational institutions – have caused significant structural changes in the education of social workers in Europe. The next large reform, the implementation of the EQF in the National Qualifications Framework of social work education, perhaps will not affect structures so much as it will bring change to the methods of understanding the content and goals of education. It is to be expected that in the long run, the increase in academic education and social work research will also improve the status and quality of knowledge in the comprehensive field of all social services.

b) Child Daycare Staff

Outlining the qualification requirements for staff working in child daycare and early education in the Member States is the current focus of significant public interest. Awareness is growing regarding the interrelation between the quality of pre-school services and the learning performance of children in school as well as their further opportunities. Early childhood services and their quality are growing in importance due to long-term development in most societies of mothers participating in the labour market, today a very clear strategic aim of the EU and of most Member States. However, as seen in comparative studies (UNICEF 2006; EGGE 2003), the issues concern not only the availability of child daycare but also the quality of it in terms of the qualifications and number of staff. In such questions, cross-European comparisons are very fruitful and exciting.

The UNICEF report "Child Day-Care in Transition" (2006) uses the qualifications of staff as a core criterion for evaluating the quality of child care. UNICEF proposed that at least 50 per

cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years' tertiary education with a recognised qualification in early childhood studies or a related field. The UNICEF report states that twenty out of twenty-five OECD countries were able to meet this standard, however, the UNICEF minimum only addresses primary- and pre-school teaching qualification, with no special training in social support and developmental needs of children.

When comparing the qualifications of child daycare staff, most attention is paid to the quantitative level of qualification: the required degree. However, analysis of the content and orientation of the qualification, another very important issue, depends on whether child daycare is regarded chiefly as a social care service, an educational service, or a mixture of both. The answer may differ across societies according to the form of child daycare services. In countries in which child daycare is regarded as both a social care service and an educational service, the groups of children are smaller and the staff-to-children ratio is lower. Additionally, both 'types' of staff are available: experts in social care *and* experts in early childhood education. Where the only aim is to provide care, the demand for qualifications is not very high and groups are small, such as in children's private daycare groups, or care by private nurses. Where the focus is mainly on education, groups are quite large, the staff-to-children ratio is quite high, and the qualifications of staff are educationally-oriented. The traditional German *Kindergarten*, which does not provide all-day care, is an example of this.

Cross-European variation in the qualification requirements of staff caring for children is broad, ranging from the MA degrees in early education of kindergarten teachers in Finland to Portugal's stipulation – stated in an answer to an EU-questionnaire about European child-care provision – that "child minders should be able to read and write" (EGGE 2009, 46). Despite such great variations, very clear commonalities exist in the qualifications of child care staff. Most countries differentiate between types of staff according to three levels: child minders or care assistants with a qualification level of 1 to 4; child carers, educators or pedagogues with a qualification level of 4 to 5; and kindergarten teachers, supervisors, social educators or managers with a qualification level of 6 to 7. Beyond this very similar structure across Member States, differences emerge in questions of how qualification requirements work in reality. Finally, among the most important factors in the quality of child daycare are child-to-staff ratios and group sizes, which vary significantly between countries.

c) Social Carers in Social Services

Although care issues are considered a global challenge (see Ehrenreich & Russel Hochschild 2004; Camenon & Boddy 2006), comparable systematic data on the qualifications of social care staff working with various age groups is poor. This category of staff in social services also consists of highly heterogeneous vocations, from informal carers to trained social carers, social pedagogues, social inspectors, social assistants, social educators, family helpers and childminders. Moreover, the differentiation of nursing staff is not always clear or even an aim. In a 'knowledge-based society' such as Europe, increasing formal qualification is demanded also from the staff working in the caring tasks of and everyday assistance with various people in need. But at the same time, due to the significant shortage of workers, standards of qualification are not first on the agenda, and uneducated 'experienced carers' are welcome to the field. Some cross-European publications are available on social care work, including issues of qualification (Boddy et al. 2006). The previously mentioned report, published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006), attends to critical future issues of staff shortages in care services. Another

publication, based on the results of the EQUIP project (Salonen 2009), explores home care practices and education in six European countries.

