



## **Global Sustainable Development Goals through the lenses of Social Work Students in Australia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – Comparative Research**

**Vesna Šućur-Janjetović<sup>1\*</sup>**

**Ljubo Lepir<sup>1</sup>**

**Dragana Šćepović<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Political Science, Department for Social Work,  
University of Banja Luka, Bosnia

\*Email: vesna.sucur-janjetovic@fpn.unibl.org

### **Abstract**

The Research Project was directed towards the research on opinions of future social workers (current students) in two different socio-economically developed societies, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Australia. The focus of this research were the opinions and attitudes amongst future social workers about strategic directions of societies' global developments defined by the Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2015-2030 (SDGs). The method for data collection used in this research was a specifically designed online survey. The main findings indicate that most of the social work students in both countries are not familiar with the SDGs, as well as that students of social work see the role of social workers in permanent critiquing and challenging the constrains of capitalism and social systems that create unjust societies. Such systems entrench inequality and poverty in society, regardless of their socio-economic development. The study identifies difference in opinion concerning the values important for family, community and profession of social work which is in correlation with the difference in socio-economic development of the two countries. The findings of this study also identify similarities in social work students' opinions and attitudes regarding the future development and social work issues, both at the global and local level of communities. Finally, this article also includes some ideas and discussions for future research directions on similar topics.

**Keywords:** social work students, global sustainable development goals, social work education

## Introduction

Inspired by evident crises and challenges in the contemporary world, the creators of the Global Sustainable Development Goals had few important things in focus: questions on priorities concerning development issues, prerequisites for contemporary development, development directions, the necessity of having development resources and expected development outcomes, all with the aim to search for answers to a key question: How to preserve the life on Earth?

Global Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by the United Nations in 2015, when the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives from around the world committed to a new sustainable development agenda in the form of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, often referred to as SDGs, and 169 accompanying targets (Bengtsson, Barakat & Muttarak, 2018). The SDGs aim is to grasp the complexity of contemporary civilization development, as well as the differences coming with the development. All defined goals consist key areas that need balance between the economic, social, cultural and ecological development in each community on planet Earth (UN, 2019).

The research project represents an attempt to interconnect the science and profession of social work with current global development directions. The project was directed towards the research on opinions of future social workers (current students) in two different socio-economically developed societies, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) and Australia. The focus of this research was on the opinions and attitudes amongst future social workers about strategic directions of societies' global developments defined by the Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2015-2030<sup>1</sup>. The research included social work students from University of Banja Luka, University of Sarajevo and University of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and social work students from Australian Collage of Applied Psychology in Sydney and Melbourne (Australia).

The socio-ecological crisis, as well as the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will produce changes that would be visible in the process of making sustainable societies. Bearing in mind that the transition to sustainable societies will take place in all aspects of human life, it is impossible to leave social work out of that process. Social work science and profession has a lot to offer. The overarching model of social work inclusion is directed towards empowerment, building social capital and development, where social work as a scientific and applicable practical discipline has already

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

developed a socio-ecological practice focused on empowerment, resilience and development of social capital (Peeters, 2012). Parallel analysis of documents concerning the Global Agenda of Social Work and Global Sustainable Development Goals shows a great level of compatibility in defining global and specific goals (Lombard, 2016). It is extremely important that future social workers are aware of that, and that the social work lecturers find ways and resources for a concrete influence towards the skills development of social work students, in order to have an active role in practice and participate in fulfilling the goals of the Global Agenda.

There are many differences between Australia and Bosnia and Herzegovina when it comes to social and economy characteristics, therefore, hard to compare. However, the question of perception of the future society development by those ones that would take over the “helm” of social development in their communities, represents the area of common interest. This paper provides the findings of a comparative research on values, opinions, perceptions and attitudes of students of social work at the above-mentioned universities on how much are the SDGs accepted amongst young generations, and how much are they prepared to contribute to their implementation in their own communities.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The SDGs are strongly aligned with the social work profession. The values and principals of social work are embedded into the SDGs through the focus on health and well-being of all humans. The SDGs also mirror the social work's methods and models of work through the focus on individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities, at local and global level (Rice, Fisher & Moore, 2022). Jayasooria (2016) adds that SDGs represent a good basis that provides social workers with framework for practice that might be in line with the holistic approach to interventions. This is something that can be applied in any context, including the context of B&H and Australia, being very different societies in all aspects of societal life. Social workers are educated to analyse and intervene at all levels of society. Analysing the macro level and possibilities to achieve the SDGs by 2030 represents an important step towards this goal.

