



## International Network for School Social Work

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## Electronic Newsletter April 2022

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### **Elephant in the Room: Long Journey Into School Social Work In Turkiye**

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**Turkiye** (*This is the official spelling for international purposes since 2021*)

The Republic of Turkiye sits on a large peninsula bounded on three sides by the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea. It is partly in Europe and partly in Asia. The official language is Turkish and it is taught as the mother tongue in schools. Several other languages are also spoken by a number of ethnic groups. The Constitution provides for 12 years of free, compulsory education under the Ministry of National Education and coordinated with provincial governments. Education spending accounts for about 15.7% of the national budget.



### **Current issues in education in Turkiye**

In recent years, the number of children at risk has greatly increased, with problems such as peer bullying, poverty, drug use, child neglect and abuse, migration, parental deprivation, school dropout, and crime. These increasing problems impact children's academic success and their adjustment to school, necessitating new services in schools. Such services include conducting regular educational and training activities for healthy development, supporting students and their families, intervening in psychosocial crises that may occur in the school, protecting students at risk, strengthening relationships between students, families, teachers and school administrators etc. The need for social work in schools is becoming more evident day by day.

### **Current situation of school social work in Turkiye**

In 2021, Turkiye celebrated its 50th anniversary of social work education. Although it is a young profession, social work is well-known in the field of child protection and childcare. As for school

social work, it does not have a long history and is not yet officially found in schools. However, there are several initiatives in Türkiye to support the professionalization of school social work and to allow social workers to work in primary and secondary schools.

School social work is a sub-discipline of social work and has been implemented on a project basis in schools in a few cities such as Istanbul, Konya and Rize. Among them the School Social Work Project in Konya is the youngest and most successful running from 2017 to 2020 [https://sosyalhizmetokullari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OSH\\_Prj\\_Gen\\_Deg.pdf](https://sosyalhizmetokullari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OSH_Prj_Gen_Deg.pdf). In the Konya Project, in collaboration with the provincial directorates of the Ministry of Education, social workers from the Ministry of Family and Social Services worked with schools to identify children with psychosocial problems that limit their academic performance and whose development is at risk, and to plan and implement social work interventions for these children and their families.

In addition, there are more than 50 undergraduate social work programs in Türkiye. School social work is taught as part of the curricula. Senior students can work in a school as part of their field practicum. Since school social workers do not yet work in schools, students are supervised by a professional titled 'psychological counselling and guidance teacher' (Psikolojik Danışman ve Rehber Öğretmen).

Several initiatives have been taken so far to promote school social work in the country. The Turkish Association of Social Workers <http://shuder.org> has established a special interest group called School Social Work. Academics and social workers interested in this field come together and carry out some activities and projects to promote school social work in Türkiye. The Association of School Social Work <https://www.okulsosyalhizmetidernegi.com> was established in 2019 to support the professionalization of school social work in Türkiye. The School Social Work Application and Research Center at Hacettepe University [http://www.hosmer.hacettepe.edu.tr/en/menu/home\\_page-31](http://www.hosmer.hacettepe.edu.tr/en/menu/home_page-31) was established by the university in 2015 to strengthen the links between society, university and schools. This center plays an important role in advancing school social work in Türkiye.

There are also other initiatives to support the birth of school social work. These initiatives include social media campaigns, petition campaigns on change.org <https://www.change.org>, policy support papers, master's and doctoral theses. In 2018, the Ministry of Family and Social Services launched the 'Mobile Units for Children's Social Work' to protect children from risks and provide protective, preventive and supportive services through timely intervention. These units were launched as a pilot project and then converted into a policy implemented directly by the Ministry as a nationwide service since 2019. This new child protection policy is the most similar model to school social work in Türkiye to date. Started outside of the school system, mobile unit social workers visit schools to screen children and provide protective services in accordance with the 2015 Law for the Protection of Children <http://www.lawsturkey.com/law/juvenile-protection-law-5395>.

In summary, we can say that school mental health services are provided by the psychological counselling and guidance teachers, the only professional group currently employed in schools in Türkiye. However, social workers are now providing protective, preventive, and supportive services through the 'Mobile Child Social Work Units' program, under the Ministry of Family and Social Services. Although school social work is not directly and officially implemented in schools in Türkiye, researchers, scholars and practitioners are doing their best to make this dream come true.

### **Credits**

Special thanks to Sedat Turkeri (social worker) and the members of the School Social Work Committee of the Turkish Association of Social Workers.