Overcoming Bureaucratization. Rethinking the Social Work Model in Dialogue with Roma
Ane López de Aguileta¹, & Ariadna Munté-Pascual¹

1) Social Work Training and Research Section, University of Barcelona, Spain

Abstract
Social Work was born to find and implement actions that succeed at alleviating or overcoming human suffering. Far from this objective, the scientific literature has highlighted that, during the pandemic, the serious situation of disadvantaged communities, including much of the Roma community, has underscored the historical evolution of the discipline towards bureaucratization. However, more research is needed to identify and analyze the actions through which many Social Work professionals have had the opportunity to rethink the current hegemonic model of social intervention. This study analyzes the main characteristics of some such actions. This research has been carried out following the communicative methodology through 40 semi-structured interviews to Social Work professionals in social services, educational centers and civic organizations. Results show that a constant dialogue with Roma communities, overcoming bureaucratization by changing intervention to co-create the best solutions, and a professional and human commitment at the service of people are common characteristics of those actions. These findings illustrate elements with which some Social Workers have been able to rethink the social intervention model they previously followed, allowing them to transform such model and regain the origins of the discipline towards finding the best solutions to improve the situations and lives of many Roma people.

Keywords
Social work, pandemic, Roma people, social intervention

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Corresponding author(s): Ariadna Munté-Pascual
Contact address: amunte@ub.edu
Superando la Burocratización. Repensar el Modelo de Trabajo Social en Diálogo con Personas Gitanas

Ane López de Aguileta¹, y Arianda Munté-Pascual¹

¹) Unidad de Formación e Investigación. Escuela de Trabajo Social, Universidad de Barcelona, España

Resumen
El Trabajo Social nació para encontrar e implementar acciones que logren aliviar o superar el sufrimiento humano. Lejos de este objetivo, la literatura científica ha destacado que, durante la pandemia, la grave situación de las comunidades desfavorecidas, entre las que se encuentra gran parte de la comunidad gitana, ha puesto de manifiesto la evolución histórica de la disciplina hacia la burocratización. Sin embargo, son necesarias más investigaciones para identificar y analizar las acciones a través de las cuales un gran número de profesionales del Trabajo Social han tenido la oportunidad de replantearse el actual modelo hegemónico de intervención social. Este estudio analiza las principales características de algunas de estas acciones. Esta investigación se ha realizado siguiendo la metodología comunicativa a través de 40 entrevistas semi-estructuradas a profesionales del Trabajo Social en servicios sociales, centros educativos y organizaciones cívicas. Los resultados muestran que el diálogo constante con las comunidades gitanas, la superación de la burocratización cambiando la intervención para co-crear las mejores soluciones, y el compromiso profesional y humano al servicio de las personas son características comunes de dichas actuaciones. Estos hallazgos ilustran elementos con los que profesionales del Trabajo Social han podido repensar el modelo de intervención social que seguían anteriormente, permitiéndoles transformar dicho modelo y recuperar los orígenes de la disciplina hacia la búsqueda de las mejores soluciones para mejorar las situaciones y las vidas de muchas personas gitanas.

Palabras clave
Trabajo Social, pandemia, pueblo gitano, intervención social

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Correspondencia Autores(s): Ariadna Munté-Pascual
Dirección de contacto: amunte@ub.edu
Social sciences are the daughters of democracy, and they were born to allow societies to better understand and know themselves (Habermas & Rawls, 1998; Parsons, 1977). Within social sciences, Social Work was specifically born to identify and implement the actions that help alleviate and overcome human suffering. Since its origins in the context of the industrial revolution, the discipline was created in order to improve the lives of those most in need, and with a focus on co-creating the solutions to their main problems with the same end-users. For instance, what is considered to be the precursor of group Social Work, a movement focused on collective action arose in England: the mentioned Settlement Houses movement. In 1884, Samuel and Henrietta Barnett founded Toynbee Hall, a community center that offered a variety of services to neighborhood families. According to the Barnett’s, it was essential to have a close understanding of the needs of the poor in order to help them improve their social situation. Later, inspired by this movement, Jane Addams founded the Hull House in Chicago together with Ellen Gates Starr (Addams, 1981).

