

# The professional training of social workers in post-Bologna Process Portugal (2024)

*A formação profissional de assistentes sociais em Portugal pós-Bolonha (2024)*

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## ABSTRACT

This text aims to present some aspects of the professional training of social workers in Portugal today (2024), using as a methodological framework and reference the Bologna Process and documentary research in the Study Plans of the 17 social work degrees in the country. We understand that Portuguese socio-historical training is the basis for the development of the profession in the country. In this sense, this article presents aspects of this training, highlighting the processes initiated in Portugal's orientation towards Europe, with its accession to the European Community and the Bologna Process. The "idea of harmonization" and the search for standardization of higher education in social work training post-Bologna imply limitations in the perspectives of consolidating critical professional training.

**Keywords:** Portugal, professional training, social work, Bologna Process

## RESUMO

Este texto tem por objetivo expor alguns aspectos sobre a formação profissional dos assistentes sociais em Portugal na atualidade (2024), tendo como percurso metodológico e referência o processo de Bolonha e a pesquisa documental nos Planos de Estudos das 17 licenciaturas de Serviço Social no país. Compreendemos que a formação sócio-histórica portuguesa assenta como base para o desenvolvimento da profissão no país. Neste sentido, este artigo expõe aspectos desta formação, com destaque para os processos iniciados na orientação de Portugal para a Europa, com a sua adesão à Comunidade Europeia e ao Processo de Bolonha. O "ideário de harmonização" e a busca de padronização do ensino superior na formação em Serviço Social pós-Bolonha implica em limitações face às perspectivas de consolidar uma formação profissional crítica.

**Palavras-Chave:** Portugal, formação profissional, Serviço Social, Processo de Bolonha

## Introduction

This article presents preliminary results within the scope of the subproject *Historical and theoretical foundations of social work in Portugal: antecedents, memory, and contemporary challenges*, of the inter-

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national network research *Social work in history: social issue and social movements – Latin America and Europe*, currently in development. Its objective is to present some aspects of the professional training of social workers in Portugal today (2024), taking the Bologna Process as a reference.

In theoretical-methodological terms, we analyze socio-historical aspects that contribute to the understanding of academic-professional training in the historical particularity of capitalist social relations, considering the unity between the processes of social production and reproduction (Iamamoto; Carvalho, 2005) that constitute, in this form of sociability, a concrete totality (Eiras, 2024). One of the guiding premises of this article refers to the configuration of the Bologna Process as an expression corresponding to the development stage of capitalist social relations.

Since the mid-1960s, the current stage of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 2000) has accentuated the trend towards technical-scientific improvement and the need for training and supplying qualified labor, subsumed under the “need” (of capital) to increase labor value and maintain profit rates. Until the 1970s, this academic-professional training was limited to national borders. Our working hypothesis indicates that the demands of flexible accumulation have created the need for mobility and common content in training, facilitating the movement of qualified professionals across Europe. The Bologna Process<sup>1</sup> is an expression of this historical particularity, conditioned by the peculiarity of the European Community/Union in the dynamics of capitalist social relations.

In turn, to understand how this process impacts academic-professional training in social work in Portugal, the methodological approach used in this stage was documentary research with preliminary analysis of the Study Plans and Curricular Unit Forms of the 17 social work undergraduate courses currently in operation in the country, which allows us to identify general characteristics of this training at present (2024). For this article, we limit ourselves to presenting initial data, since the research is still ongoing.

The development of the article is divided into four sections, including this first introduction. In the second section, we indicate some socio-historical aspects with significant elements of Portugal’s insertion in the particularity of capitalist social relations. In the third, we present information on the training in social work, registered in the Bologna Process. In the fourth section, at the end, we outline some considerations to continue advancing in depth this research.

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1 This process was forged in the historical movement of creation of the first European communities, from 1950 onwards, among the economic and social measures of restructuring the European continent, orchestrated at a supranational level (Meirelles, 2016, p. 107-108).

## Socio-historical aspects of Portugal's integration into the European Union: the path to joining the “Bologna Process”

The socio-historical formation of Portugal dates back to the 13th century, in the year 1297, a milestone in the configuration of Portuguese territory in Europe, with its dimensions practically unchanged to the present day (Hartmann, 2023)<sup>2</sup>.

