



Regional Guidance for ASEAN Member States on Strengthening the Role of Social Workers and the Wider Social Service Workforce in the Education Sector



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one community



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and the Wider Social Service Workforce
in the Education Sector**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967.

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Foreword

The Regional Guidance for the ASEAN Member States on the Role of Social Workers and the Wider Social Service Workforce in the Education Sector are an important milestone towards increasing the prosperity, connectivity, resilience, and security of children of ASEAN Member States.

The development of this Guidance is to support the operationalisation of the ASEAN Road Map for the Implementation of the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community. This ASEAN guidance is intended to support policy makers, managers and members of the social service workforce in ASEAN Member States (AMS) to strengthen the role of social workers and the wider social service workforce in the Education Sector.

We trust that the Guidance will benefit ASEAN Member States as the basis to develop more specific nationally relevant guidelines and action plans that can take into account the context of each country.

ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD)



Acknowledgements

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The leadership of SOMSWD Philippines in the development of this Guidance is much appreciated. The ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) also deserves our appreciation for coordinating the development process, including coordinating ASEAN Member States (AMS) contributions to the guidance. We thank the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) East Asia and Pacific Regional Office for their financial and technical support in developing this Guidance.

ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD)



Abbreviations

AMS	ASEAN Member States
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CP	Child Protection
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EAPRO	East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GSSWA	Global Social Service Workforce Alliance
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSD	Social Services Department
SSW	Social Service Workforce
SW	Social Work / Social Worker
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girl's Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



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1. Purpose of this guidance

The social service workforce plays a critical role across sectors, as part of an integrated child protection system that can protect children from all forms of violence. The workforce can more effectively reach the most vulnerable individuals and communities with support and services by working not only as part of the social protection and social welfare systems, but working in and linked with services and settings in health, education and justice sectors, and in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and resilience.

This ASEAN guidance is part of a set of regional guidance papers developed for ASEAN Member States (AMS) with the support of UNICEF that explore and outline the role of the workforce in these different sectors and settings. This paper, focusing on the role of social workers and the wider social service workforce in the education sector, is intended to support policy makers and decision makers in the fields of education and social welfare, school leaders and teachers, and managers and members of the social service workforce. It is written to help these stakeholders in AMS to consider the ways in which the social service workforce can be most effectively deployed in or linked with schools and pre-school settings.

The guidance sets out how such cross-sectoral deployment can lead to enhanced and more sustained positive outcomes for school age-children and their families. These include addressing underlying psychosocial factors to prevent school drop-out and contribute to improvements in students' school attendance, learning and achievement, in a gender-responsive way, while helping create a caring and safe whole school environment. It also cover ways in which social service workers, when working in or linked with specific schools and pre-school settings, can engage with and support students and their families on wider issues, including students' emotional wellbeing and mental health, and the stigma associated with mental health issues. Furthermore, it deals with how social service workers can work with teachers to enrich the content of lessons to include engaging content on social and emotional learning, positive gender socialisation and gender role modelling, and development of 21st century transferable life skills.¹

Finally, this paper considers the role of the social service workforce in schools in prevention and protection of students from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, through identifying concerns, and making referrals to connect children in need and at risk with the wider child protection system.

This paper addresses the role of the social service workforce in all education settings for children, so by 'schools' it refers to all education establishments that cater for children up to the age of 18, including pre-school settings such as creches, playgroups, nursery schools and kindergartens, and primary or elementary schools, middle and secondary schools, also known as junior and senior high schools, as well as schools for children with special educational needs. In doing so it applies to all private, independent or faith-based schools as well as public (state-run) schools and international schools.

However, the role of the social service workforce in or linked to boarding schools or other residential settings is beyond the scope of this paper. Although their work in these settings is significant and in need of guidance, to ensure the rights of children are upheld, and their protection and support needs met, the distinct roles and responsibilities of the social service workforce in or linked to residential schools would need more detailed and specialist consideration than this guidance paper can provide, given the 24 hour nature of the role, and the very significant responsibilities for direct care and protection of children that such institutions have.

¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019) Global framework on transferable skills. How to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



The role of the social service workforce in education institutions for over 18s, including universities and vocational colleges, is likewise outside the scope of this paper. This guidance paper is focused primarily on how a strengthened role for social workers and other social service workers in education settings can increase the effectiveness of the child protection system, as part of the overall social welfare or social protection system. Thus it applies only to children defined by law as persons under the age of 18.

Background

ASEAN Member States adopted the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community in 2020. The Declaration recognised the need for strengthening the social service workforce across sectors beyond social welfare. The accompanying Road Map for the Implementation of the Ha Noi Declaration, noted in 2021, highlighted the need for laws, policies and strategies to define and strengthen the roles and competencies of social workers and other social service workforce in key sectors, including health, education, justice, early childhood development (ECD), labour, community development, and disaster risk reduction. More specifically:

- Priority 1.3 of the Road Map calls on AMS to identify the role of social workers in different fields, including but not limited to health, education, justice and disaster risk management, and to ensure laws in other sectors define the roles, responsibilities and requirements of social work in that sector.
- Priority 1.4 calls on AMS to develop or strengthen relevant secondary legislation and policy for social work, including regulations, minimum standards and standard operating procedures for social workers and related workforce in different roles and settings.
- Priority 1.8 tasks ASEAN with developing regional guidance notes on the role of social work and social service workforce strengthening for each key sector, to support AMS to plan for and strengthen the social service workforce across relevant sectors and multi sectoral delivery of social work, undertake needs assessments and develop national plans of action.

This guidance is informed by, aligned with and can help duty bearers uphold:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), notably article 6 (right to life, survival and development), article 19 (protection from violence, abuse, maltreatment and neglect), and articles 28 and 29 (right to education, including girls' right to education and goals of education).²
- Sustainable Development Goal 4: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.'³
- Sustainable Development Goal 16: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' - Targets 16.2 (protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence) and 16.1 (reduce violence everywhere).
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), which further emphasises non-discrimination and girls' and women's equal right to education.⁴
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which states that 'States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels.'

² UNICEF (n.d.) Convention on the Rights of the Child: For every child, every right.

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (n.d.) MAKE THE SDGS A REALITY Discover The Goals.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979.



