

International Network for School Social Work

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A Global Needs Assessment for School Social Work

Needs assessment

A needs assessment measures the gap between existing conditions and what is needed. For school social work the gap is between the extent of school social work services at present and the level needed. This measure includes the number of countries that have social workers in schools and those that do not, plus the extent of school social work services in each country and the amount of service that is needed.

Countries where school social work exists

There are 197 countries that are recognized by the United Nations. Five countries have over 200 million people and 73 have less than 1 million, for a total of 7 and a half billion people worldwide and growing by 1 percent a year. At present we know of 53 countries that have social workers in schools. The countries with some level of school social work coverage are:

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Curacao, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China), Hungary, Iceland, India, Jamaica, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Mauritius, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vietnam.

In the countries where school social work exists it is seldom provided at an adequate level. For example, the Australian Association of Social Workers recommends one school social worker per 500 students (<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8308>). There are about 4,000,000 school children in Australia and about 400 school social workers, or about 1 per 10,000 school children, and some of the states and territories have no school social workers.

The National Association of Social Workers in the US states that appropriate ratios for school social work staff to students depend on the needs of students, with one school social worker for 250 students or a lower ratio such as 1:50 for students with intensive needs (<https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1Ze4-9-Os7E=&portalid=0>). There are

about 50,000,000 students in the United States and approximately 30,000 school social workers, or 1 per 1,700 students, with considerable variation between states.

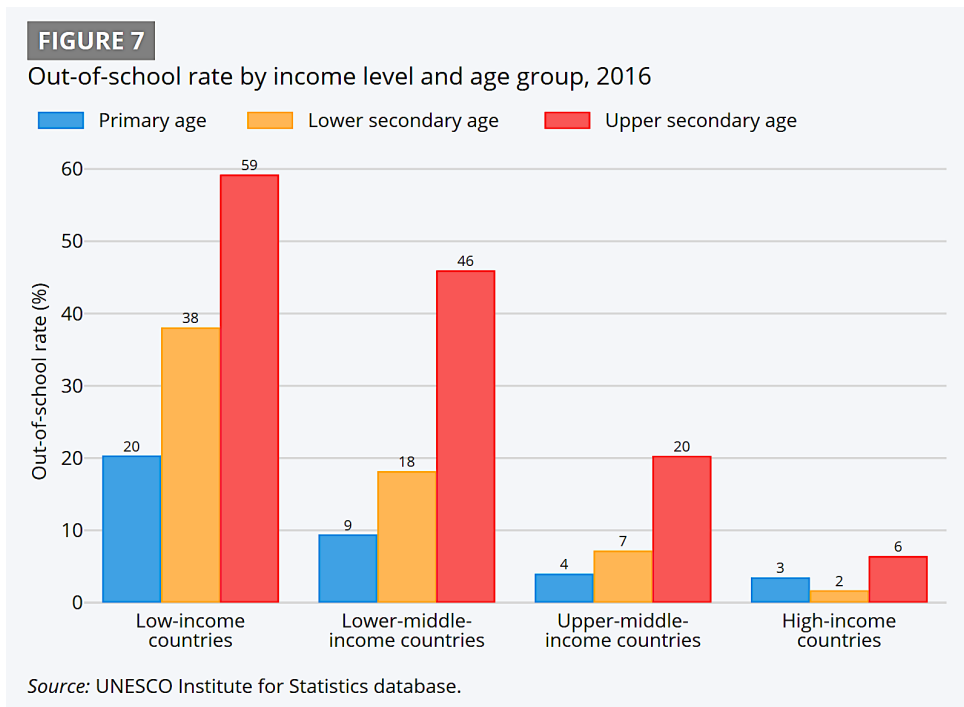
Many of the countries listed above have only small numbers of school social workers and others are just beginning to provide social workers in the schools. In general there is a large gap between the extent of school social work service and what is recommended as being needed.

Why school social workers are needed

All children have a right to education. Global school enrollment and completion has increased. Yet vulnerable groups of children are still missing out on education, including poor children, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities including physical, intellectual, sensory and psychological problems, children in remote rural areas and youth with alternative sexual orientation. Social workers have a key role in helping each of these groups achieve equal access to education.

According to data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), about **263 million children**, adolescents and youth worldwide (or one in every five) are out school, a figure that has barely changed over the past five years. Poverty is a strong indicator of educational deprivation, as shown in the UNESCO bar graph. Indicators related to poverty (in both rich and poor nations) such as poor nutrition, inadequate housing, lack of health, poor sanitation, child labor, family unemployment and lack of amenities such as toys and books suggest how poverty increases the likelihood that a child may not complete school.

Social workers are needed in the schools to help all children especially vulnerable groups overcome the barriers to educational success, and to help children in low-income families and nations reach secondary and tertiary levels of education.



<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs48-one-five-children-adolescents-youth-out-school-2018-en.pdf>, page 12