In today’s terms, Social Work has been oriented since it was born towards social impact (Flecha et al., 2018), which refers to the social improvements derived from research in relation to democratically selected goals, as are Sustainable Development Goals, among others. This can be illustrated in Jane Addams’s words, considered one of the founders of Social Work:

> Perhaps even in those first days we made a beginning toward that object which was afterwards stated in our charter: “To provide a center for a higher civic and social life; to institute and maintain educational and philanthropic enterprises, and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago.” (Addams, 1981, p. 112)

The very definition of Social Work established by the Global Social Work approved by the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) General Meeting and the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) (2014) situates the discipline in this orientation, defining its goal as the following:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that 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. (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 2014)

In order to achieve social impact, it is essential to conduct research in co-creation with diverse citizens. Indeed, due to the scientific, political and social impacts of the communicative methodology, grounded on this notion of co-creation, in improving citizens’ lives, the European Commission now requires that all research projects funded by it be conducted in co-creation and be directed towards social impact (European Commission, 2022). Unlike other disciplines within social sciences, Social Work was born with the notion of co-creation as one of its core grounds, in which researchers such as Jane Addams underscored the relevance of engaging in dialogues with diverse individuals and communities, regardless of their status:
Founded upon some such compunction, the sense that the passage of the child labor law would in many cases work hardship, was never absent from my mind during the earliest years of its operation. I addressed as many mothers’ meetings and clubs among working women as I could, in order to make clear the object of the law and the ultimate benefit to themselves as well as to their children. I am happy to remember that I never met with lack of understanding among the hard-working widows, in whose behalf many prosperous people were so eloquent. (Addams, 1981, p. 205)

Also, in other pioneers of Social Work, such as the Charity Organization Society (COS), eight fundamental principles for individualized social care were defined (Ander-Egg, 1994; Richmond, 2017). These steps were based on the importance of thoroughly examining each case to establish a diagnosis and create a long-term work plan in which individuals, families and the community were actively involved.

These two elements, social impact and co-creation, are therefore at the foundations of the best science, and they are intrinsic core values of Social Work. Nevertheless, in the last decades, social sciences have suffered a bureaucratization process (Weber, 2009) that has moved them away from the objectives with which it was born, including Social Work (Jacobsson & Meeuwisse, 2020; Liodden, 2021; Pascoe et al., 2022). Instead, this historical evolution has led the discipline to be dominated by a lack of citizens’ voices in the scientific endeavor. The lack of co-creation with citizens, especially with the most vulnerable ones, has led some researchers to make basic theoretical and scientific mistakes that have contributed to increasing, spreading and legitimizing stereotypes towards them.

A community that has been gravely harmed by the spread of such stereotypes and hoaxes is the Roma community (Clavería & Alonso, 2008; Herrero-Arias et al., 2023). The sexist, racist, and classist hoaxes about the Roma community include stating that Roma men are more sexist and the women are more submissive to them than are non-Roma ones (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2021; Gay-Y-Blasco, 1997), that they do not appreciate the value of education (Žemaitėlytė-Ivanavičė, 2020), or that they do not want to change their situation (Hadziavdic & Hoffmann, 2017), among others. Several Roma and non-Roma researchers have denounced and fought against those stereotypes, claiming for the need for research to be based on co-creation in order to avoid such mistakes. Among them, Hancock (1987), a Roma researcher, highlighted the lack of scientific and ethical rigor of such researchers:

Those who know my work know that I have thoroughly fought against the attitude of the non-Roma researchers that study our people and that want to close us up in a “time capsule” for us to be “real Roma,” illiterate, nomads, and primitive, like Himmler wanted. These persons think that we are unable to unite, to have a political conscience, and to choose our leaders. (p. 14)

These mistakes spread and validate stereotypes of Roma people that have serious consequences for much of the Roma population in different fields, including health, education or Social Work. In health, for instance, it has been reported that many Roma people face barriers to access and navigate the healthcare system (Aiello et al., 2018). These barriers include disrespectful attitudes and racist assumptions from some healthcare professionals, or a lack of flexibility to accommodate extended Roma family members in hospitals, among others (Aiello et al., 2018). In education, extensive research has shown the exclusion that many Roma
students face due to the hoax that they are not interested in education (García et al., 2017; Velicu et al., 2022), leading to practices such as segregation, low expectations from some teachers, or biased communication with Roma families. Even within Social Work, these stereotypes have generated many actions based on controlling them rather than focusing on how they can be motors of their social transformation (Vrăbiescu & Kalir, 2018).