### **The SDGs in Context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Australia**

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** can be defined as a south-eastern European country, on its pathway towards the European Union, former Yugoslavia's republic, a post-war and post-socialist country that has been in transition over 30 years (transiting into some form of neo-liberal capitalism). B&H is a developing country ranked as 74<sup>th</sup> in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2022). The social security and healthcare systems are based on universal human rights. When it comes to the state affairs, the joint institutions have the jurisdiction to adopt and implement international documents, therefore, the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals including. The SDGs were officially presented in April 2017 at the conference under the auspices of

the Presidency of B&H (consisted of representatives from three constitutional nations in B&H, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks), and subsequently the institutions were appointed to lead the coordination process for implementing Agenda 2030 at the level of B&H, Republika Srpska, Federation of B&H and the Brčko District of B&H (UNDP in BiH, 2020). The first step for implementation of Agenda 2030 in B&H was to develop the SDGs Framework. Based on the situation analysis with regard to sustainable development in B&H, three pathways of sustainable development in B&H were determined: 1) Good Governance and Public Sector Management; 2) Smart Growth; 3) Society of Equal Opportunities, and two horizontal themes 1) Human Capital for the Future and 2) the “Leave no one behind” Principle (UNDP in BiH, 2020).

**Australia** is a multi-cultural country and multi-faith society. Being a colonial country since late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of Britain in designing and developing the Australian society throughout its history was very strong. Today, Australians believe that the cultural input of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (indigenous peoples), as well as many multi-ethnic migrants from all over the world shaped the contemporary society of Australia. According to the Human Development Report (2022), Australia is a highly developed country, with 5<sup>th</sup> highest Human Development Index, being amongst the highest in the world when quality of life is concerned, democracy, health, education, economic freedom, civil liberties, safety and political rights (Freedom in the World, 2023). The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of the Prime Minister are jointly coordinating the implementation of the SDGs 2030 Agenda. Once SDGs were launched, the Australian Government produced a document titled *Report on the implementation of the sustainable development goals* in 2018, highlighting achievements, priorities and challenges, analysing both the national and international level. An important part of this report demonstrates that achieving the SDGs is not only the responsibility and initiative of the government, but it also needs to include the efforts coming from other sectors, such as: business, civil society, academia, individuals and communities. The Australian Government also has an official National Reporting Platform for the Sustainable Development Goals. The Platform contains Australian Government data on the indicators that support the Goals and will be used to track progress over time.<sup>1</sup>

### **Social Work education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Australia**

The frameworks regarding strategies, engagement and activities of individual states/nations serve as guidelines for achieving the SDGs, but not necessarily reflect on education policies and programs/curricula (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021). This confirms that social work profession somehow finds itself at the intersection of policies and social work practice, caught in the vortex of policy modernisation through many reforms and demanding reality of social work practice on one hand,

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2018. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/sdg-voluntary-national-review.pdf> Retrieved on March 9, 2023.

and the evident increase of inequality and uncertainty at the labour market on the other hand (Stepney, 2012, in Paul, 2017). According to Fitzpatrick (2011), globalization refers to: “the increasing worldwide interdependence of individuals, localities, public and private organizations, economies, nations and socio-cultures” (Fitzpatrick, 2011:174, in Paul, 2017). This might imply that social work now operates to reduce the consequences of economic globalisation where reforms and restructuring of welfare systems across the world are actually reflecting the criteria of the global market (Paul, 2017). This most certainly is challenging for social work science and practice.

Social work education in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been established after the World War II, as part of the Former Yugoslavia (Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) social welfare education system at the public universities. Hessle (2020) notes that the social welfare system after 1950s has been pretty advanced according to the international standards (Hessle, 2020). However, after the war (1992-1995) and establishing of new states, Bosnia and Herzegovina had only one School of Social Work at the University of Sarajevo. A group of international experts, mainly supported by the Swedish Government and UNICEF in BiH, developed and implemented some 20 projects in the social welfare system of B&H (Hessle, 2020). One of the projects was establishing the School/Department of Social Work at the University of Banja Luka in year 2000. Today, B&H has four Schools of Social Work (in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Mostar), all as part of public universities. There are no private faculties or universities with Schools of Social Work. This may be a result of long tradition of being a socialist country where values and expectations from citizens are still grounded in socialist values. The social work education is organised as a 4 years bachelor and 1 year master studies.

The first social work training in Australia was initiated by a network of women and women’s organisations in 1920s in Sydney (Wilson, 2005). Browne (1996, in Wilson, 2005) notes that Australian social work at the times was very much relying on support from community welfare and charity organizations, such as the Red Cross and Council of Social Services. However, during the World War II, three social work institutes in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide were transferred to the universities (Wilson, 2005). As the demand for trained professionals on labor market increased due to the growth of social and health services, a range of social work and welfare courses emerged. Welfare training, available in Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE) and at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges are considered to be among the first established (Wilson, 2005). Even though these courses were focusing on competences and in specific fields of social welfare services (youth, health care, child protection, Indigenous people, etc.), the most significant change in higher education in Australia took place in 1988, also known as the “Dawkins reforms” (Karmel, 1990:29, in Wilson, 2005). The bachelor studies are designed as minimum four years full time study. Master studies of social work are structured as 2 years study that include 1000 hours of placement divided in two placements (each in total of 500

hours). There has been a significant increase in enrolments of international students in master studies of social work in Australia, especially in Sydney and Melbourne. Many international students find Australia very attractive for studying, with majority of students coming from the region of Asia (Wilson, 2005).