Portugal's visibility far beyond its territorial borders was associated with this country's leading role in what was called (from the European perspective) “maritime expansion” and conquest of the “New World”, which began in the 16th century and continued in the relationship of colonial domination until the 20th century.

The control of territories, made possible by new navigation techniques and incentives for the maritime industry, was extremely functional to capitalism in its mercantile phase (Rubin, 2014), providing the conditions for the concentration of material resources (supply of raw materials, extraction of precious metals, in addition to enslaved labor) that would sustain the nascent industrial development and the formation of industrial powers such as England and France, organized under the capitalist mode of production (Marx and Engels, 2001).

However, Portugal held a position of subordination to the interests of industrial powers, especially in its historical relationship with England. And, in its relationship with Europe, it has also failed to remain in a central position. This condition has historically impacted the country, with a significant dependence on colonies to maintain itself as such and without resembling the central countries in terms of technological development and industrialization.

In turn, Portugal's relationship with the Catholic Church was a constitutive element of its socio-historical formation and permeated the structure of the monarchical regime (absolutist and constitutional) that was in force until 1910. It remained incisively in the structure of the state in the period from 1926 to 1974, present throughout the period of authoritarian domination under the Salazar regime<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, Portugal held a prominent position on the international stage (in relation to capitalist social relations in their genesis) and “experienced” different periods with distinct social representations, in its insertion in European territory (Souza-Santos, 2011).

According to Souza-Santos (2011, p. 34):

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- 2 Notes from the extension course “Modern and contemporary history of Portugal” (study strategy for this research subproject, developed from Nov. 2023 to Jul. 2024), taught by Professor Carlos Hartmann, to whom we are very grateful for his dedication and competence.
  - 3 Catholic religiosity is present in Portuguese culture and has capillarity throughout the territory, constituting a reference in this sociability. This condition was essential for the “acceptance” and submission to the Salazar regime (Hartmann, 2023).

There is a Portugal in the broad sense [in relation to the domination of the colonies – colonial zone] and a Portugal in the narrow sense. Through Portugal and Spain, the European zone created the colonial zone, but these countries were only very briefly central to Europe and Europe only fully assumed the importance of the colonial zone in the 19th century, at a time when Portugal and Spain were quite peripheral to the European zone.

The author continues, “in the case of the colonial zone, not only did Portugal live outside the center, but it also lived there much longer than Europe. The colonial zone where Portugal lived, in addition to being very large, lasted much longer” (Souza-Santos, 2011, p. 34). He highlights that at the time of “acceptance of Portugal by the central countries of the European zone, relations between the latter and the colonial zone” had changed (Souza-Santos, 2011, p. 42):

Between the end of the Second World War and the moment of acceptance, Portugal’s anachronism in the European zone was twofold: as a dictatorship [Salazar regime] in a democratic Western Europe and as a peripheral European country that [insisted] on maintaining control through violence over a colonial zone considered obsolete (Souza-Santos, 2011, p. 42).

This is how the author characterizes Portugal’s insertion into Europe and we can infer that he also places it within the scope of capitalist social relations, in a semi-peripheral condition: “the semi-peripheral nature of Portuguese development has a long historical duration. For many centuries, Portugal was simultaneously the center of a large colonial empire and the periphery of Europe” (Souza-Santos, 2011, p. 24). He highlights the simultaneous relationship of colonizer (domination of the colonies) and colonized, in the country’s peripheral relationship with England. In this sense, the revolution of April 25, 1974 (which overthrew the Salazar regime) would pave the way for “decolonization”, creating the conditions for the country’s insertion into the European Community.

The Carnation Revolution (1974 to 1976) left a democratic-participatory legacy and destroyed the repressive apparatus used by the Salazarist state. Thus, the structuring of the democratic state had social democracy and “social welfare” as its horizon, but in an unfavorable situation, given the change in the correlation of forces between capital and labor, on the international level, especially with the process of overthrow of real socialism in the USSR and the offensive of the bourgeoisie, with the neoliberal strategy (Eiras, 2024).

In short, the semi-peripheral character was based, above all, on Portugal’s role as an intermediary between the “center” of capitalism and the “periphery”, without consolidating technological-industrial development in the country. With the decolonization precipitated by the Carnation Revolution, Portugal turned towards Europe, entering the

European Community in a subordinate condition, which leads us to ask whether the condition of a semi-peripheral country still prevails today<sup>4</sup>.