It has been evinced that the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the serious situation of many vulnerable sectors, such as many Roma people. For instance, the difficulties that many Roma people previously faced to access and participate in high quality health and education were increased (Magano & Mendes, 2021; Nevická & Mesarčík, 2022; Velicu et al., 2022; Voda et al., 2021). This situation has highlighted Social Work’s historical evolution towards bureaucratization, resulting in a hegemonic model of social intervention far away from the objectives with which the discipline was born, from being at the service of those most in need. Fortunately, the current scientific revolution that is increasingly requiring research to be grounded on co-creation and oriented to social impact has enabled the identification and creation of Successful Actions that are contributing to improving many Roma people’s lives (Garcia Yeste et al., 2018). In education, for instance, researchers and Roma people have co-created Successful Educational Actions (SEA) that have shown to reverse dropout rates, increase engagement and motivation, promote social inclusion, and improve academic achievements of Roma students in very different contexts (Garcia Yeste et al., 2018).

Given that Social Work was born on the grounds of notions of co-creation and social impact, the discipline has great potential to be at the forefront of this scientific revolution. However, there is a need to study more in-depth the actions that do provide many Social Work professionals the opportunity to rethink the current hegemonic model of social intervention. To contribute to this gap, this study analyzes the main characteristics of some actions identified in this direction.

**Methodology**

This study is framed within the ROM21 project, which is aimed at identifying the responses Roma women have given to the increased difficulties the pandemic has posed on their communities. Given previous evidence on many Roma women’s role as transformation actors in improving their contexts (Aiello Cabrera et al., 2022), the project is aimed at analyzing these women’s role in relation to three main sectors: education, social services and civic organizations.

This research follows the communicative methodology, a pioneer across worldwide research in implementing the criteria of co-creation and social impact (Gómez et al., 2011). It is based on an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants, in which the former contribute existing scientific knowledge on the issue being studied and the latter contribute knowledge from their own experiences and reflections on that issue. This avoids the negative consequences of research that does not take into account vulnerable communities’ voices on how to improve vulnerability situations and, hence, perpetrate them and the negative stereotypes of such communities. In this way, the communicative methodology that engages
Roma participants in this egalitarian dialogue leads to a co-creation of new knowledge and evidence that contribute to improving their lives.

There is an extensive body of literature on the scientific, political and social impact of the communicative methodology (Soler-Gallart & Flecha, 2022). One such political impact can be found in the Workaló research project (DG Research. European Commission., 2001-2004), which engaged, from the very design of the project throughout its lifespan and beyond, diverse Roman, non-Roma, academic and non-academic people in a constant egalitarian dialogue. The project’s main conclusion was unanimously approved by the European Parliament by recognizing in 2005 the Roma people as a European minority. Other Parliaments of Member States soon made the same recognition.

The communicative methodology is therefore the optimal methodology not only to improve diverse citizens’ - especially the most vulnerable ones - lives, but also to improve science itself, as it avoids and overcomes erroneous interpretations of reality (Roca et al., 2022). It is also the optimal research in Social Work, as it is grounded on the disciplines main principles: always being oriented towards the achievement of human rights, justice, and social cohesion (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014).

Participants

The study reported here is based on participant professionals from the field of Social Work, as well as some education professionals who closely worked with social workers. All of them belonged to social services, educational sector or civic organizations and were involved with Roma people in their daily work. In sum, 40 professionals participated in this study.

Data Collection

In order to analyze the characteristics of actions that provide many Social Work professionals the opportunity to rethink the current hegemonic model of social attention, researchers conducted 40 individual semi-structured interviews with professionals of social services, civil organizations, and education. Data were collected in three different Spanish regions: Aragon, the Basque Country, and Catalonia. In the interviews, researchers and participants engaged in a dialogue on participants’ own knowledge and experience on the actions they co-created with Roma people to overcome the barriers posed to the community during the pandemic.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and all were audio-recorded. Some of them were conducted in Catalan, and others in Spanish.