This guidance draws on the key findings and evidence compiled for the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) technical note ‘Social Service Workers in Schools: Their Role in Addressing Violence Against Children and Other Child Protection Concerns’ (2022).⁵ It is also complementary to the ASEAN Guidance on Setting Minimum Ratios for Social Workers Per Population.

⁵ Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) and UNICEF (2022) Social Service Workers in Schools: Their Role in Addressing Violence Against Children and Other Child Protection Concerns.

2. Definitions

To support ASEAN Member States, the Road Map provides the following definition of the social service workforce, in line with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance definition:⁶

‘The Social Service Workforce (SSW) includes a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental professionals, para-professionals and community level volunteers, who work with children, youth, women and men, older persons, families and communities, focusing on those with additional needs who are marginalised, in vulnerable situations or at risk, to protect and ensure their healthy development and well-being and the fulfilment of their rights. To do so, the social service workforce provides preventative, gender responsive and promotive services that are informed by the humanities and social sciences, indigenous knowledge and values, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, and ethical principles. Social service workers engage people, structures and organisations to facilitate access to needed services, alleviate poverty, challenge and reduce discrimination and social isolation, promote social justice and human rights, and prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and family separation.’

A key distinctive feature of social work, and, by extension, the wider social service workforce, is its approach to understanding and supporting the individual and family, and their strengths, resources and challenges, in the context of their social environment and wider community. This is known as the social-ecological perspective, or ecological systems theory,⁷ which is central to the distinctive role of the SSW in taking a strengths-based approach, and in building individual, family and community resilience.

The definition in the Road Map goes on to state: ‘The wider social service workforce includes practitioners, researchers, managers and educators. Social service workers include social workers, case workers, community workers, case managers, among others, including those working with specific groups or on specific issues e.g., child protection and youth care workers, those specialised in addressing violence against women and children, and those working with people with disabilities, people with mental health needs, migrants and the elderly. The exact job titles and functions vary from one country to the other, in line with local laws, policies, culture, traditions and the historical development of these roles and professions in each context.’

There are a number of roles and titles used for the deployment of social service workers in schools, but the most common is **school social worker** and **school counsellors**, followed by education welfare officer, or other types of student welfare support role. School social workers and education welfare officers usually focus on student attendance, any welfare issues affecting their learning and overall well-being and mental health. They are also usually responsible for identifying and referring to relevant child protection authorities any indication that a child has experienced or is at risk of significant harm, including as a result of violence, abuse or neglect whether taking place in the school, home or community. For some school social workers their role would extend to visiting the child’s family to discuss and seek to resolve issues affecting the student’s attendance, performance at school or overall welfare. However, if the concern was one of child protection, i.e. that of a child considered to be ‘at risk’ not just ‘in need’, then such visits would normally need to be conducted by the statutory child protection social worker in the community, or other relevant child protection authority.

⁶ Global Social Service Workforce Alliance. Who is the Social Service Workforce?

⁷ National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2012) Standards for School Social Work Services. Germaine, C. (1973) An ecological perspective in casework. *Social Casework*, 54, 323-330.



School counsellors, or school psychologists, depending on national definitions, may either be considered part of the social service workforce role, or can be defined as a member of an ‘allied workforce’, such as education or health. School counsellors would be considered part of the education workforce, where their role is primarily to support and guide student learning and achievement (particularly if the school counsellor is a teacher who is then trained and assigned to this role). They could be considered part of the health workforce if their role is to focus on issues such as student mental health, healthy lifestyles (and reducing risky or harmful behaviours such as substance abuse) or sexual and reproductive health. These distinctions are discussed further below, in defining what is meant by ‘allied sectors’. If school counsellors are specifically trained and work full time to provide counselling to students on social welfare issues, and especially if they have a child protection identification and referral role, this would likely be seen as a social service workforce role, as their primary function is to provide a social (not education or health) service.⁸

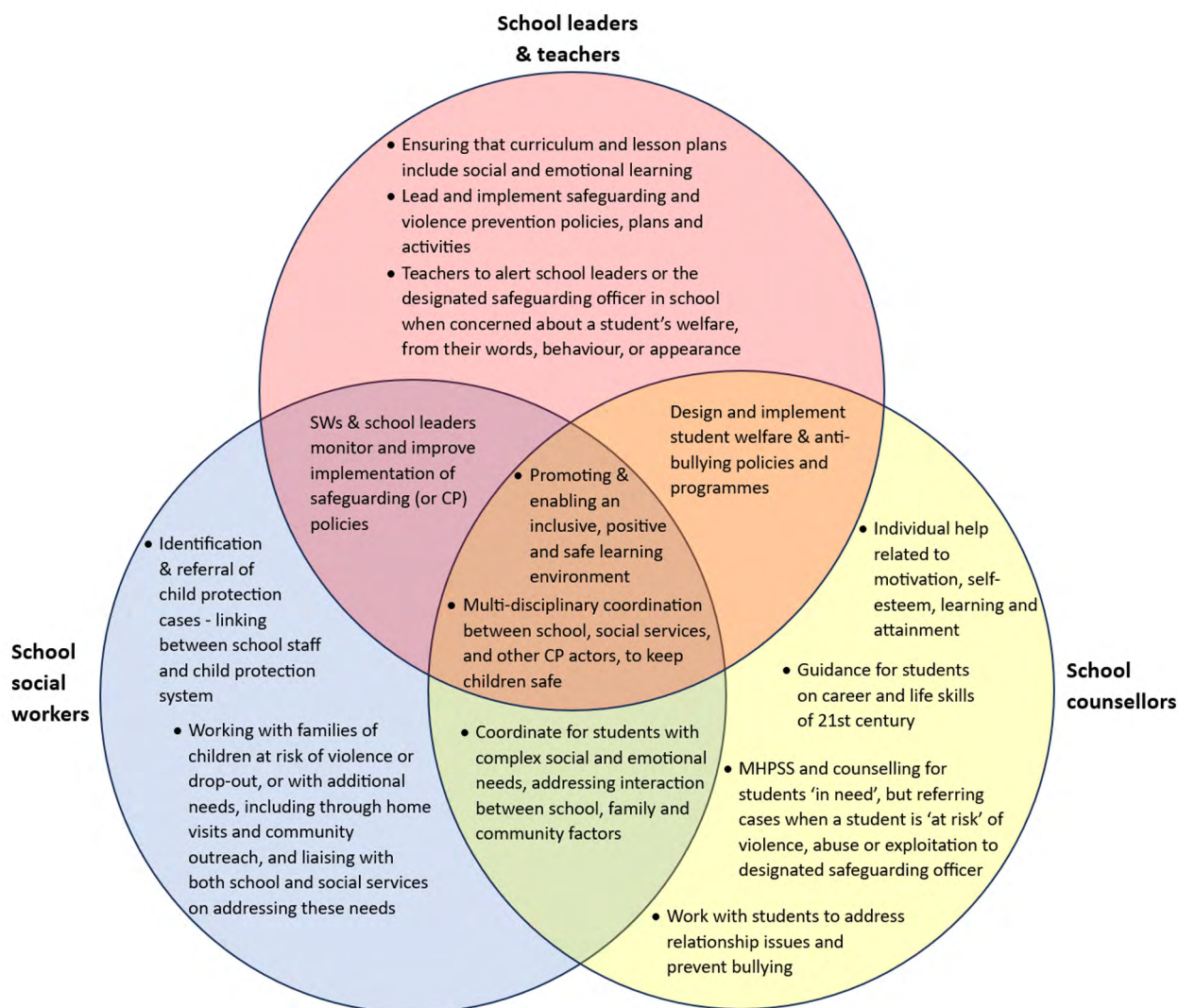
The diagram below has been prepared to help avoid any confusion between the roles of:

- **social workers or other social service workers** working in or linked to schools,
- **school counsellors or school psychologists**, and,
- **teachers and school leaders** (directors and administrators).

The diagram aims to show how these three groups of roles differ from one another, and where they overlap.

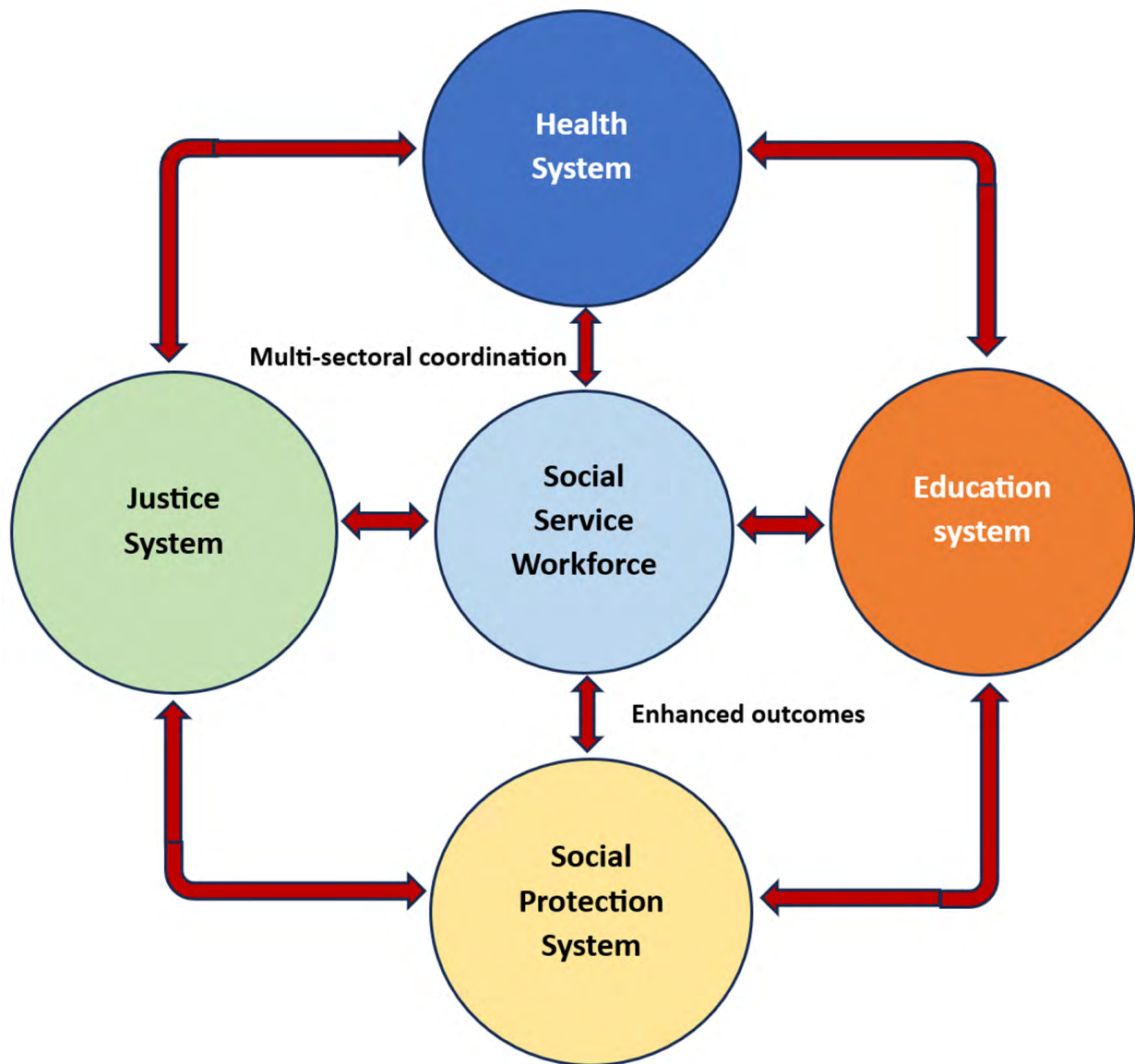
8 Huxtable, Marion (2022) *A Global Picture of School Social Work in 2021*, International Journal of School Social Work: Vol. 7: Iss. 1.

Figure 1: Areas of difference and overlap in the role of SSW, school counsellors, and school leaders and teachers



Allied workforce / allied sectors: Other key sectors, that operate alongside social services, such as health/ mental health, education and justice, are often referred to, from the perspective of the social service workforce, as 'allied workforce' as they are working in 'allied sectors'. They are seen as 'allied' in recognition of the multiple intersections and potential synergies with social services. When working across sectoral boundaries colleagues from different disciplines can achieve enhanced and more sustained outcomes for individuals, families and groups facing different forms of risk, adversity and social marginalisation. Thus, in seeing them as 'allied workforce', while education, health and justice workers are not primarily providers of social services, the roles and responsibilities that they perform are vital to the effective delivery of social services (e.g. ensuring a school place and additional support at school for a child who is placed with a foster carer or reintegrated to their family from institutional care). Equally, in return, the work of the social service workforce helps increase the effectiveness of services provided by the allied sectors (e.g. when education outcomes are enhanced through addressing the psychosocial factors, and family and community issues affecting student attendance, learning and attainment).