In this sense, Portugal's accession to the European Economic Community in 1986 (currently the European Union-EU) meant "turning its gaze" to Europe (Souza-Santos, 2011). This accession paved the way for the country to become a signatory to the agreements within the Bologna Process.

A characteristic of this process has been the submission to the deliberations taken by international organizations, which begin to condition academic-professional training. According to Afonso (2001, p. 24), countries are faced with the "emergence of new organizations and supranational regulatory bodies (NGOs, Mercosur, World Trade Organization, European Union), whose influence joins other organizations that are no longer recent, but continue to be very influential (World Bank, OECD, IMF)".

Coelho (2018, p. 216) states that "international organizations are decisive in the new forms of configuring education policy, especially higher education, worldwide", among which the World Bank, IMF, UNESCO, and WTO stand out. These organizations finance and guide economic and political reforms in countries of the "peripheral bloc" of capitalism and guide reforms that impact the direction of education, from elementary to higher education.

In this process, in 1990 UNESCO organized the "World Conference on Education for All", held in Jomtien, Thailand, with the aim of "seeking solutions to reverse the serious problem of global education, in a context of crisis". In 1998, a meeting of the Ministers of Education of Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom took place in Paris, when the European Higher Education Area was created and the Sorbonne Declaration was signed, which set out the intention of creating what was called the "Europe of Knowledge". According to the Declaration,

The European process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development. (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998, p. 1).

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4 There are elements that bring Portugal closer to the condition of countries considered "peripheral" (we highlight two: technological-industrial development and submission to pressures from central countries in the economic-social plan, including in the management of state priorities) and this conception of semi-peripheral is, therefore, questionable.

In June 1999, the city of Bologna, Italy, welcomed 29 European education ministers. The Bologna Declaration, the document resulting from this meeting, enshrined the fundamental principles that had already been outlined in the Sorbonne Declaration. 1) Adoption of a system with easily-equivalent academic degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, to promote the employability of European citizens and the competitiveness of the European Higher Education System. 2) Adoption of a system based essentially on two main phases, the pre-graduate and post-graduate phases. Access to the second phase should require successful completion of studies in the first phase, lasting at least three years. The degree awarded after completion of the first phase should also be considered as an appropriate level of qualification for entry into the European job market. The second phase should lead to a master's and/or doctorate degree, as was already the case in many European countries. 3) Establishment of a credit system – such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) – as an appropriate way of encouraging student mobility in the freest possible way. Credits may also be obtained in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided that they are recognised by the participating universities. 4) Encouragement of mobility in stages in the useful exercise of free movement, with particular attention to students, access to study and internship opportunities and access to related services; for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and appreciation of periods spent in European research, teaching and training actions, without prejudice to their statutory rights. 5) Encouragement of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. 6) Promotion of the necessary dimensions at European level in the field of higher education, in particular with regard to curriculum development, interinstitutional cooperation, people circulation projects, and integrated programs of study, internship, and research (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

Coelho (2018) states that subsequent conferences, held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Paris (2003), ratify the proposals formulated in Bologna.

Thus, in 2009, 20 more countries were invited to join what they called the “Bologna Political Forum”, expanding participation to countries outside the European Union bloc. In 2010, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was officially launched, consolidating the Bologna Process, with the accession of 47 countries, from a strictly neoliberal perspective.

According to Boschetti (2016), the Bologna Process brought about a significant change in higher education, especially in the direction of its streamlining, competitiveness, and subjection to the demands of the global market. For the author, Europe denied its historical autonomous production of knowledge in order to surrender to the recommendations of international organizations. Based on this process, it proposed and defended a new conception of university, with a “model” of organization, structure, teaching



plans, research and evaluation from the perspective that a good university should be cheap, fast, standardized, with self-sustainable financing, commercially adapted to the demands of expansion and capital accumulation. This analysis indicates that the Bologna Process contributed to the advancement of conservatism in the field of education and is contrary to critical professional education.

## The Bologna Process and Social Work Training in Portugal

Connected to these historical processes, the emergence of the profession in Portugal dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, and its genesis is related to the authoritarian state, engendered by the role, functionality, and meaning of social assistance in the Salazar regime.

Martins (2010) analyzes the genesis of social work in Portugal, understanding the meaning attributed by fascism to the profession in the process of its institutionalization, in the years 1930 to 1950. In another article, Martins (2017, p. 41) identifies the processes by which social workers were “involved in movements of opposition and resistance to the regime” and how the profession distanced itself from the meaning initially attributed to it.

