

**Contextualizing the Global Definition of Social Work within the Portuguese Context:
Ontology, Challenges and Implications**

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The revised global definition of social work adopted by the IFSW and IASSW in July 2014 indicates notable shifts from that of the previous definition, and raises discussions around issues of macro versus micro practice; collectivism versus individualism; and the role of critical and radical social work ideals. The location and exploration of these debates using existing key ontological paradigms, socio-economic contexts and the challenges for global and national social work, encourages critical reflection on the purpose, role and function of social work in society. The authors reflect on these implications and challenges within the present Portuguese context.

Against the backdrop of the political and social reality of Portugal, the authors implemented a comparative analysis between the ontological transitions in the new definition, and the ontological transitions of Portuguese professional social work practice and education. Portuguese social work has a history of moving from a functionalist-therapeutic view to a humanist radical emancipatory vision; however, more recently, the profession has been confronted with the silent return to a therapeutic vision and the growing influence of the neoliberal-managerialist paradigm. As a result, the principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are being neglected, motivated by the worsening economic Portuguese crisis and the implementation of neoliberal-based austerity policies. Yet, the transitions in the new definition indicate a shift toward socialist-collective thinking and the need for macro engagement within the profession.

Portuguese social workers are confronted with the challenge of adopting the principles and ideals as outlined in the new definition within an increasingly neoliberal context. The profession has much to offer and contribute to address growing global and national challenges, however it must develop a critical understanding of its ontological values and principles in order to better enact its role within society toward authentic and sustainable change.