The Special Issue of *International Social Work (2014)* includes reports on studies reflecting on possible implications of the Global Agenda for social work education and practice. It is expected from the education sector to play a lead role through training and research (Healy et al., 2014). A study reported by Sims, Chenu and Williams (2014:362), involving six universities in United Kingdom from 2010 to 2011, where in total 400 social work students were introduced to the draft Global Agenda and later also participated in development of the document. The findings indicated that students felt by engaging in this process, they got a "professional and political voice" in policy-making at national, regional and international levels, which is in line with the aim of the Global Agenda (Sims et al., 2014:361, Lombard, 2015). Students pointed out opinions that they don't see social work only as valuable support to individuals, but consider social work as a profession that contributes to the "overall welfare and improvement of society" (Sims et al., 2014, Lombard, 2015). In another study, where Global Agenda was used as a framework to analyse social work policy education, reported in South African and United States study by Ranga and Zelnick (2014, in Lombard, 2015), students identified concerns for social work professionals not being involved enough in policy formulation (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014, in Lombard 2015). Students that participated in this study see the role of social workers in "critiquing and challenging the limits of neoliberal capitalism as an unjust social system which entrenches inequality and poverty in society (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:394, in Lombard, 2015:51-52).

As stated in the latest UN Sustainable Development Report (United Nations, 2022), recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and delivering global sustainability, require "an urgent rescue effort for the SDGs". The required commitments "to support the world's most vulnerable people, communities and nations" places the social work profession in the centre of system responses and activities necessary to achieve the SDGs (United Nations, 2022). Higher education is based on collectively shared values, such as social justice and solidarity and therefore, can offer some vision for the future (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021:7).

The SDGs address a wide range of issues including poverty and inequality, health, international trade, climate change and gender, with a strong emphasis on the environment (Healy, 2017). There are many areas of particular interest to the profession of social work, tackling inequality within and between countries, and concerns over the role of human rights protection (Healy, 2017). Many authors agree that adopting a human rights approach to social work practice is of high importance, universal and based on the right of all human beings (Jayasooria, 2016). All the above-

mentioned underpins the importance of hearing the voices of social work students when it comes to implementation and fulfilment of the SDGs.

### **Research Design and Methods**

To address the research objectives, research questions were defined and research methods chosen to fit the needs of this Project. This represents the basis for the methodological framework development. Current students of social work are the stakeholders of the future social and economic development. Their opinions, attitudes and perceptions on ways of development have a starting engine power and represent one of the most important elements for implementation of defined SDGs. A comparative study design was applied. According to Bryman (2016), this design entails studying two or more different cases using same or similar methods. As per definition by Hantrais (1996, Bryman 2016), this research intends to compare different socio-cultural and economic settings, as well as “to seek explanations for similarities and differences or to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social realities in different national contexts” (Bryman, 2016:65). This research study can also be defined as cross-cultural research, since it entails collection and/or analysis from two or more nations (Bryman, 2016).

The research questions were: 1) To what extent are the students of social work familiar with the Global Sustainable Development Goals? 2) What are the opinions and attitudes of students of social work regarding the SDGs? 3) To what extent are the students of social work involved in social life of their community and what values are important for development of family, community and profession of social work? 4) Are there any differences between the students’ opinions regarding SDGs? 5) How do students’ attitudes differ taking into account their country of origin and social locations?

This empirical research study made use of a questionnaire designed and developed for the purpose of this study by the team of researchers. The data collection was organized in two separate voluntary, self-administrated, self-report online surveys that consisted scales and items that could be used for a comparative analysis. The ethical approval for the research was obtained from both countries, the Human Research Ethical Committee (HREC) of the Australian Collage of Applied Psychology (ACAP) and Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Banja Luka both approved this research.

### **Data collection**

All participants who consented to participate in the research study were directed via link to an anonymous online survey, administrated under the webpage of the University of Banja Luka (Faculty of Political Science). Participants were recruited using two strategies: ACAP student pool using SONA for students in Australia and official webpage of Universities in B&H. Social work students studying at ACAP in Sydney or Melbourne, once enrolled in first year have access to all research being

conducted in the discipline of Social Work through SONA. They read the information on the research page before clicking on a link which takes them to the survey. Social work students in B&H could access the official Universities webpages. The research team received approvals to advertise the study. Any interested social work student could access the online research page, read about the research, and decide if they wish to complete the survey. Participants had to consent (implied consent) prior to being allowed to enter the online survey.

*Inclusion criteria* was defined in a way that all participants must be over 18 years of age, be enrolled in a social work course at a tertiary institution, and must be sufficient enough in one of the languages that survey is provided in. *Exclusion criteria* applied to students enrolled in other disciplines.

