

# SDGs and Social Work Education – How students' placements in the Global South can contribute to achieving the SDGs

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## Introduction

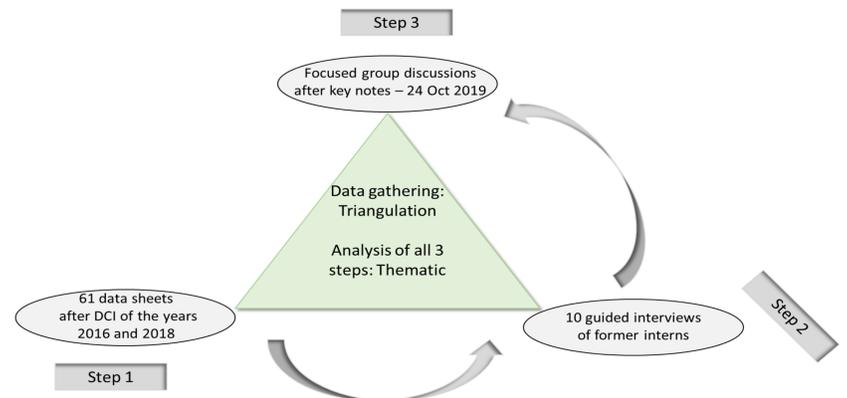
The universal relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their focus on global interconnectedness and interdependencies provides a new context for examining the relevance of international social work and related practice including social work internships in the Global South. For this reason, we posed the following research question: "What is the role of (International) Social Work within the framework of the Development Cooperation Internship (DCI) programme in achieving the SDGs?" Our research gives an overview of the interlinkages of social work to the SDGs. We analysed thematic data sheets from placements in the Global South and individual and group interviews regarding the interconnectness of social work, Development Cooperation Internships and the SDGs. Our conclusions include recommendations.

## Social Work and SDGs

"Social work ... promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. ..." (Global Definition of Social Work, IFSW 2014)  
Social Work contributes to all three dimensions of sustainable development as can be seen from the Global Agenda for Social Work which was adopted in 2012 and includes the following 4 themes (Global Agenda 2012:2)

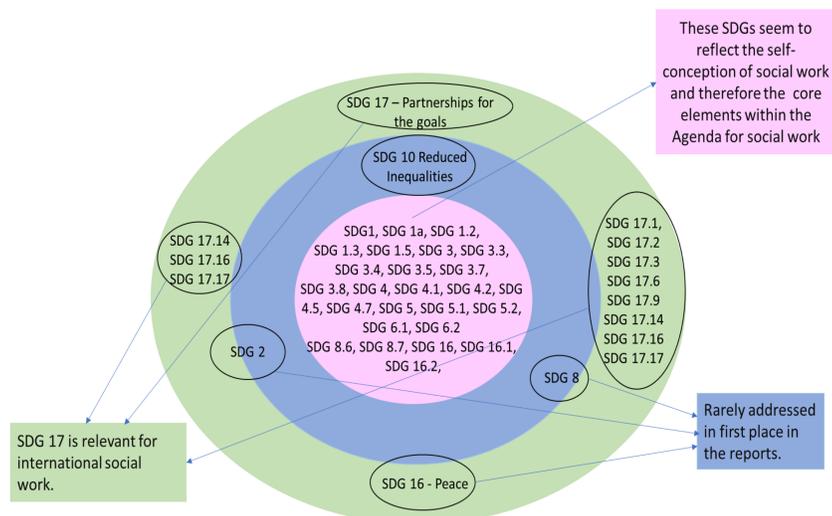
- Promoting Social and economic equalities
- Promoting the dignity and worth of peoples
- Promoting community and environmental sustainability
- Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships.

## Methods and Data Gathering



## Results

### Analysis Data Sheets 2016 and 2018 – SDGs directly and indirectly linked to students' placements



### Benefits of Placement Perceived by Students

For Students	For Host Country
<b>Insight into different lifestyles and different culture. Opportunity to develop intercultural competences</b>	Intercultural exchange. Many of the people students come into contact with will never get the chance to travel or visit other cultures
<b>Insight into different contexts of social work and social systems.</b>	Exchange of different methods and ideas about social work.
<b>Realisation of how privileged life in Austria is. Seeing unbelievable inequalities with own eyes.</b>	Organisation gets financial support for taking interns and additional publicity
<b>Self and personality development</b>	Opportunity to discuss different world views.
<b>Understanding global responsibilities and the impacts of Austrian/EU lifestyle on poorer countries.</b>	Seeing examples of different, alternative ways of life and relationships – awareness that other places in the world are different.
<b>Skills (including language skills) and experience that will help in future career</b>	Reduced stress for overworked staff
<b>Importance of seeing social work in the context of the culture, the history and country specific problems and given opportunities</b>	Recognition from outside of the value of the work being done by the organisation.
<b>Exchange of views and knowledge was seen as being mutually beneficial.</b>	

SDG	Negative effects perceived by students
<b>3 (Health)</b>	• One student suffered from health problems for a year after her DCI
<b>8 (Decent Work)</b>	• One intern felt local staff could have been paid to do her work.
<b>10 (Reduced Inequalities)</b>	• There is no opportunity for a real exchange – the DCI is a one-way programme. • Stereotypes e.g. 'Europeans' know more and can tell locals what to do was perhaps perpetuated in some situations e.g. when students were asked to give workshops although not experts in the living environment. • Students felt uncomfortable when taken along to official appointments because having a 'European' colleague meant that waiting times were reduced, staff were taken more seriously and outcomes were likely to be more positive. • One student felt it necessary to lie when asked about the price of her flight because she realised that the person asking and their family could have lived for many months with the money she paid for her ticket.
<b>13 (Climate Action)</b>	• Long-Haul flights mean significant negative environmental impact. Students were generally aware of and had considered this aspect but concluded that the benefits compensated for the impact.



## Recommendations

### Specific Recommendations for the DCI Programme

- Dedicate more time in the DCI preparation seminar to the interdependencies between the SDGs and their direct relevance to the programme. Here it would be important to discuss the holistic and systemic approach of Agenda 2030. Increase the emphasis on reflection in the seminar. In particular the chances and challenges of cooperation of SDG 17 should be addressed.
- Focus on the effect the individual student's DCI had on the SDGs in the reflection seminar after the internship
- Work closely with civil society and stakeholders in the field of DCI and where there are weaknesses empower individuals and the local community to implement the SDGs.
- Future DCI participants should reflect on how they justify the environmental impact of the programme and be given a tool to calculate their carbon footprint and be encouraged to consider how they could compensate.

### Other Recommendations

- Events introducing and discussing Agenda 2030 could be held in different departments in tertiary education institutions around Austria.
- Theories and history of sustainable development should be part of social work education.
- Carry out more scientific work about sustainable development in social work education (term papers, Bachelor and Master thesis)