Compared to professionals in nursing and education, workers in social care have a lower level of education, if at all (Brannen et al. 2007, 77-78). The lack of promotion opportunities or career progress in social care might be one important reason why it does not attract many young people, particularly men, and why many existing care workers change the field. The European notion of Lifelong Learning and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should therefore be developed into 'ladder instruments', instruments that enable promotion to more demanding and qualified tasks, continuing the process of education in social care for those seeking new challenges. It became evident to Brannen et al. (2007) that most care workers move across different areas of care work over the span of their career, a fact that can be regarded as a strength of social care, enabling more work options and widening experiences and perspectives in a vertical direction.

In Finland, for example, two paradoxical tendencies in social care are visible: the increase and decrease of qualification standards. Constant upgrading of the qualification for current staff as well as making the training for social carers attractive to young people, a BA degree of social carers and social instructors at universities of applied sciences at level 6, are examples of this. At the same time, the Ministry of Trade and Employment introduced new one-year short-term training for adult social carers and for migrants as care assistants in 2010, in order to meet the high quantitative demand for staff in social services. (Super 2010)

The low or unclear standards of qualification of the social care staff generally mirror the attitude that the everyday issues of European citizens in need still seems to be a 'private issue' to be solved by informal networks and voluntary organisations.

5 Concluding comparison of the professional qualifications in the social services

As considered above, achieving a joint picture of qualification demands and education of staff in social services across Europe is challenging, as the data are incomplete and rapid changes are ongoing. However, the following table aims at providing a comparative look, as comprehensive as possible, at the qualification standards based on the available sources of valid data from all EU Member States.

Table 2. *The qualifications of the staff in social services in the EU Member States, according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Matthies 2010). The numbers refer to the level in the EQF.*

MEMBER STATE	Qualifications of social workers	Qualifications of staff in child daycare services	Qualifications of care staff in social care services[2]
Austria	A change from college (5) to universities of applied sciences	Kindergarten pedagogues: 5 years of upper secondary education (5);	comparative information not available

[2] In most Member States, data on the qualifications of staff in social care for families of this type are not available; required qualifications are either undefined or social care services for families are not established.

	(diploma) took place in 2001; a change to 3-year BA (6)/2-year optional MA (7) took place in 2007.	educators 2-years training (2); Training for childminders not mandatory in all provinces.	
Belgium	The Flemish community: A change from colleges to universities of applied sciences in 1995 with diploma (BA 6) The French community: non-university higher education (institutes of higher education) in social work either as a BA (6) or BA + MA (7)	The Flemish community: only 25 % of jobs require a diploma; nursery school teachers: 3 years of tertiary education (6); child care workers: a secondary-level degree (3-4). The French community: teachers: 3-year college degree (6); nurses: 2-year secondary education (2); child minders: 'useful experience' required	comparative information not available
Bulgaria	A 4-year BA degree (6) and 2-year MA (7)	No details available; 'Staff education has been introduced in working with children and improving management skills' (2)	comparative information not available
Cyprus	A 4-year BA degree (6) at a university	Child carers: college diploma (4-5); kindergarten teachers: BA (6)	comparative information not available
Czech Republic	A BA + MA university degree (7)	95 % of pedagogues have an upper secondary degree (4); university BA degree (6) has started	comparative information not available
Denmark	A 3.5-year BA degree at a college (5-6) required; two universities also offer an optional MA	Social pedagogues: a 3.5-year degree (6); basic educational training for careers (2); informal qualification of childminders only	Social and health care assistants have vocational level 4; social and health care helpers have