The sample included 75 social work students from B&H (Universities based in three cities) whom are all citizens of B&H (domestic students), and 71 social work students studying in Australia (Sydney and Melbourne). In the Australian sample, out of 71 respondents, 30 (20.5%) are of Australian nationality, while 7 (4.8%) are citizens of a European country, 9 (6.2%) are citizens of a South American country, 18 (12.3) students are citizens of an Asian country, and 7 (4.8%) are citizens of an African country. In total, 41 students in the Australian sample have the status of an international student. The age range of respondents from B&H are predominantly between 19 and 24 years of age ( $n=58$ , 77.3%). The Australian respondents age range is predominantly between 24 and 45 years of age ( $n=64$ , 90.1%).

In total, 38 respondents (26%) grew up in a large city (over 1 million population), out of which, 37 (97.4%) are Australians, and 1 (2.6%) is citizen of B&H. 22 respondents grew up in a city less than 1 million inhabitants (12 respondents from Australia and 10 respondents from B&H). Majority of respondents, 58.9% ( $n=86$ ) grew up in a city with population less than 100,000 inhabitants or in a village/small settlement (64/86, 74.4% are students of B&H). In total, 74% ( $n=108$ ) of respondents grew up in a city that has less than 1 million inhabitants.

## **Research Instrument**

The Questionnaire specially designed for this research study consisted 80 questions. For the purpose of this article, specific questions and answers were subjected to analysis and will be presented in this paper (40 questions and answers in total). This is in line with the selected research questions referred to in this article. These include the following: information about how familiar students are with and how do they value the SDGs (25 questions); information about students' opinion on family and social values especially important for the profession of social work and social development, as defined by the SDGs (5 questions); demographic information (10 questions: age, nationality, where they grew up, students' assessment on financial status of their family, students' religious denomination, and students' involvement in certain areas of social life).

## Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed using the IBM SPSS (version 25). All data sets from Australia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were merged into one data set. Prior to analyzing data, the following steps were undertaken: data cleaning was carried out to ensure that it is appropriate for further analysis; basic descriptive statistics was carried out in order to examine the averages for the main variables; inferential statistics ( $\chi^2$  - chi-square test of independence) was used to draw conclusions about observed differences between groups in this study. Also, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ( $R_s$ ) was used to measure the correlation (strength of the relationship) between the data from two countries.

## Limitations

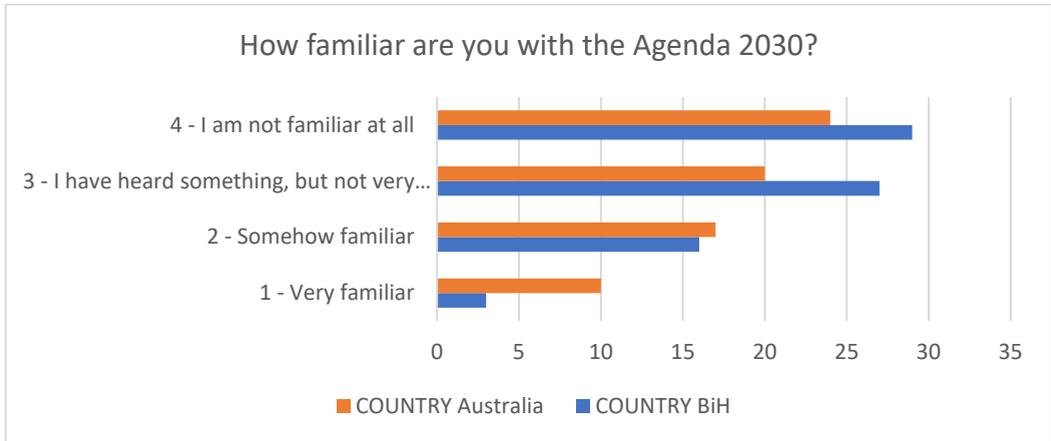
The research was launched in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, the study is subject to a few limitations. The main one is that both study groups are non-probabilistic convenience samples. Having in mind context differences, the structure of samples can also be considered as a limitation factor. Namely, social work students in B&H are predominantly domestic students, while students in Australia are multi-cultural with both domestic and international status of students. Another limitation might be in being a cross-cultural and cross-national self-reported study.

## Research Findings

*How familiar are students of social work with the Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs/Agenda 2030)?*

One of the main aims of this research was to determine how familiar are the social work students with the SDGs. We asked respondents to what extent are they familiar and how did they get informed about the SDGs. Respondents were asked to select the answer and extent of familiarity offering: 1) Yes, I am very familiar with SDGs; 2) I am somewhat familiar; 3) I have heard something, but not very familiar with details; and 4) I am not familiar at all. Chart 1 presents the results, showing that 68,5% ( $n=100$ ) selected options 3 and 4. There is no statistically significant difference between the respondents' answers from Australia and B&H.