Data Analysis

All data were transcribed and read through several times. Following the communicative methodology, two main categories were first established in light of the abovementioned SDG: exclusionary elements, which included data regarding the barriers that hindered many Roma people’s access to social practices, goods or services in equality; and transformative elements,
which included data about the actions that have facilitated many Roma people’s equal access to social practices, goods and services. This analysis was first conducted individually by four researchers of the ROM21 project. Then, each shared their analysis with each other and engaged in a dialogue to agree on the shared categorization of all data. Once the data from the exclusionary and transformative elements were agreed upon by researchers, they presented the analysis to ROM21’s advisory committee, which was formed by diverse Roma and non-Roma people, including representatives of Roma associations, social workers, public workers, or experts on issues related to the project.

For the purposes of the specific study presented in this article, researchers focused on the data categorized within the transformative dimension. All data within this category were read several times again to find main themes that responded to this paper’s objective: to analyze the main characteristics of some actions through which many Social Work professionals have the opportunity to rethink the current hegemonic model of social attention. Once several characteristics were identified, researchers contrasted them with the literature in the Web of Science database to know whether they were supported by scientific evidence or not. Finally, three main characteristics were found: professionals constantly engaged in dialogue with Roma people in order to continue improving the services; they implemented changes in their intervention services to co-create the best solutions; and they kept a human and professional commitment at the service of those most in need at all times.

Ethical Considerations

This study has been conducted following international scientific ethical guidelines, specifically the UNESCO Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration of Helsinki, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Following these guidelines, all participants read an information sheet with details about the project’s objectives and methodology, as well as how data would be used, and potential risks and benefits of participating. The form also specified that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any point. They had the opportunity to ask questions about the procedures. Once they agreed to participate, they signed an informed written consent form.

The study received the approval of the Ethical Committee of the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA), with reference number 20230212.

Results

Constant Dialogue with Roma for Improving the Services: Roma Women’s Role

In the interviews, several participants highlighted the shortcomings of the measures taken in several services to attend to Roma people during the pandemic. The presence of the bureaucratization process already present in Social Work was made more evident during the pandemic in the studied contexts. They stated that it was not a new phenomenon, but that its consequences during the pandemic were especially devastating. This bureaucratization process
implied the focus on the professionals rather than on the transformation and well-being of service users. As ESOC1 states, social worker in a hospital setting, such shortcomings were the result of implementing intervention services without reflecting on what those who would receive it needed:

I believe that the measures that have been adopted did not come from a reflection of thinking about the other and what needs they have, but rather they were measures designed to meet the needs of a hospital. (...) We have not attended the families well, we have attended the patients very well but we have detached the patient from his environment and his closest environment, which is the family, expelling the families from the healthcare centers. (ESOC1)

As ESOC1 states, Roma patients and their families were not the priority when planning and implementing the measures but, rather, it was the very services’ needs that were taken into account.

Nonetheless, many participants reported actions that have taken Roma people’s needs into account as a priority, contributing to helping them go through a very difficult situation. The research has identified many actions that have underscored the need to engage in a constant dialogue with Roma communities, allowing them to come up with solutions that directly responded to their needs and requests:

At all times we have been in direct contact with Roma civil society itself, and all actions have come from the community itself. For example, the trainings we carried out had an extra reference person and a virtual campus with live concessions to guarantee access for all people. This request came from the Roma people themselves. (ESOCDC1)

As ESOCDC1 explains, the actions they implemented came directly from the Roma community, which was possible through the dialogue in which they were constantly engaged.

Such dialogues allowed an increased awareness on how many Roma people viewed or experienced social services, facilitating an approach oriented to social transformation similar to the actions of Social Work’s pioneers. In a similar vein, ECEDC3, the directo of a school that is part of the social action committee of the center, stated that some Roma people often mistrust social services, emphasizing the importance of dialogue to address it and focus on helping them and finding solutions:

Many times we have group meetings, either with social services, the school, whoever, families. And sometimes, in many cases, frequently, it seems the families have some fear towards social services, because, well, they think they will take their children, instead of seeing them as help, that’s how they view it in many cases. So the strategy is to [have] a more welcoming space. (ECEDC3)

Aware of how some Roma families view social services as the opposite of helping them, ECEDC3 mentions they approach such mistrust by creating spaces where the families can feel welcome and heard.