Figure 2: The inter-relationship and interdependence between workforce roles in social services – the social welfare sector - and allied sectors





3. Rationale for deploying SSW in or linked with schools

Schools are well placed to identify and address students' mental health and psychosocial support needs.

When adequately trained and supported, with defined and regulated roles, social workers and counsellors or psychologists in schools can identify and address mental health concerns, behavioral concerns, and provide positive behavioral support, help arrange academic and classroom support, and carry out consultation with parents, teachers and administrators to enable them to do so. When trained in counselling, they may also be able to provide individual or group therapy. They can also carry out crisis intervention in mental health cases when required, including referral to specialist services.

Recent research in 2022 coordinated by the Burnet Institute for UNICEF⁹ found that, in the East Asia and Pacific region, children's mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs are often unrecognised, or stigmatised, and such services as exist are often provided too late and through a solely medical model or primarily in institutional settings. To address this challenge, schools, supported by SSW working in or linked with schools, have the potential to play a key role as part of what the report on MHPSS summarises as 'a holistic and tiered approach', including three areas of action to '**promote** well-being; **prevent** poor mental health by addressing risks and enhancing protective factors; and **ensure quality and accessible care** for those with mental health conditions (emphasis added).' The report goes on to emphasise that 'this requires the mobilisation of all sectors – including health, education, social welfare and justice – as well as engagement with communities, schools, parents, service providers and children and adolescents themselves.'¹⁰

Schools are critical spaces to prevent and identify violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, and other child protection concerns.

Children have a right to protection from violence, including physical, sexual, emotional and gender-based violence, and other forms of abuse and neglect, in all settings, including schools. Thus school's obligations to fulfil children's rights to protection is fundamental and indivisible from their obligation to fulfil children's right to education. Since children spend a lot of time each day in school, it is the place where child protection concerns can often be first identified, in particular when school staff are aware of the signs of child abuse and neglect, and take their child protection responsibilities seriously. For the most marginalised students, schools are a key point of access to essential support services that they would otherwise struggle to access.

All school staff, when mandated, trained and supported to do so, can play a key role in child protection, but the constraints on their time and capacity need to be recognised.

Teachers and school administrators can play a key role in recognising signs and symptoms of abuse or violence, recording concerns in writing and making referrals to the relevant external child protection agencies.¹¹ They also have a wider role to play in preventing violence in schools by identifying and challenging the attitudes, social norms and behaviours that lead to violence, in particular gender-based violence, abuse and neglect, online sexual abuse and exploitation, bullying and discrimination. For this to be achieved, education authorities

9 UNICEF, Burnet Institute (2022) Strengthening Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Systems and Services for Children and Adolescents in East Asia and the Pacific Region. Regional Report.

10 Ibid.

11 GSSWA and UNICEF (2022) op cit.



need to ensure that all school staff in daily contact with students receive sufficient training, support and ongoing capacity building. Education authorities also need to ensure gender-responsive safeguarding, child protection, violence prevention and anti-bullying policies and procedures are in place, understood and implemented, and that they include a clear mandate, role and responsibility in this area of work for school teachers, administrators and leaders.

Social service workers, when working in or linked to specific schools, can also play a key role in providing this training, guidance and support for school staff, and in particular to help them gain skills and confidence in their responsibilities to identify, respond to and report child protection concerns. This will need to include raising their awareness of the different types, signs and symptoms of violence and abuse against children, of gender-based violence, and of the heightened risk and vulnerability factors related to gender, disability and other special needs (particularly for children with communication and /or intellectual impairments). This training would also need to cover sensitivity to the impact that a child's family and home situation, as well as community, culture and social pressures, can have on their motivation and capacity to learn, and on their behaviour in school.

Child protection and violence prevention can be achieved most effectively using a holistic, multi-disciplinary, whole school approach¹² – an approach which social worker (or other social service workers, SSW) in or linked to schools are well placed to support. While teachers play a crucial role in preventing and addressing all forms of violence against children, and gender-based violence, in and around schools,¹³ asking teachers and school leaders to assume full and sole responsibility for safeguarding and child protection in schools is challenging given the wide range of responsibilities that they already hold. Having social workers working in or closely linked to schools, significantly increases school capacity to identify and address child protection and child welfare concerns as they arise and connect interventions at school with the wider child protection system and services.

By deploying social workers (or other SSW) in or linked to schools / pre-school settings, they can play a key role in mobilising a 'whole school approach', which also engages students' families and communities, to achieve an inclusive, holistic approach to both education and child protection. Such a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, including coordinating with social welfare, health and justice services and other sources of support in the community, increases the school's ability to identify the full range of student welfare needs, and to prevent violence, and respond promptly and effectively to child protection cases when they arise. Drawing on social workers' distinctive social-ecological approach, enables the school to see and engage with the student in the context of their family, school and community. Thus they can enhance students' overall well-being, supporting their overall emotional, social and physical development, in addition to their intellectual development. This approach enhances accessibility and inclusion in schools, and student engagement in learning, by overcoming both internal and external barriers to starting and staying in school, to learning and attainment,¹⁴ and enabling their fuller participation across wider school and community activities.

12 United Nations Girl's education Initiative (UNGEI) (2019) A whole school approach to prevent school related gender-based violence Minimum Standards and Monitoring Framework. World Health Organization (2019) School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook.

13 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2022) The key role of teachers in ending school violence and bullying. Technical brief.

14 Internal barriers including students' physical and psychological health, attitudes, motivation, self-esteem, ability to concentrate, and external barriers including family and societal values, pressures and stressors.



Social workers, and other SSW, can help schools to identify, include and effectively integrate children with special educational needs.