Chart 1. Familiarity with the Global Sustainable Development Goals

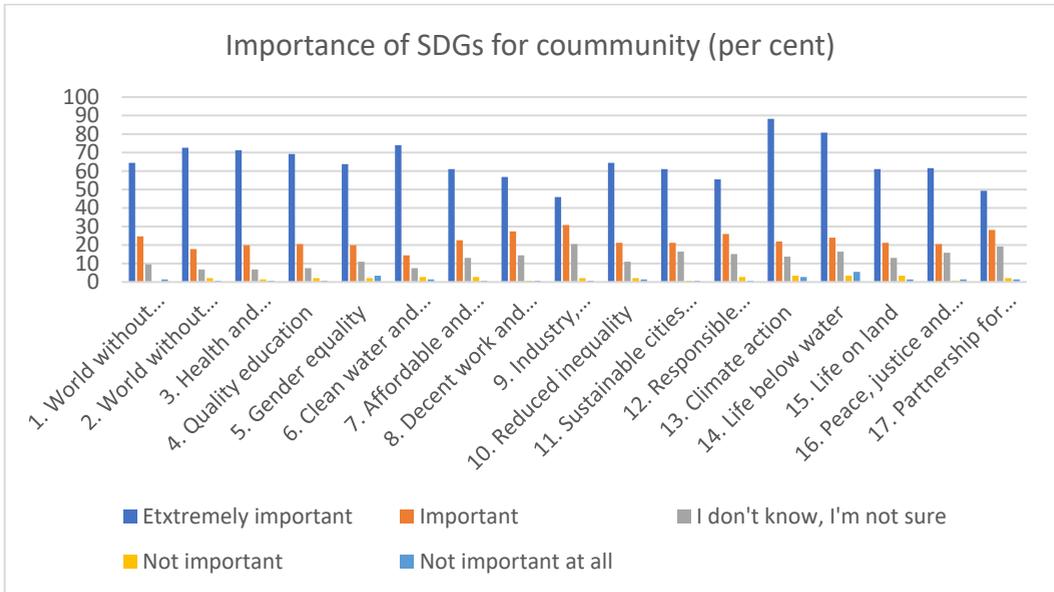


Asked about how did they get the information about the SDGs, 60 respondents (41.1%) selected option (1) through my studies - Social Work Curriculum, and 24 respondents (16.4%) selected option (4) through internet/social media.

#### *Opinions of social work students on the Global Sustainable Development Goal*

The Global Sustainable Development Goals/Agenda 2030 (SDGs), all 17 goals were measured using 5-point Likert scale, with the highest score (1) indicating “extremely important”, 2) important, 3) I don’t know/I’m not sure, 4) not important, and 5) not important at all. The majority of respondents selected options 1 (extremely important) and 2 (important) for each of the 17 SDGs (Chart 2). The highest reported frequency of 74% (108/146) respondents selecting “extremely important” was found for the “Clean water and sanitation” goal, followed by “World without hunger”, where 72.6% (106/146) and “Health and wellbeing”, where 71.2% (104/146) selected “extremely important” as their response. The least frequently selected as “extremely important” was found for the “Industry, innovation and infrastructure” goal, where 45.9% (67/146) selected this answer.

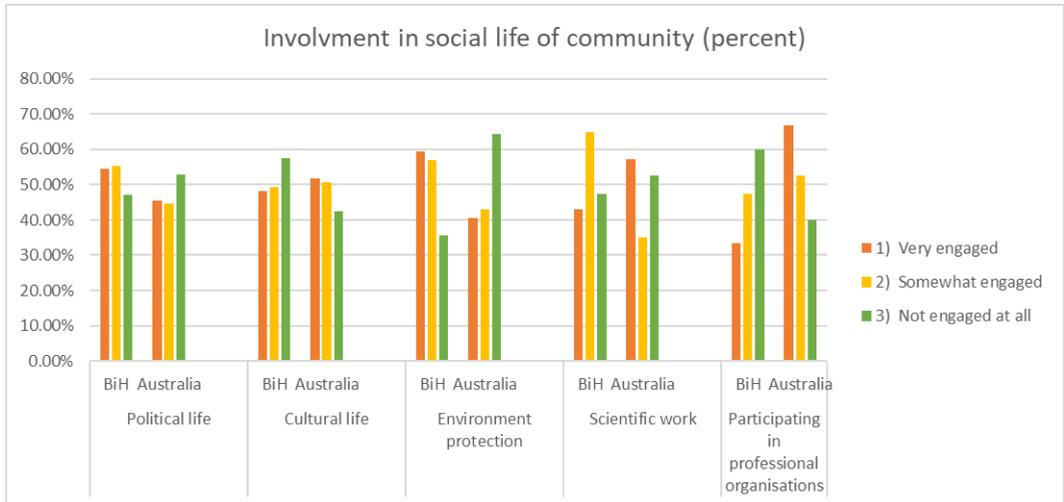
Chart 2. Importance of 17 Sustainable Development Goals for your community



*Social work students' involvement in social life of community and values important for family, community and profession of social work development*

The involvement of respondents in social life of their community was measured using a five-item instrument, covering the major aspects of social life: political life, cultural life, environmental protection, scientific work and participation in professional organisations. As presented in Chart 3, the most frequently reported response of 65.1% (95/146) respondents selecting “not engaged at all” in scientific work. On the opposite note, the most frequently reported engagement as “very engaged” was in environment protection, 29/146 respondents (21,9%). Involvement in political life reports the highest percent of 46.6% (48/146) as “not engaged at all”.