	degree (7)	(1)	vocational level 3
Estonia	A BA + MA university degree (7)	Teachers in child daycare institutions: upper secondary vocational degree (5-6) or secondary vocational education (4) with specialisation in pre-school education	Social care worker
Finland	University MA degree (7) as social work qualification required, in some areas further specialisation (8, (licenciate possible)	Kindergarten teachers: MA or BA degree (6-7) in early childhood education; child nurses: 3-year secondary vocational degree (4); childminders in family daycare: access to vocational degree (4) (majority still 2-3)	Social instructors, pedagogues and carers: a BA degree at university of applied sciences (6), or an upper vocational degree (5); more basic practical social carers: a vocational degree (3)
France	3-year tertiary-level education (diploma) at level 5; three universities offer undergraduate-degree-level in social work training at level 5; private schools train the majority of social workers	Teachers at *école maternelle:* a university degree and specialisation (7); educators: a tertiary degree (5-6): children's nurses at *école maternelle* or at a *crèche:* specialisation (4)	comparative information not available
Germany	BA degree (6; at university of applied sciences) in practical SW, MA degree (7) optional; university degree (7) demanded for all management and leading tasks	Educators: majority hold 2-year degree (5); child nurses: a vocational degree (4); childminders; no education; social pedagogues (6-7) in leading positions; a BA degree (6) in early childhood education started 2005	In particular family support of child care: BA degree (6); Educators in residential care (5); carers in services: a certificate of 80 hours of adult training (3) or without qualification

Greece	BA and MA university degree (7)	Educators: tertiary degree (6); assistants: mainly an upper vocational degree (5)	comparative information not available
Hungary	Three previous different professions now moving towards social work with a strong social science and social policy content; a 4-year university BA degree has been established (6)	2/3 of staff in kindergarten: tertiary degree (6); trained child nurses: secondary vocational training (4); workers in nurseries mainly: secondary vocational education (4)	comparative information not available
Ireland	A national professional certificate in social work and BA degree (6); an additional 2-year MA degree (7) optional at universities	No national minimum standard of qualification ('qualification poor/ experience rich'), 1-2); National Child Care Strategy has suggested a training framework, several universities now offering qualifications and degree courses	comparative information not available
Italy	3-year BA degree (6) + 2-year MA degree (7) at universities	Since 2003 kindergarten staff: university degree in primary education (6); still practicing staff: vocational training (5)	comparative information not available
Latvia	4-year university BA degree (6)	Kindergarten and pre-school teachers: a pedagogical degree in education should be higher than that of and pre-school pedagogues. In-service training required every 3rd year. No training of private childminders.	comparative information not available
Lithuania	3.5-year degree at a college (5); a 4-year	Teachers in pre-school education: a secondary	comparative information not

	BA degree at university (6); an MA degree after additional 1-2 years (7)	or higher degree (4-6) related to pre-school education	available
Luxembourg	No social work education existed for a long time; a BA degree has now been established at the University of L (6)	'Most workers in the care sector are qualified employees with training that may differ by function (management, education, and cooking and cleaning).'	comparative information not available
Malta	4-year BA degree (5)	Supervisors: training in management and administration (4). Carers in home-based facilities need recognised training in childcare (3-4)	comparative information not available
Netherlands	4-year BA degree (5); one university offers an international MA in comparative Social Work (6)	The minimum qualification requirement for childcare staff: relevant secondary vocational schooling (4); directors: tertiary degree (5-6)	Care workers: vocational training (3); care helpers below it (2)
Poland	3-year BA and 3-year MA university degrees (6-7)	Pre-school teachers: the same as teachers in other educational programmes: post-secondary education (5)	comparative information not available
Portugal	A 3- to 3.5-year BA degree (6) + 1.5 to 2 more years for an MA degree (7) at university	Teachers in *crèches* and in Kindergarten: a 4-year university or polytechnic education (6), nurses and social workers have tertiary education (5); Care assistants: secondary education	comparative information not available