School staff, supported by social workers (or other SSW), can be key agents of positive gender socialisation. Gender socialisation is the process through which individuals internalise gender norms and conform to, or challenge, gender roles and expectations. The process of gender socialisation is simultaneously and continuously perpetuated by individual and institutional agents of socialisation, including schools and school staff. However, typically very few school staff are trained in providing gender-responsive support. Both SSW and teachers who have incomplete training are likely to perpetuate gender discriminatory biases when delivering services. The fact that the teaching profession suffers from skewed gender ratios, being considered a ‘feminine’ activity related to childcare, may further exacerbate the bias. Regular training for the SSW on gender roles and positive gender socialisation is therefore needed to ensure that teachers and school staff are aware of gender discriminatory practices and promote and role model positive gender norms and practices.

4. Policy considerations in deploying or linking social service workers in or with allied sectors, including schools

This guidance is recommending that AMS consider two main options for deployment of Social Service Workforce in schools or linking them to specific schools:

1. **Closely linking SSW to a specific school or cluster of schools**, through clear referral pathways, or providing a social worker to act as a focal point for receiving referrals from and coordinating with one or several schools in the community. An additional option would be for the focal point worker to be based in that school on a certain day or days, or certain times, every week.
2. **Physically deploying, i.e. locating social workers or other social service workers in schools**. In doing so, there are three additional ways to manage this deployment option:
 - a. The social service worker(s) is recruited, paid, managed and supervised by the social welfare / social services ministry or department, but in their job description it is stated that their main place of work is the specific school or cluster of schools.
 - b. The social service worker(s) is recruited, paid, managed and supervised by the responsible body in the education sector, (e.g. education authority, or the school itself).
 - c. As above, but while the worker is still recruited, paid and managed by the education department or a specific school, they receive professional supportive supervision from a qualified social worker, from the social services / social welfare department.

The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are set out in the table below:

Type of inter-sectoral arrangement	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. SSW employed and supervised by social services department (SSD) but linked with a specific school or cluster of schools.	This achieves some of the benefits of inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary working, but at lower cost as one worker can cover a cluster of local services, and less commitment is required by the school / education department. SSW in schools but closely linked to SSD also can help with coordinated services to include out of school children, including children with disabilities.	Such linking arrangements may not allow for sufficiently close joint working and coordination to achieve the enhanced outcomes for services users outlined below, in particular if education / school staff still do not fully trust, recognise or know how to work with and involve SSW in their service.



Type of inter-sectoral arrangement	Advantages	Disadvantages
2a. SSW employed and supervised by SSD, but physically located in a specific school.	Achieves the main benefits of joint work that are achieved by SSW being located in schools, but without requiring significant cost and commitment from the school or education department.	The lower level of ownership by management of the school / education dept may result in lower commitment to making deployment of SSW in school effective.
2b. SSW recruited, paid, managed & supervised by the school or education department.	Strong ownership by the school or education department where the SSW is located. Clear management and reporting lines. SSW are close to and physically accessible by teachers and students, and will more often be involved and consulted as relationships and trust are built.	The management and colleagues at the school or education department might not recognise or be able to meet the supervision and professional development requirements of SSW (unless this is something the district education department could provide from a central specialist unit for SSW supervision).
2c. SSW recruited, paid and managed & supervised by the school or education department, but supervised by a senior social worker in the local social services department.	Same as b. but with the added advantage of receiving supervision (incl. support for learning, professional development and reflective practice) from a qualified, experienced social worker, to strengthen their social work practice.	SSW could receive conflicting advice from their manager and colleagues in the school, and from their off-site supervisor, or might not be allowed time by their on-site manager to attend off-site social work technical supervision (especially if this requires time and travel cost).

ASEAN Member States may approach these options as incremental steps, moving after a few years from option 1 to option 2 (a, b or c), recognising that option 2, full deployment and location of SSW to services in school may at first be too resource intensive for them, in terms of the salary costs, management, training and SOPs required, especially if this involves a high number of additional staff. This would be particularly the case if it was proposed that one worker would be located in each local service, e.g. school. Therefore, in some countries it might initially be more feasible for one worker to be linked to a small cluster of schools in neighbouring areas, while still based in and employed and supervised by the social services department.

The other reason this interim stage may be required, before a school or education department is able to fully take over recruiting, paying, managing and supervising its social service worker(s), is that it may initially be difficult to secure the commitments of the other sector, e.g. education department, to take on the full responsibility of recruiting, paying, managing and supervising such SSW, but this commitment might be achieved after having had the experience of linking SSW to schools, in which policy makers, school leadership and staff can see the benefits of closer inter-sectoral coordination and joint work, to achieve enhanced outcomes for students. They may then consider that they wish to move to option 2, in order to achieve the additional benefits of directly hiring and locating those workers in the school or other education services. If there is still not capacity to provide professional / technical supervision of a social worker (or other SSW) in the school, the education department may have capacity in the form of a supervision unit providing supervision to all SSW working across schools in its district, through supervision in both in-person and online formats, and potentially both individual and group

formats too.¹⁵

In order to effectively deploy social workers and other SSW in an allied sector such as education, or specifically link their work to that sector, a number of further factors need to be considered in the way this deployment or link is planned, the way the workforce's capacity is developed in these roles, and in the ways they are supported. Below is a summary of the key considerations:

Planning

- **Assess the need for social work in schools:** Planning of social services, and of the workforce needed to deliver such services, should wherever possible be evidence-based and needs-led rather than resource-led. It is therefore important first to collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data to gauge the level of need, and in particular unmet need, for social work services in school (including both services for students who may be 'at risk' and may need referral to child protection services, and for students 'in need' who may need individual psychosocial or family support).
- **Underscore ministerial leadership and coordination:** Considering the advantage and disadvantages set out in the table on p.4, each AMS needs to decide whether the mandate of deploying SSW in schools should be held and funded by the ministry responsible for education, or the ministry responsible for social welfare and social services. Regardless of the lead ministry selected, it is important that both ministries recognise the important role of SSW in schools, not as a temporary initiative, but as an integral part of sustainable service structures and human resources, with the SSW role clearly built into the staffing of schools.
- **Set out a normative and policy framework, inclusive of all schools and pre-school settings, both private and public (independent and state-run):** The mandate, role and duties of all types of schools and pre-school settings, and their teachers and staff, for safeguarding, and more specifically for identifying and recording child protection concerns and making referrals to the relevant authorities, need to be explicitly set out in legislation, both overall laws and specific regulations, and in the child protection policies and procedures in schools.
- **Define clearly in legislation and policy the mandate and roles of social workers and other SSW in schools:** To ensure effective and recognised roles for social workers and other SSW in schools it is important for the mandate, job descriptions and roles of social workers / SSW to be defined in national legislation, and national education, social welfare and child protection policies.
- **Develop clear service specifications and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Given the risk of social workers or other SSW in schools not being understood, recognised, respected, integrated with other specialists or well utilised, when deployed in other sectors, it is important to plan and prepare for any such arrangement through defining a clear service specification or Terms of Reference (ToR), with SOPs which clearly state the role, responsibility, required qualifications and status of those workers, in line with relevant ASEAN guidelines¹⁶. It is particularly important for these SOPs to cover the safeguarding protocols and responsibilities of the school, and their duties to identify and refer cases to child protection authorities where a child is suspected to be at risk of violence, abuse or exploitation, in coordination with the various statutory services in the local child protection system. In these SOPs the specific role of the social service worker(s) and how this is differentiated from the role of teachers, administrators and school leadership, should be made clear. The functions and processes described should include detailed guidelines on how to identify and record child protection concerns, and how to make and follow-up on referrals to statutory services (timelines, processes, forms to use etc) to ensure concerns are registered

¹⁵ Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (2020) Guidance Manual on Strengthening Supervision for the Social Service Workforce.

¹⁶ Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (2023) Regional Guidance on Strengthening the Role of Social Workers and the Wider Social Service Workforce in Social Protection.



and investigated, and acted on where necessary. The child protection authorities receiving such referrals should also have SOPs that define how they are required to work with schools, including requirements and limits for information sharing as part of multi-agency child protection assessment and decision making.

- **Develop clear job descriptions and specifications (including required qualifications) for these roles:** For this, it is essential first to develop a clear job description for the role, and for the line manager or supervisor of the person in that role, to ensure, based on a clear understanding of its role and distinct contribution, that such a position can complement, and integrate and coordinate with other disciplines working in that setting, and also not become subsumed into other more general work (e.g. a school social worker being pulled into helping with general administration or to organising events, for a school). The job specifications should state what qualifications are required to be appointed as a social worker in a school or pre-school settings, or in another SSW role, e.g. school counsellor. Where possible, these specifications should align with the national competency framework and licensing or registration requirements for professional social work positions, which should encompass school-based roles.
- **Clarify the nature of the inter-sectoral relationship at both national and local level:** This would include inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial agreements on child protection responsibilities and referral protocols. As for the roles of SSW, this would include defining if the SSW are to work inter-sectorally by being physically located in a service setting in that sector (e.g., school or clinic), or they will achieve the same benefits by being linked to that setting (e.g. through acting as a focal point for referrals, making regular visits, or spending a day a week in that setting). In doing so, it is important to consider the benefits and potential drawbacks of each type of arrangement.
- **Consider if SSW can be deployed alone or will be more effective working alongside other social workers / social service workers:** Sometimes resources only allow one worker to be deployed full-time to a setting such as a school, but in doing so, it is important to consider the risk of the worker becoming isolated, unsupported, unrecognised, over-worked or under-utilised. In that case, it might be preferable for SSW to be deployed in pairs or small teams. However, if that is not possible, these risks would be mitigated if the solo social service worker could be well integrated, supported, supervised and recognised within a multi-disciplinary team of school staff.
- **Plan the staff numbers required to then inform adequate budget allocations to ensure the workforce and services it provides are sufficient and sustainable in numbers, quality of practice and resources:** The role and mandate of social workers and other SSW in schools needs to be recognised in the national budget and medium-term expenditure framework, and in the budgets and resourcing plans of ministries of education and social welfare. This will not only ensure coverage of their direct employment costs, but will also enable their access to resources and suitable working conditions. This level of resourcing is essential in order to build and sustain capacity and quality of service provision in schools.

To attract skilled and experienced professionals, social workers and other SSW working in schools should be paid a competitive salary as well as provided with office space, a computer and telephone for writing reports and liaising with other professionals and agencies. To discuss sensitive social welfare issues and hold confidential meetings with students and their families they also need access to suitable child-friendly and uninterrupted spaces. Finally, they should be provided transport costs to enable them to visit students' homes, particularly when the families of these students live some distance away.



In order to estimate the numbers of social workers or other SSW likely to be needed for a given population of school and pre-school children, and on that basis to cost the effective deployment of social workers and other SSW in schools, it would be helpful for government planners to use the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance guidance on the use of ratios and costing in SSW planning¹⁷, and the ASEAN Regional Guidance on the Development and Use of Social Service Workforce to Population Ratios, developed by UNICEF and GSSWA.

Developing

- **Develop a competency framework for social workers and other SSW in schools and implement the framework at all stages of training and professional development - pre-service and in-service training and continuing professional development (CPD):** This approach would start with incorporating the role of social workers in schools in the curricula of university courses, and enabling and supervising field placement of student social workers in school settings. Post-qualifying career progression opportunities should also be offered, with chances to gain certified training in more advanced areas of social work practice in this area, and promotion opportunities, (e.g. to become a manager of several SSW deployed across schools, or an off-site supervisor for SSW in schools). It would be important also to make this training and CPD available and accessible for para professionals or community volunteers working in or with schools, who may initially lack a social work or equivalent qualification, but who gain and move up through the different levels of competence (in the SSW in schools competency framework), through in-service training opportunities (online and in-person), which may at some point include time off to study (full or part-time) for a social work diploma or degree.
- **Ensure that training and CPD provided to social workers and other SSW in schools covers the main knowledge, practice skills and values for not only keeping children safe, happy and achieving in schools, but ensuring schools are fully inclusive, non-discriminatory environments:** This would include training not only on safeguarding, child protection, prevention and response to violence and bullying (online and offline), but also on MHPSS, transferable life skills, inclusive education and disability inclusive approaches,¹⁸ and addressing negative social norms and harmful cultural practices, in particular in relation to gender, gender sensitivity and not reinforcing gender stereotypes.
- **Provide multi-disciplinary training opportunities:** As enabling SSW to participate in training alongside workers of other disciplines and sectors can help strengthen teamwork and cooperation on cases based on mutual trust, as well as mutual recognition, understanding and wider collaboration among workers across different sectors.
- **Collect data for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL):** To inform the ongoing capacity development of the social service workforce in schools, and the continued improvement the accessibility, effectiveness and quality of social services in schools, establish systems and structures for MEAL, and collect the required quantitative and qualitative data on an ongoing basis, including direct feedback from children in schools and their caregivers, to inform baseline, formative and summative evaluations.