The author analyzes the participation of social workers in movements for democracy during the 1960s and 1970s, highlighting their engagement in the fight against colonial wars and in disputes for civil and political rights, especially for political prisoners, under the Salazar dictatorship that continued during the short government of Marcelo Caetano (Martins, 2017).

The changes in the positioning of the Catholic Church<sup>5</sup> will also be a field that will open up, into which social workers will converge, in the fight against fascism and for democracy.

Social workers, through their involvement in organizations associated with progressive Catholics, political actions of opposition and resistance, and especially through the collective union organization of the late 1960s and early 1970s, distanced themselves from the legitimacy attributed by fascism, affirming social work as a profession. [...] These vanguards, which in these years began a path towards constituting themselves as a professional subject, with the April Revolution of 1974, would become involved in collective actions and struggles in favor of a socialist society (Martins, 2017, p. 53-54).

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5 The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a historic landmark that made explicit the change in the institutional commitment of the Catholic Church. From then on, new theological positions were opened that enunciated the church's commitment to the people and the poor.

In the period 1979-1999, the author highlights a set of important achievements for Portuguese social work. After many mobilizations and struggles undertaken by the profession, the degree in social work was recognized (an academic degree equivalent to university level) and the social work career was created in the Portuguese Public Service (Higher Social Work Technical Career – TSSS, 1991) (Martins, 2017)<sup>6</sup>.

During the 2000s, master's and doctoral courses were created and social work was recognized as an area of knowledge within sociology (2007) and by Portuguese funding agencies (2014).

According to Martins and Tomé (2019), the Bologna Declaration had a negative impact on the training in social work, imposing setbacks on this path of expansion and some achievements for the profession in the country. For them, this declaration

built the path and the definition of which education and training were necessary for the European and international common market, under the logic of capital [...] and control of the labor market. [...] The reform of higher education with the Bologna Declaration was developed guided by a process of internationalization of the classification of education and training areas, whose objective was to establish parameters of comparability between different countries through the compilation and evaluation of educational statistics guided by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) conceived in 1977, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (Martins; Tomé, 2019, p. 390-391).

The authors report that after Portugal joined the Bologna Declaration, there was a reduction from 22 undergraduate courses in social work in 2006 to 17 courses, a number that remains in place until 2024.

They also consider its impact on professional training in social work, since the Portuguese professional project that was developing in the 1990s assumed a broader critical training, one that even contemplated the historical processes and mediations through which the profession is carried out in capitalist society. With the accession to Bologna, this training was compromised, streamlined, and directed towards the interests of the labor market subject to the political-economic interests of the European Union.

According to Martins and Tomé (2019), with the strengthening of neoliberal policies, a process of regressivity was recorded in the training and work of social workers, such as: growth in unemployment among graduates, devaluation of the profession, and precariousness of the work of social workers.

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6 It mentions more recent achievements, sought since 1997 (Martins, 2017, p. 403), such as the first bill (rejected in 2015), resubmitted in July 2019 and approved in August 2019, in which the state recognizes the Order of Social Workers (OAS).



In this direction, Rodrigues and Cardoso (2024, p. 9) – in an article on internship supervision – point out that

An important part of the training work consists of ensuring the transmission and appropriation of a perspective that reflects questioningly on society (in its various expressions) and on the professional practice of social work itself. The education of social workers, by aiming to combine teaching how to act professionally and, at the same time, preparing and encouraging critical reflection, becomes a demanding activity for students as well.

In Portugal, undergraduate courses can be taken at universities (public or private) and polytechnic institutes. The degree of bachelor is awarded to students who pass all the subjects (course units) proposed in the study plan for each course.

Table 1 shows how social work degrees are currently organized in the country.