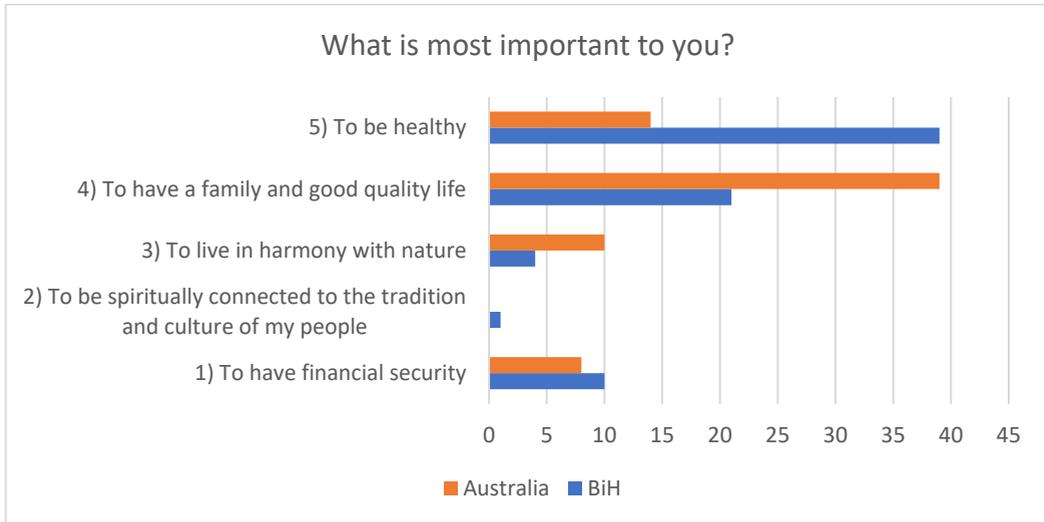
Chart 3. Extent of involvement in social life of community



The statistical significance of the descriptive statistic was analysed applying  $\chi^2$  - chi-square test on two independent samples. The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = .951$ ) indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The relationship between the countries (location of students) and attitudes was tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The results of the Spearman's correlation test ( $r_s = .074$ ) indicate that there is no significant positive correlation between the two samples.

The values referring to family and family relations, development of contemporary society, development of education and development of modern social work profession were each measured using five-item instruments, with instructions to choose only one answer. The results on question "what is most important to you?" show that 41.1% (60/146) of respondents selected (4) and 36.3% (53/146) selected (5). As presented in Chart 4, the results also show that 65% (39/60) Australian respondents selected (4), while 73.6% (39/53) of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina selected (5).

Chart 4. Most important in life of social work students



The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = 20.892$ ) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups at both levels (.01 and .05). The results of the Spearman's correlation ( $r_s = -.250$ ) indicate that there is a low negative association statistically significant at both levels ( $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

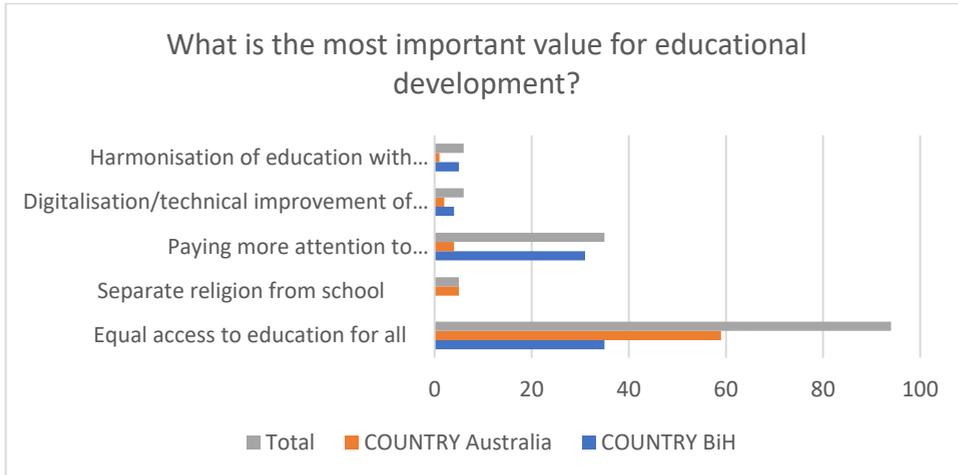
When asked about the values the development of contemporary society is based on, the most frequently selected was 1) fulfilling of human rights and individual freedoms, with 69.2% (101/146), out of which 47.5% (48/101) respondents are from B&H and 52.5% (53/101) respondents are from Australia. The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = 16.492$ ) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups at both levels. The results of the Spearman's correlation test ( $r_s = -.135$ ) indicate that there is a low negative association that is not statistically significant at both levels.