¹⁷ Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and UNICEF Proposed Guidance on Developing Minimum Social Service Workforce Ratios. Desk review findings and a step-by-step guide. October 2022, and Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and UNICEF Proposed Guidance and Tool for Costing the Social Service Workforce. Desk review findings and a step-by-step guide. October 2022.

¹⁸ UNICEF (2023) Disability Inclusive Child Protection Framework.



Supporting

- **Ensure regular supportive supervision¹⁹, peer support and team meetings** for SSW, regardless of the setting or sector in which they are deployed, preferably provided by a qualified social worker, and on a one-to-one basis, but with the option of group supervision too, if appropriate and helpful. Group supervision by expert supervisors can also be provided to multi-disciplinary teams, to discuss and reflect on particularly complex cases, and to work out joint, inter-sectoral approaches to working with such cases. Similarly, it is important to enable regular attendance at staff team meetings for such workers, to enable joint planning and coordination of teamwork across sectors. Establishing peer support networks can also provide a platform for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and fostering a sense of community among SSW. Peer support can alleviate feelings of isolation and enhance job satisfaction.
- **Encourage innovation in practice.** Fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement among social workers and other SSW can lead to the development of effective strategies and interventions within school and pre-school settings.
- **Provide support for staff well-being** for SSW deployed in schools and other community settings, to help prevent and address particular forms of stress that may be associated with working in the community and apart from other SSW colleagues and social service teams or departments, e.g. high workload, lack of recognition, lack of peer support, role confusion through working across sectors.
- **Recognise and support the role of professional associations of social workers** in raising professional and public awareness of the role played by SSW in the education sector, in developing and promoting quality standards for the workforce and advocating for the support and resources they require to work effectively across sectors.
- **Provide reasonable accommodation or support required for social service workers with disabilities**, as to perform their job they may require assistive products, sign language interpretation, support for travel or an assistant and hold meetings in accessible locations.
- **Hold recruitment campaigns for the role of school social worker, or other social service worker in or connected to schools.** It will be important to have specific and locally based recruitment drives to raise awareness of the importance of these roles, and motivate potential local candidates to apply, knowing what the role entails, and the professional development opportunities involved, and also with a view to ensuring equitable recruitment to achieve a gender balance of appointees from different socio-economic and ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds, in particular those currently unrepresented in the staffing of schools. Such recruitment campaigns should make creative use of media, including videos and social media, to highlight positive role models of social workers working in schools.

¹⁹ Defined as 'a supportive relationship, carried out in regular meetings, which focus on accountability, well-being and skill development. Through regular contacts, the supervisor provides coaching and encourages the supervisee to critically reflect on their practice. The ultimate aim of supervision is to improve the service to clients', in the Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection (2019), developed by the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and UNICEF.

5. Challenges and good practices in the region, identified in a regional consultation on the role of the SSW in schools²⁰

This online consultation followed the presentation of the original draft of the paper developed by the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance for UNICEF and ASEAN, 'Regional Guidance on Social Service Workforce Strengthening for Key Sectors to Strengthen the Multi-Sectoral Delivery of Social Services in ASEAN Member States'. It identified a range of challenges that are currently faced in efforts to plan, develop and support the role of social workers and other SSW in schools, as well as a few existing areas of good practice.

Challenges

- Social workers and other SSW in schools are not well recognised by other sectors, including the education sector, and there is a lack of trust as well as a lack of recognition of the SSW's value and role in schools.
- Social workers / SSW where they do work in schools are over-worked, with too many cases, because the ratio of numbers of SWs / SSW to the population is too low. As a result, they typically lack time to visit, work in, or link and coordinate their work with schools.
- Some countries have relevant legislation, or a ministerial decree (e.g. on supporting overall student well-being, helping them develop life skills, or for preventing violence in schools), but there is often a lack of awareness of these laws or decrees, and a lack of staff training, curriculum and classroom materials, or clear SOPs for identification, referral and multi-disciplinary child protection interventions.
- Teachers across the region often lack capacity and competencies identifying and referring cases, and if given these roles they will soon be overloaded, so some consulted felt the need to clearly delineate the role of SSW in schools from that of teaching staff.
- Teachers generally have not been trained in either psychology or social work, so they need to involve psychologists or social workers in a case if they detect the need for it.
- There is often a lack of ministerial coordination, with different ministries responsible for SSW and schools, but also different ministries responsible for certain types of school (e.g. religious or ethnic boarding schools).
- There are often poorly coordinated or overlapping reporting mechanisms at different levels when it comes to child protection in schools.
- In some ASEAN member states, most schools lack access to school counsellors. Since social workers are not usually trained therapists, their roles and responsibilities need to be really clear so that SSWs in schools are not misused for a primarily counselling role for which they are not trained, and which could lead to unintentional harm.

Examples of good practice in deploying, managing and supporting SSW in schools

When asked to summarise the main roles that SSW currently play in or linked to schools in their countries, and what is working well already, this regional consultation identified a few examples of specifically appointed school social workers, or other SSW, who are physically located in schools. The main examples given were of SSW linking with schools, including:

²⁰ This regional consultation took place as part of the ASEAN Inter-Sectoral Regional Conference on Strengthening Social Work and Implementing the ASEAN Road Map, 26-28 April 2022. In addition UNICEF EAPRO and select Country offices have provided reflections that contributed to the development of this guidance.