It must be stated that, when asked with whom they had most contact, most of the participant professionals stated that it was with the Roma women. Therefore, an identified characteristic was including the Roma women’s voice in an egalitarian dialogue. This involved taking into
account the greater discrimination these women suffer and strategies to overcome it, being that they were identified as pillars of the transformation of their communities. Most importantly, engaging in dialogues with Roma women not only helped Social Work professionals better understand their needs and concerns in such a critical time, but they resulted in transformative actions that helped them overcome many barriers they were facing. As EOCGC3_1, social worker from a Roma women association, explains, Social Work professionals, educators, politicians, Roma women who were a reference for many Roma people, and Roma families were in constant dialogues that sought to find solutions, as well as showed many Roma women’s role in such transformations:

During the lockdown, especially during the time we were at home, we were in contact with women who were a reference from different places: Girona, Tarragona, Barcelona, gathering a bit of the situation they were in and how we could help or provide support. And well, all this information, we were also in contact with the Integral Plan [Plan of the Catalonian Government for the improvement of the situation of Roma] (....), with the intergroup of the Parliament of Catalonia, and we went through what the women demanded. (EOCGC3_1)

In all, as EOCGC3_1 states, despite the chaos of those first weeks of the pandemic, the dialogues with such diverse people, especially Roma women, resulted in solutions and actions that provided them with opportunities to continue pursuing their goals, rather than giving up on them. As stated by many professionals, the dialogues with Roma users were even improving their own practice and the impact of the actions taken by them. As explained by ESOCPA1:

At the point of need and everything, you had to complement a lot, so they were precisely the ones who complemented us where we did not reach, there was the informal network to support us and to enter and provide cover as much as we could. (ESOCPA1)

*Overcoming Bureaucratization: Changes in Intervention to Co-create the Best Solutions*

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that many professionals of Social Work saw a need to change the way in which they attended those most in need to find the best solutions according to their needs and concerns. ESOC1 claimed the need to transform their services to best serve the persons and communities that received them:

We have to lose this concept that the person has to adapt to the hospital, I mean, the person does not have to adapt to the institution, it is the institution that has to adapt [to the person]. (ESOC1)

In this quote, ESOC1 briefly mentions the bureaucratization that institutions, such as hospitals in this case, went through by claiming that it is not the communities that have to adapt to the institutions, but rather, the institutions have to change their approach and adapt to the communities. This was found in many other examples where other social workers were self-conscious of the need of maintaining the ethos of Social Work, instead of what professionals of the service thought were interesting without taking into account users’ voices. She reflects on a rethinking process of what the service is they have made motivated by this situation:
In the end it is to assist the people in the neighborhood with the needs that they have, not us. Not what we diagnose (...) No, it's not what motivates me and it's cool and I'm going to make a group, it's whatever they want, we can ask them. And we are in this line of trying to change the model and we will start to make some dialogues with the community that just happens so that the neighbors come and tell us and from here we can see what we can do, right? (ESOCPC1)

In a more implicit way, ESOCPC6_2 also referenced the bureaucratization of many services, and found instead that other institutions, such as religious ones, were more effective in adapting the needs that were exacerbated at that time:

The response was more on the religious issue, the parish priest (...) was more agile, he did not ask whether the collecting time [of the food] was here or there, look, [he would say] “I will take my car and bring dinner”, than was the City Hall. (ESOCPC6_2)

As ESOCPC6_2 explains, whereas he perceived a lack of adequate response from the City Hall, he gives the example of a parish priest who did not limit his actions to the bureaucratization of schedules for when food had to be served. ESOCPC4_1 provides another example of how they addressed this need to change their attention to best serve the Roma community during the pandemic:

Since the families couldn't go to the office, because all the offices were shut down, well, we went to the streets, we made many visits to the irregular settlements, and we went every week, they were very thankful for that (ESOCPC4_1)

As ESOCPC4_1 explains, during the lockdowns Roma families could not go to the Social Worker’s offices, as they were shut down. However, rather than limiting their services to the situation, they re-thought how they could continue attending the families that needed them, and decided that if the families could not go to them, they would go to the families. This approach was greatly appreciated by the Roma families themselves, as she states.

