

Queering Social Work Education in Europe

A recent report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) has pointed out the fundamental role of public officials and other frontline professionals in the fields of education, healthcare and law enforcement for effectively achieving LGBT rights. The report has provided evidence of both drivers and barriers professionals face in promoting diversity, and fighting discrimination and intolerance on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity across the EU.

Against this background, the proposed contribution will discuss needs, challenges and potentials of systematically including issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in European social work education.

Referring to social work's commitment to LGBT people, the contribution will point out its ongoing relevance as questions of marginalisation and discrimination go beyond formal equality in legislation and normalisation of homosexuality within existing societal institutions. Furthermore, new questions and dynamics in rapidly changing and highly diverse societal contexts bring about new challenges in addressing LGBT issues.

As regards the question of how to include LGBT related content in social work education, the contribution will discuss problems of representation and knowledge and underline the potential of a queer approach. A queer perspective questions taken-for-granted assumptions about sexual orientation, gender identity and intimate relationships. It challenges normalizing categories of sex, gender and desire and brings out possibilities existing beyond the heteronormative order. This way, it offers social work education a powerful theoretical lens to address issues of sexuality and gender not just as minority issues, but as a transversal matter and topics of general interest.