		(4); Childminders are not legally obliged to have a education	
Romania	3-year BA degree (6) + 2-year MA degree (7), at universities, introduced according to the Bologna Process	comparative information not available	comparative information not available
Slovakia	comparative information not available	The compulsory education for a kindergarten teacher is tertiary schooling (5) or special secondary education (4)	comparative information not available
Slovenia	4-year university BA degree (6); 1-year MA degree (7)	Pre-school teachers: advanced or higher education or university degree (5-6); Care assistants: upper secondary qualification (4)	comparative information not available
Spain	A 3-year undergraduate degree (5) will be changed into a 4-year degree (6) and a 1-year postgraduate degree will be changed into a 2-year MA degree (7)	Educational services in pre-school: the minimum required qualification is a 3-year university degree (6) in (pre-)school education or a professional qualification (4-5)	Social and health care workers at home have level 2; a home helper has level 1 (no qualification)
Sweden	3.5-year BA degree (6) required; 2-year MA degree introduced (7).	One half of the workers and all directors in child daycare: university qualifications (6); child care assistants: 3-year diploma degree (4-5); family day-carers: training (4)	Social carers have a degree of 140 ECTS at college level
United Kingdom	3-year undergraduate degree in England	20 % have a university or tertiary qualification	Level 3 is required, but has been

	and Wales (5-6); 4-year BA degree in Scotland and Northern Ireland (5-6); 1- to 2-year postgraduate degree (specialist areas, management, research) (7)	(5-6); senior managers and supervisors: a minimum professional qualification (3); at least half the staff must be trained (2); child minders must complete a pre-registration course within six months of service; 30 % have no qualification.	achieved by all (70 % of providers have fewer than 20 % staff with any relevant education); family support workers being pressured to upgrade their qualification (to 2-3); domiciliary care workers/care at home staff: varied training (1-4)

(Boddy, Cameron, & Moss 2006; Frost & Freitas 2006; Hofer 2005; IASSW 2004; IFSW 2010; Ministry of Education, Finland 2009; Salonen 2009; SuPer 2010; Pantucek et al. 2008; Panayiotopoulos & Athanasiou 2005)

Constructing the above international comparison of staff qualifications in social services was indeed a challenging task and the results should be understood not as complete, but as a first step. It also shows how difficult it is to find comparative data even in this 'knowledge-based' era of Europe, full of different comparative networks. Therefore, further data and discussion about the criteria of comparison are needed. There are, however, certain phenomena that can be concluded on the basis of the current data.

For professional social workers with academic degrees at the BA and MA levels, the European qualification standards are already quite clear. International professional organisations (IFSW, IASSW) have tried to comprehensively define joint standards and learning outcomes for social work education worldwide. The professionalisation is also related to the gender equality in the societies and the public value of traditionally female fields of tasks. While a university MA degree was earlier required in social work in such societies as the Nordic countries and some post-socialist countries (Forsberg & Kröger 2010) – which have featured strong professionalisation in all social and pedagogical services – currently several Southern European countries and all post-socialist countries are aiming for the same. In the more conservative welfare states in Central Europe, social work education seems to remain at a university of applied sciences level, but an increasing number of these schools are aiming at MA-level degrees as well (Kommission Sozialpädagogik Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaften 2009).

A similar tendency is also visible in the qualification of child daycare, where at least a BA degree will be required in most European societies. At a European level, efforts are emerging to define minimum standards for required qualifications in child daycare and early education (see, for example, UNICEF 2008). However, professional qualifications in social care services have not yet been discussed at a cross-European level. This third area seems to comprise a mix of not formally qualified staff, staff trained on the job and staff with vocational degrees, such as social educators.

6 Tendencies of the Current Development

The cross-European tendency to upgrade the qualification standards of social workers, child daycare staff and social carers can be considered a positive one within the frame of the

'knowledge-based society', a tendency to attain better skills, knowledge, and competences to work with the most vulnerable members of society. But several experts in comprehensive studies (see Boddy, Cameron & Moss 2006; Brannen et al. 2007, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006; Henriksson & Wrede 2004; Kröger, Leinonen and Vuorensyrjä 2009; Vuorensyrjä et al. 2006) and many practitioners in their daily work contend that there is a contradictory co-existence between 'rising demand' and 'decreasing supply' in social services. All the Member States are experiencing an increasing need for workers in social and care services, yet also have limited resources or a limited willingness to pay them in regular jobs. The *flexibilisation* of labour market regulations is used widely in care services. While temporary part-time contracts might be useful for staff in particular life situations, for most staff members and particularly for service users, permanent contracts and continuing working relationships in personal services take priority. The comparative evaluative research of the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions* (2006, 7) states that one part of political power in the EU and in the Member States speaks for joint regulations to require higher qualifications and good training for social service professions; another part feels that doing so would place an unacceptable financial burden on the Member States. Qualifications specified by law also may be very high, while the job itself is unrewarding.