Asked about the opinion on which value is the most important for development of modern social work profession, the most frequently selected was (1), with 30.1% (44/146) respondents, out of which 75% (33/44) were respondents from Australia. Similar results are with selecting option (2), where 24% (35/146) selected promotion of social justice as the most important value for development of modern social work profession. 65% (23/35) were respondents from Australia. The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = 36.844$ ) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups at both levels. The results of the Spearman's correlation test ( $r_s = -.464$ ) indicate that there is a low negative association statistically significant at both levels ( $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The most important value for educational development was examined using five-item instrument, with instruction to select one. As presented in Chart 5, results show that

the most frequently selected was (1) equal access to education for all, with 64.4% (94/146) responses. Amongst these, 62.8% (59/94) were from the Australian sample.

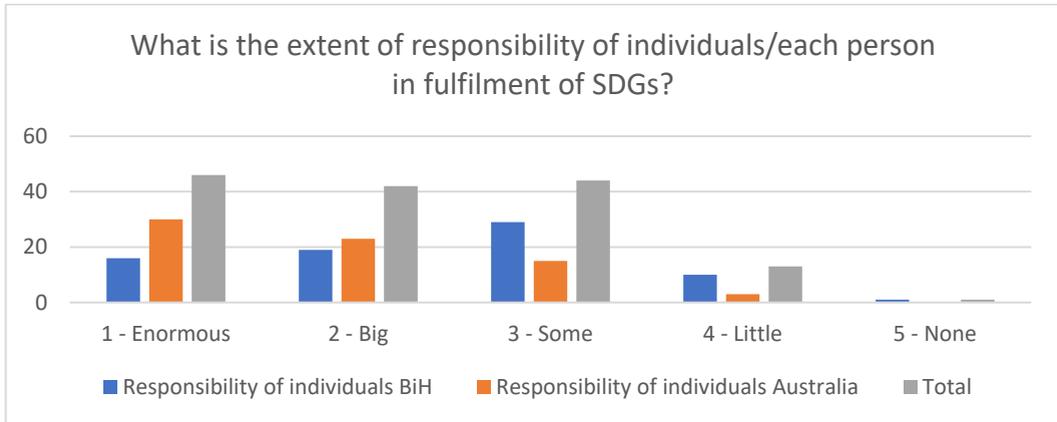
Chart 5. Most important value for educational development



*Are there any differences between the students' opinions regarding Global Sustainable Development Goals?*

Social work students were asked about their opinion regarding the responsibility of individuals, state and institutions in fulfilment and realisation of the SDGs by 2030. These answers were used to measure the extent of responsibility for fulfilment of SDGs using 5-point Likert scale (1-enourmous to 5-none). The results show (Chart 6) that 31.5% (46/146) of respondents believe that the responsibility of individuals is enormous for fulfilment of the SDGs by 2030 (34.8%, 16/46 from BiH and 65.2%, 30/46 from Australia). The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = 13.766$ ) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups at both levels. The results of the Spearman's correlation test ( $r_s = -.301$ ) indicate that there is a medium negative association statistically significant at both levels ( $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Chart 6. Individual responsibility for fulfilment of SDGs



When asked about the opinion concerning the responsibility of state and institutions for fulfilment of SDGs, the results show that 59.6% (87/146) of respondents selected (1), out of which 85.6% (51/87) were respondents from Australia. The chi-square test result ( $\chi^2 = 19.188$ ) indicates that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups at both levels. The results of the Spearman's correlation test ( $r_s = .293$ ) indicate that there is a positive association statistically significant at both levels ( $p < .01$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The opinions regarding the possibilities for the SDGs to be fulfilled by 2030 was examined using three-point scale, starting with 1) I am convinced that it will happen, and followed by 2) I don't know, I am not sure, and 3) I am certain that nothing will change with that regard. The majority of respondents selected (2), 58.9% (86/146), with no statistically significant difference between the two countries.

### Comparative Analysis, Discussion and Conclusions

One of the main aims of the comparative analysis is to understand if there are any differences in opinions, or how do students' attitudes differ taking into account their country of origin and social locations, which was research question five. The first difference can be found in the actual sample of respondents studying social work in Australia and in B&H. Social work students tend to be more mature in the Australian sample, with most of them being of over 24 years of age, while comparing to their counterparts in B&H, most of the social work students were up to 24 years of age. Another significant finding regarding the sample structure and the context in which respondents grew up is that B&H respondents are all domestic students, while Australian respondents have more international students that grew up in smaller cities, comparing to domestic Australian students. This is in line with Wilson (2005) emphasizing the interest of international students to study social work in Australia. There is also a statistically significant difference regarding the assessment of respondents'

opinion on financial situation of their family. Out of 29 respondents assessing the financial situation of their family as “above average”, 24 (82.8%) are from the Australian sample, while out of 92 respondents that assessed the financial situation of their family as average, 60 (64.2%) are from the B&H sample. The explanation for this result and differences between samples is in line with the Human Development Report (2022) results.