Professional and Human Commitment at the Service of Those most in Need: Recovering the Roots of Social Work

Elements that fully align with the origins of Social Work have been found. These are related to a professional and human commitment of many professionals who acknowledged they were in a privileged situation and tirelessly committed to improving the situation of those in need. In fact, in the first weeks of the pandemic in Spain, there was a great collapse in social services and many Roma families participating in this study even lacked food, water or energy supplies. As Social Worker ESOCPC6_2 explains, she worked intensely to try to provide as much as possible for the Roma families she worked with: “Eight o'clock in the morning, nine o'clock in the evening. Everyone was aware that there was no timetable, until the last one was done we did not come back” (ESOCPC6_2).

This tireless work was also satisfying for some social workers who participated in this study that worked aligned with the pioneers of Social Work.
We worked with family and children in a different way, but tirelessly. There is an agreement in the confinement not to rest, it is not tiring and that is also a hard but difficult time and at the same time beautiful because I was in the house, that is, it was complicated, but it surprised me. (EOCGC5_2)

Agility and working in an interdisciplinary way, as the pioneers in Social Work did, was seen as a key factor for providing a good service and solving the suffering of the Roma families they attended. EOCGC3_2 exposes how a network of many diverse people working rapidly was a component that helped them overcome the main obstacles that Roma families encountered. The egalitarian dialogue among Roma users and very diverse professionals is highlighted:

And we, as a team I think we went very fast, we are fortunate to have a very wide network because we had very diverse views and that has been essential. If we had done it only as a team, those of us who are day to day, we would have missed a lot. We are an assembly entity and they are very diverse, they are in the field of: education, administration, health... (EOCGC3_2)

As EOCAGAH explains, the human component was present throughout all their actions to co-create the best solutions for Roma families. He highlights the human component as distinguishing their actions from those of other workers who have been carried away by bureaucratization:

For us, the human component is very important. The window officers [are like] “let people come to me and I attend them, either by appointment or by any other means, and any problem you may have, put it in writing and I will deal with it”. But here at the Foundation we don’t work like that. we don't work like that when a woman who has been kicked out of her house for squatting and has two children comes crying to the Foundation, and you tell her to come tomorrow, that I cannot attend her? At least I can't do that. (EOCAGAH)

As he explains, his foundation’s professional and human commitment to work for the communities that were in most need at that time prevailed in their actions. He clarifies that she could never act in an inhumane way, letting people down due to bureaucratic reasons, and the way they acted was always oriented towards helping them in the way they needed it most.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study reveal that the main characteristics of some of the actions identified in the ROM21 study through which many Social Work professionals have had the opportunity to rethink the current hegemonic model of social intervention are aligned with the disciplines core values: co-creation and social impact.

The origins of Social Work are considered to be at the end of the 18th century in England. Due to the industrialization process that first began in this territory, social consequences such as child exploitation, unhealthy conditions in factories and housing, and deprivation needed a
response. This is where Social Work was born and was, since its beginnings, focused on finding solutions to human suffering. Social Work’s pioneers such as Jane Addams or Mary Richmond both understood research as a basis for improving social conditions with its application (Addams, 1981; Richmond, 1922, 2017).

However, from this origin and even taking into account the very definition of Social Work, a bureaucratization process present in many social sciences has also affected it. This phenomenon identifies Social Work services and professionals acting far from the discipline’s core objective and focusing on other aspects such as their motivations, comfort, opinions or even ideologies (Harms Smith, 2017; Moldovan & Moyo, 2007), instead of co-creating the solutions with end-users in order to transform their situations. In the case of Roma service users, this is more evident when taking into account that antigypsyism has also penetrated many Social Work professionals (Daly, 2016). In many cases, scientific literature has shown that with Roma people, Social Work practices tend to be far from the desired social transformation and focus instead on control approaches towards this collective (Vrăbiescu & Kalir, 2018). The situation and consequences of this bureaucratization process have been more evident in the pandemic according to the participants of this research, which is consistent with scientific literature (Lima-Silva et al., 2020).