**Table 1.** Characterization of social work degrees in Portugal (2024)

No.	Educational institutions	Nature	Type of teaching	Course duration	Regime – Daytime or after-work
1	Lusíada University	Private	University	3 years	Daytime
2	ISCTE	Public	University	3 years	After-Work
3	ISCSP	Public	University	3.5 years	Daytime and After-Work
4	Lusophone Lisbon	Private	University	3 years	Daytime
5	Lusophone Porto	Private	University	3 years	Daytime
6	UCP Lisbon	Private/Confessional	University	3 years	Daytime
7	UCP Braga	Private/Confessional	University	3.5 years	Daytime
8	ISMT	Private	University	3.5 years	Daytime and After-Work
9	UTAD	Public	University	3.5 years	Daytime
10	ISSSP	Private	University	3.5 years	Daytime
11	University of Coimbra	Public	University	3.5 years	Daytime
12	University of Azores	Public	University	3.5 years	Daytime
13	IP Beja	Private	Polytechnic Institute	3 years	Daytime
14	IP Viseu/Lamego	Public	Polytechnic Institute	3 years	Daytime and After-Work
15	IP Leiria	Private	Polytechnic Institute	3 years	Daytime and After-Work
16	IP Castelo Branco	Public	Polytechnic Institute	3 years	Daytime
17	IP Portalegre	Public	Polytechnic Institute	3 years	After-Work

Source: The authors (data collection carried out in 2024)

Based on the analysis of the Study Plans (the curriculum for each course) of the social work undergraduate courses, after adaptation to the Bologna Process and corroborating previous research by Duarte (2009), we found that the debate regarding adaptation to the Bologna Process focused on the duration of the courses, as well as on the construc-

tion of a professional profile that would meet the new demands of the social worker job market, given the moment of crisis in Europe and the country.

The organization of the curricula of social work courses was changed and training began to be organized into study cycles: 1st Cycle (undergraduate degree), 2nd Cycle (master's degree) and 3rd Cycle (doctorate), "in a concept of continuity and devaluing training" (Martins; Santos, 2016, p. 327). The Bologna guidelines were for the 1st and 2nd Cycle courses to last five years, which in practice resulted in the transformation of the initial training, of the recently recognized undergraduate degree (1989) into an undergraduate and a master's degrees. The five years, which were previously required for the undergraduate degree, now also include the master's degree. The undergraduate degree was reduced to three or three and a half years, as shown in table 1. In this configuration,

[...] several social work organizations expressed their views on [this] restructuring of the courses. Taking this policy into account, it was found that the debate focused on the duration of the training, its relationship with the training profile achieved and its suitability to the job market. In this context, the opinion was uniform that in order to maintain the qualification and status gained by social work, a four-year duration (8 semesters - 240 ECTS) would be necessary, thus maintaining the profile required of social workers and the skills necessary to work in various areas of the job market. (Duarte, 2009, p. 143-144).

Considering Duarte's argument, the presence of a different position from that expressed by the Bologna Process is clear. However, current data express the adaptation of social work training to the Bologna guidelines.

Table I shows that, currently, 53% of courses are offered in private and/or religious institutions and 47% in public institutions<sup>7</sup>. Regarding the period in which these courses are offered, 65% are daytime, 12% are after-work, and 23% in both. The minimum requirement of three years for the 1st Cycle, contained in the Bologna Declaration, is assumed in Portugal as a maximum duration for most courses (60%); 40% of courses have seven semesters, representing a duration of three and a half years. These courses, which are longer, are offered entirely in universities; no course offered in polytechnic institutes has more than six semesters. It is also important to mention that, post-Bologna, no social work course in Portugal has a workload of 240 ECT.

Regarding the education system, 70% of courses are offered at universities and higher education institutes and 30% at polytechnic institutes. Portugal has particularities

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<sup>7</sup> To develop this research, we must better understand the relationship between private institutions and market interests, which are present today in the area of Education in Europe. What is clear is the absence of free public higher education in Portugal today.

in relation to higher education, as its binary system integrates universities and polytechnic institutes. According to the Directorate General of Higher Education - DGES,

University education is guided by a perspective of promoting research and knowledge creation and aims to ensure solid scientific and cultural preparation and provide technical training that qualifies students for the exercise of professional and cultural activities and fosters the development of capacities for concession, innovation, and critical analysis. Polytechnic education is guided by a perspective of applied research and development, aimed at understanding and solving specific problems and aims to provide solid cultural and technical training at a higher level, develop the capacity for innovation and critical analysis, and provide scientific knowledge of a theoretical and practical nature and its applications with a view to the exercise of professional activities. (DGES, 2008)

It is well known that the Bologna Process guidelines aim to establish common standards for courses in the European space, aimed at the job market and with a view to requiring a new worker profile (Martins; Carrara; Tomé, 2015) whose employability is associated with the level of education that prioritizes the acquisition of skills and abilities in a short time.