Worsening working conditions and low salaries mean that many qualified professionals are leaving the field of social services, and less qualified staff must replace them in many societies. Due to the privatisation of services and variety of providers, staff qualifications can no longer be controlled to the same extent as by the public sector. Reduction of qualification requirements is often regarded positively as flexibilisation. Perhaps the biggest challenge to qualification standards in social services is the neoliberal labour market policy: each unemployed individual must be 'activated', in any kind of job, and as local authorities are under pressure to find for him or her a practical placement, short-term job or other means of labour market integration, the service sector is often seen as the solution.

Regarding the tendencies mentioned, the introduction of the EQF can be seen as a promising step in facilitating the movement of staff in social services to regions in which they are most needed and where working conditions are the most attractive. By enabling an objective comparison of qualifications between countries, the EQF may in turn create positive pressure to upgrade standards in the European mainstream. However, the comparison may lead to political pressure in another direction and a type of 'de-qualification'; if less highly-qualified professionals are sufficient in Southern European countries, for example, one might ask why such highly-qualified staff are necessary in Northern Europe. It seems reasonable to hope that cross-European reflection might encourage valuing skills, knowledge, and competence in social services, rather than belief in 'natural competences' of caring.

Gaps between living standards, income and working conditions between different regions within Europe – and on its borders – motivate the mobility of workers in social services between Member States and from outside of Europe. But the exact consequences for services and families in the poorer regions sending staff to better-off regions, as well as consequences for service users in the recipient regions, have not yet been systematically studied. It is also important that incoming workers are able to achieve the necessary qualifications as soon as possible, so as not to be exploited in the de-qualification of professional standards.

Interestingly, it is easier to coax women to Europe from the other side of the globe to work in social services than it is to convince European men to become involved in social care, even

within a family. Most documents analysed for this report emphasise the importance of recruiting more male workers to this predominantly female sector of the labour market. Banez and Ehlert (2006, 68) contend that to strengthen the relevance of gender issues within the social work curricula, gender must be considered a part of the criteria in the national accreditation, evaluation and quality assurance process. Thus, they regard the guidelines set by the EU and by international organisations as very important.

In many countries, qualification for a certain vocation in social services marks an entrance to an 'dead-end' career. However, understanding EQF levels as optional steps towards higher education – according to the concept of lifelong learning – might be both possible and motivational.

It is typical for the qualifications and professional work of social services to be in the middle of disciplinary and sectoral disputes. Health care professionals and agencies on one side, and professionals and institutions with backgrounds in educational thinking on the other, take part in social work and social care in each of the professional fields chiefly regarding social work, child daycare and family support. However, it is essential that both medicalisation and over-pedagogisation of the social needs of people are avoided. A solid multi-professional cooperation may be achieved only if the content of the qualifications of social professions has its own clear identity, an identity to which social aspects, social work, social policy and other social science-rooted contents are central.

The global standard of social workers, formulated by the International Federation of Social Workers (2004), points out the critical nature of relationships to service users and states the following points concerning the most important goals for the qualifications of social workers; this could perhaps be the foundation for an individual cross-professional base for a personal identity of social professions. Firstly, a social worker 'respects the rights and interests of service users and their participation in all aspects of the delivery of programmes.' Secondly, 'the core purpose of Social Work is to form short- and longer-term working relationships with and mobilise individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities to enhance their well-being and their problem-solving capacities.' Moreover, concerning the paradigm of the social work profession, 'there is a clear requirement that the curriculum should focus on capacity-building and empowerment of individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities through a human-centred, developmental approach' (IFSW 2004).

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Author´s Address:
Prof. Aila-Leena Matthies
University of Jyväskylä
Email: aila-leena.matthies@chydenius.fi