In the present research, the responses of social workers in a fast-changing situation of crisis are analyzed. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns created an unprecedented situation for which most social services and social workers were not prepared. Whereas this situation emphasized the bureaucratization that overtook the origin of a big part of the discipline, the Social Work professionals that have been based on the reason why it was born have taken actions to rethink and change the model of social intervention they were providing.

A key aspect has been the egalitarian dialogue with Roma users of social services. This has enabled the participant social workers to reach and improve certain situations to which they would have not been able to arrive (Yu, 2013). In addition, the main focus of these social workers that have maintained the historical roots has been to hear the Roma users’ voices, not focusing on their own motivations or their non-co-created diagnoses or actions. This type of response coincides with the philosophy, for instance, of the actions led by Jane Addams in the Hull House. Hull House was a space that adapted itself to the needs of the neighbors at all times. It was not a fixed institution nor methodology that could not be moved in favor of the ones who worked there, but was rather in constant transformation to adapt itself to what could best improve the lives of individuals and communities (Addams, 1981; Addams et al., 1893).

Another element of rethinking the hegemonic social intervention model in the analyzed settings has been to co-create and change the actions of the social workers. The notion of co-creation was described by many participants as an essential and indispensable factor in their actions. Together with the Roma users, many social workers have changed and tried to overcome the bureaucratization process through a shift in their focus: from centering on the social workers themselves to focusing on and prioritizing Roma end-users. In addition, a quick response in constant dialogue with interdisciplinary teams has been analyzed as positive, which coincides with scientific literature (Clarke et al., 2012; McCallin, 2006). Once again, this characteristic is aligned with the way in which Social Work has historically acted, in dialogue with both other disciplines and as many diverse people as possible (including the most vulnerable ones) in order to co-create the paths that alleviate human suffering. Rethinking the
intervention approach beyond institutional norms enabled a more comprehensive engagement with the ethical and historical features of Social Work. This adaptive capacity, highlighted in recent research on social workers’ actions during the pandemic, helped improve the highly stressful situation that Roma families were experiencing, especially women (Bermejo & de la Red, 1996; Ling et al., 2023; Morley & Clarke, 2020).

The third key element that coincides with the principles of Social Work since its origins is the professional and human commitment of the participant social workers towards maintaining a humanitarian and respectful action with Roma users. According to scientific literature, this is not so in many cases (Daly, 2016). This attitude contributes to the overcoming of the extended prejudices towards Roma and particularly Roma women in social attention (Goldberg, 2000; Vrăbiescu & Kalir, 2018). In addition, some of them also mentioned that working commitment aligned with the roots of Social Work gave them great satisfaction, as scientific literature in this topic had studied (Graham et al., 2013; Kuok, 2022; Marmo et al., 2021).

As this study shows, although the historical evolution towards the bureaucratization of many social sciences has also affected Social Work (Jacobsson & Meeuwisse, 2020; Liodden, 2021; Wastell & White, 2014), moving it away from the core values and objectives with which it was born, there are also actions in the field through which some professionals have been able to rethink the hegemonic model of social intervention. Even in the hardest moments, as was the COVID-19 pandemic, which aggravated many Roma people’s situation, the findings presented here shed light on actions that have allowed many Social Work professionals to regain the discipline’s roots.

**Conclusion**

Scientific literature has highlighted that, although the origin of Social Work was linked to the improvement of the situation of those who needed it most, a bureaucratization process has created a distance between current practice and this initial goal. In the case of Roma people during the pandemic, this has been made more evident, where the already existing vulnerabilities have been increased. However, the ROM21 study has found that some social workers involved with the Roma population have made a rethinking of the hegemonic intervention model towards the origins and ethos of Social Work.

Aligned with the ideas of the pioneers of the discipline, some of the analyzed cases advocated for the institutions of social intervention to adapt to the ones who need it, and not the other way around. Just like Jane Addams did, who advocated for also changing the social context that created such human suffering.

In the current scientific revolution of all sciences towards social impact and co-creation, it is argued that Social Work is in a privileged position if the roots and ethos of the discipline are respected.
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