Likewise, under the guidance of the Bologna Process, the Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES)<sup>8</sup> was created in Portugal in 2007, through Decree-Law No. 369/2007 – “with regular six-yearly assessment cycles of study cycles in operation and prior accreditation of proposals for the creation of new courses” (Branco, 2024, p. 317), offering general criteria for the training of social workers in Portugal.

However, in this process, there was no collective formulation and proposition in social work of common requirements for academic-professional training. According to Duarte (2009, p.143),

The entire process of growth, development, and quality of training in social work was initiated by private university education and later by public education. However, alongside this process of affirmation, some risks of its vulnerability can also be observed in the current context, namely the absence of elementary forms of regulation of training, since this entire trajectory, including adaptation to the Bologna Process, was carried out without regulation.

In this sense, in an attempt to establish minimum parameters for training in social work, Portugal has sought to reference itself based on international standards, pro-

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8 A3ES - Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education has a nature “under private law, endowed with legal personality and is recognized as being of public utility, constituted for an indefinite period” (Coelho, 2018).

posed by international agencies, such as the document *Global Standards for Education and Training in Social Work*, written by the International Federation of Social Workers (FIAS) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work, (AIETS), adopted in 2004 and updated in 2019. For Rodrigues and Cardoso (2024, p. 306), this is

a document approved with broad consensus among countries and professional organizations and which proposes the following central objectives: ensuring the quality of training, the participation of all those involved in the training process, cooperation between the various educational entities, and the quality of training resources. As it is a global document, it simultaneously states that it is attentive to the universality of principles, values, and cultures, but also to the diversity that characterizes the profession.

The guidelines contained in the document are configured as “curricular reflections-recommendations” and are organized around two interdependent, dynamic, and concomitant axes: social work in context and social work in practice. “Social work in context refers to the broad knowledge that is required for a critical understanding of the socio-legal, cultural, and historical forces that have shaped social work” (FIAS and AIESS, 2019, n. pag.). The second axis, “social work in practice refers to a broad set of skills and knowledge necessary to design and implement effective, ethical, and competent interventions” (FIAS and AIESS, 2019, n. pag.). All these skills, in principle, are limited by the period of six to seven semesters for their “construction”, as highlighted previously.

Finally, in terms of social work’s collective organization to position itself in the face of these processes, it is important to highlight that the Order of Social Workers – created by Law 121/2019 –, still in the process of being implemented by the Order’s Installation Committee (Cioas), is a commission established by order of the Ministry of Labor, Solidarity, and Social Security (supervisory entity), in operation from 2020 to the present (October 2024). The Ministry provided for the attributions of this commission, among others, to guide the issue of training “referred to in the regulatory documents, both by defining who can be a member, and also by providing instruments for measuring and interfering with the training provided and with regard to unfounded professional practices that are potentially harmful to the common interest” (Rodrigues; Cardoso, 2024, p. 6).

Thus, it is in question who will build references for professional training in social work and the autonomy of the profession’s proposition within this context of the Bologna Process.

## Final considerations

The higher education model proposed by Bologna and the construction of the European Higher Education Area express in an exemplary way the new face of capitalist

social relations, in which the peculiarities of each country and its autonomy, within the scope of education policy, are restricted by submission to the interests of the “central” countries and the purposes of capital valorization, including in view of the profitability of the education sector as a commodity.

Thus, the streamlining of training with the aim of making it cheaper, as well as linking it directly to the job market, in addition to the mobility of the workforce, creating a reserve that guarantees the maintenance of low wages, are very explicit indicators of the interests that predominate since Bologna, and it is up to us to understand the mediations that connect professional training in social work to this process.

When considering the peculiarities of training in the area of social work, the bibliography referenced above indicates limitations regarding the prospects of consolidating critical academic-professional training. In turn, adherence to Bologna has led to training in social work in Portugal being based on the guidelines of international entities, such as FIAS and AIESS.

In view of the preliminary data analyzed, we ask: will such an inclination replace a movement of the profession itself to consolidate its identity? Will the implementation of the Order of Social Workers be able to establish criteria and guidelines that contribute to configuring a critical training in dialogue, but not restricted to the acquisition of skills and abilities for the market? How is professionalization in the area of social work processed (and what are the impacts on it) in this open post-Bologna situation? In the continuation of the research, we will delve deeper into these questions.

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