The majority of social work students studying in B&H or Australia have heard about the SDGs or are not familiar at all (100/146). In total, 60/146 respondents that are familiar somehow or have heard about the SDGs, got the information from their studies and Social Work curricula, or internet/social media. Another finding concerning the importance of SDGs (17 goals), respondents from both B&H and Australia expressed their opinion as extremely important and important with no significant differences between the two countries. This means that the education sector in both countries plays a lead role through training (Healy et al., 2014), which includes informing about the new global developments concerning human right issues. However, the ranking of importance shows that the majority of respondents selecting extremely important as an answer, selected “clean water and sanitation” most frequently, followed by “world without hunger” and “health and wellbeing”.

The main difference between the two groups’ responses regarding the 17 SDGs can be found in the comparison analysis results for each of the SDGs, taking into consideration the selected answers “extremely important”. The results of this analysis show that the respondents from B&H regard as extremely important more than respondents from Australia the following goals: health and wellbeing; industry, innovation and infrastructure; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnership for goals. On the other note, the respondents from Australia regard as extremely important the following goals: clean water and sanitation; decent work and economy; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; and climate action. As found in another study, social work students also consider social work as a profession that contributes to the “overall welfare and improvement of society” (Sims et al., 2014, Lombard, 2015).

As for the participation in social life of their community, the comparative analysis shows that respondents from Australia more frequently selected answer “very engaged” in cultural life and partnership activities concerning the professional organisations, while respondents from B&H more frequently selected answer “somehow engaged” in political life, environment protection and scientific life. This is in line with findings from another study where students identified concerns for social work professionals not being involved enough in policy formulation (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014, in Lombard 2015).

The comparative analysis on values important for family, community and profession of social work show that the most important values for respondent from B&H are “to be healthy” and “to have financial security”. The explanation for this could be found in different aspects of B&H society being defined as a developing country ranked as 74<sup>th</sup> in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2022). The respondents from Australia most frequently selected “to have a family and good quality life” and “to live in harmony with nature”. This is also in line with the fact that the Human Development Report (2022), ranked Australia as the 5<sup>th</sup> highest Human Development Index. As for the development of contemporary society, there is no significant difference in percent of respondents from both countries selecting the answer “Fulfilling of human rights and individual freedoms”, being the most frequently selected answer in total.

As emphasizes by Healy (2017), there are many areas of particular interest to the profession of social work, and one of the main roles is human rights protection. Social work students from both countries recognise this as the most important value for society development. As for the other offered answers, respondents from B&H more frequently selected answers “preservation of public health” and “economic, technological and industrial development”, comparing to their counterparts from Australia. On the other hand, the respondents from Australia more frequently selected answers “preservation of nature” and “maintain national and cultural identity”. Interesting research finding of this analysis is that both groups of respondents most frequently and equally (in percent) selected as most important values for good family relations, the “emotional connectiveness between family members” and “equality and open communication between family members”. This is also in line with the values of social work.

With regard to education values, B&H respondents are of the opinion that “paying more attention to practice” is the most important value for education development, while most of the respondents from Australia are of the opinion that “equal access to education” is the most important value for education development. Social work students from Australia have 1000 hours of placement during the course (Wilson, 2005), while student in B&H have between 250-200 depending on the university and accreditation of program. In the opinion of Australian respondents, development of modern social work profession is based on the “respect of dignity of each and every individual” and “promotion of social justice”, while respondents from B&H most frequently selected “empathy for person in social need” and “supporting changes in society”. Results from both groups are in line with the findings from another study where students see the role of social workers in “critiquing and challenging the limits of neoliberal capitalism as an unjust social system which entrenches inequality and poverty in society (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:394, in Lombard, 2015:51-52).

Lastly, but equally important, differences in opinion between the respondents' answers from both countries can be found in the answers concerning the responsibility for the SDGs realisation and fulfilment. The respondents from Australia are of the opinion that the enormous and big responsibility is on individuals, as well as on state and institutions, while respondents from B&H most frequently selected these responsibilities as "some" and "little". This result is not surprising if one is to look through the prism of citizens' trust in state and institutions in Australian society and in B&H society. The results reflect the opinion from the individual perspective too.

The main conclusion here is in agreement with the statement published as the *News from our societies – IFSW: The incredible journey of the global agenda continues* (2021), which sees the broadening of the horizons of social development through the 'co-building approach', and this "will enable social work to more fully respond to changing needs and dynamics of our fast-moving world" (IFSW, 2021:137).

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