- **SSW visiting schools to do outreach work**, for example in the following countries:
 - » In **Malaysia**, social service workers working for NGOs come into schools for this, particularly targeting vulnerable communities, but it is up to the school to invite them to come in. At district level there are multi-agency child protection teams and child welfare teams (including education staff), though they mostly focus on preventive measures.
 - » In **Viet Nam**, SSW visit schools to raise awareness on prevention of child abuse.
 - » In **Lao PDR**, SSW join life skills training to address topics including marriage, pregnancy, school violence and drug abuse.
 - » In **Indonesia**, the SSW role in schools includes drug demand reduction, and prevention of bullying and child abuse.
 - » In **Singapore**, SSW are invited by schools to engage students who are not meaningfully engaged after school hours, to deliver talks and conduct campaigns to increase awareness on issues such as mental health, cyber safety and anti-drug messages.
- **SSW linking with schools to receive and coordinate referrals**, including when there are child protection concerns, including concerns about suspected violence against children. Examples include the following countries:
 - » In **Indonesia**, where schools are integrated with the child protection referral system.
 - » In **Malaysia**, where district Social Welfare Officers are contacted by the school if there are child protection concerns.
 - » In **Lao PDR**, SSW perform this role as part of school violence mediation committees, where issues of school dropout and school violence can be addressed, as per the Education Law. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Lao Women's Union have also developed an MoU with the Ministry of Education, which enabled them to exchange staff to develop a preventing violence in schools manual.
 - » In **Cambodia**, the Commune Committees for Women and Children, and District Social Workers, have played a crucial role in addressing issues concerning women and children. District Social Workers are in charge of referring children who have experienced violence, exploitation and abuse to social services, including through schools.
 - » In **the Philippines**, schools have a clear mandate and responsibilities for identification and referral of cases as part of the wider, integrated, child protection system; in this work, school guidance counsellors play a key role. In the community, the key members of the social service workforce that coordinate with schools in fulfilling this child protection function are child protection officers and youth development officers.
 - » In **Singapore**, there are clear protocols for schools to refer child protection concerns to relevant authorities and services.

There were also countries where, rather than deploying professional social workers or other SSW in schools, the government has focused on strengthening the role of existing school counsellors or psychologists to ensure they can meet all the care and protection needs of students. These members of staff are usually teachers by background, not social workers, who have received additional training and education to be counsellors or psychologists. Examples include:

- » In **Viet Nam**, school counsellors play an essential role in enhancing students' emotional, mental and physical well-being, and improving their academic performance. In a landmark policy development in 2023, the Government issued Circular 20/2023/TT-BGDDT to provide guidance on job positions, employee structure by professional title and number quotas. The circular provides guidance on the number of people working in education schools and public specialised schools. It introduces the new requirement for all primary and secondary education schools to have a school counsellor position, a



full-time staff providing psychosocial support for students. The school counsellor role includes acting as the focal point for provision of social services and child protection interventions in school. This guidance builds on the circular already issued by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2018, Circular No. 33/2018/TT-BGDDT, to guide the provision of social work in schools.

- » In **Thailand**, the role of school psychologist, or guidance teacher working as psychologist in the field of education, is well established and should be present in all schools, and there is also a long history of direct involvement of social workers in schools. It is mandatory for teachers to carry out home visits to each child enrolled in the school.
- » In **Malaysia**, the government has focused on enhancing the current role of existing staff including counsellors (Malaysian scenario) in schools. They have found that the advantage of this approach, over deploying professional social workers or other SSW in schools, is that it reduce costs, as the staff are already in school - a new post does not need to be introduced. It also avoids introducing a new reporting line to the staff structure, as these counsellors already report to the school leadership. However, a challenge can be ensuring these staff develop a sufficiently high level of specialisation to be able to deal with the more complex cases. These might be overlooked or not tackled adequately if staff are not trained and supported to deal with such cases.

6. Conclusions and summary of policy and planning recommendations

Professional social workers, and other members of the social service workforce in a variety of roles, can work effectively and achieve significant outcomes for their target populations through being physically located in or closely linked with the services provided in the community in other sectors, notably in schools. The benefits of doing so would not be achieved if the SSW remained based solely in social welfare settings and offices. These outcomes particularly result from addressing the social and behaviour determinants and drivers of key challenges facing these populations, which, as covered in this guidance, include ensuring inclusion of children with disabilities in school, supporting attendance and attainment at schools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, preventing school drop-out, in particular of girls, and supporting transition from primary to secondary levels of schooling.

These are more effective as a result of being more readily accessible in the school and community and offered earlier in the life of the problem, owing to early identification through coordinated multi-agency screening. The benefits of these services are also deeper and longer lasting since SSW can ensure that the inputs and interventions of multiple agencies are coordinated, and informal actors including volunteers, youth and civil society groups are identified and engaged in both early intervention and follow-up. These benefits can all be facilitated by supporting and recognising SSW in their key coordination role in assessing, planning, providing and reviewing integrated, holistic, child friendly, person-centred, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency services.

In order for the SSW to be able to perform these roles more effectively, including in schools, they need:

1. Recognition and definition in laws, regulations, practice standards and policies, which requires sustained advocacy to and engagement with policy makers.
2. Adequate long-term budgeting and resourcing, and strategic planning, to enable more sustainable physical deployment of social workers, school counsellors and other social service workers in schools, or more consistent and high quality linking of SSW with schools.
3. Specialist training on social work in schools, practice teaching in social work degree courses (including social work field placements in schools), and continuing professional development. Ideally this should be accompanied by content in pre- and in-service training for teachers which explains the role of SSW in schools and how teachers can work closely in cooperation with SSW to prevent and address violence and address issues of student wellbeing and mental health.
4. Wider professional and public support and recognition, which also increases both the supply of people interested in entering these professional roles, and demand and respect for these services by the general public, partner agencies and professionals making referrals. Participants in the 2022 regional online consultation noted that:
 - » School students and parents need awareness raising on role of SSW, how to raise and report concerns about risk to a child,²¹ and access help from the SSW, and young people should be involved in such advocacy efforts.

²¹ As an example of youth involvement in advocacy to raise issues of concern, see UNICEF's U-Report framework, 'Empowering and connecting young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them'.

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- » The value of SSW doing home visits to help reduce school drop-outs, needs to be made clear to education authorities, so they learn to value the input of SSW to schools.
 - 5. Professional supervision for SSW in schools by experienced social workers, as well as specialist coaching by experts in the specific field.
 - 6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning to ensure continued innovation and improvement, and evidence-based practice.
 - 7. Better cross-ministerial policy making, and inter-agency coordination at national, regional and district level.
 - 8. Community engagement to ensure that social work interventions are effective, culturally sensitive and aligned with local priorities. Building strong partnerships with community organisations can enhance the effectiveness of SSW initiatives.



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