

## **Solidarity and Support with Ukrainian Social Work Educators from the Schools of Social Work**

The people of Ukraine, including social work educators and staff of schools of social work, have been suffering from the Russian invasion since February 24, 2022. Ordinary life has become one of destruction and devastation of homes, infrastructure, and the entire living environment. People live in fear of losing their loved ones and each and every member of their country. Due to military attacks from the ground and air, over 15 million people have already been forced to leave their homes and have become internally displaced or refugees in other countries. Fear, loss, and an uncertain future are the common experiences of recent weeks. Thousands of people in Mariupol have been surviving in the occupied city for over three weeks without food, water, heating, or humanitarian aid. It is estimated that 150,000 people are still trapped in the city. Children, adults, elderly people from large and small cities, towns, villages are suffering and dying due to intensive bombing and shelling all over Ukraine, and acute humanitarian crisis in many towns and cities.

There are over 50 university-based social work programmes across Ukraine that offer bachelor and master's in social work degrees and some have doctoral studies. A number of us were part of an EU project that established social work education in Kyiv and Odessa between 1993 to 2000, and hence a number of the Ukrainian lecturers were known to us from the time they were social work students.

The Eastern European Subregional Association of Schools of Social Work, together with some IASSW and EASSW board members, contacted colleagues from the School of Social Work at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy immediately after the war began and organised first Zoom meeting of solidarity and support with social work academics from Ukraine. So far (31.3.2022) we have held six meetings attended by social work educators, professionals and NGO activists working with people with disabilities from different parts of Ukraine and international colleagues from Cyprus, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Kosovo, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and UK.

At the meetings, colleagues tell us about their daily lives under the war, the horrific stories of the attacks on humanitarian corridors and civilians, how they continue to teach social work, either through zoom or in the same buildings that become canteens and shelters in the evenings for those who have lost their homes. Most of social work educators are in constant contact with students, service recipients, families and parents of people with disabilities. They collect money, food, clothing and medicine to distribute to those in need.

The members of the international social work community are thus the silent witnesses of their daily struggle, attempting to respond to their immediate needs. So far, the colleagues asked us to provide psychological literature and training on psychological first aid, coping with stress and trauma, provide professional material on organising social services in times of war and humanitarian disasters, support them with co-teaching and co-supervision and with information on conditions in the various countries to which refugees are trying to reach. They also asked us to help breaking the chain of misinformation and fake news set up by the invaders. The letter to OCHA on the

urgent humanitarian situation was drafted and disseminated across the national social work associations to sign.

The commitment, energy, and courage of social work academics are tremendous as they provide support not only to families and friends, but also to social work students, communities, staff, and service users, while trying to maintain some sense of ordinary life by teaching via Zoom and communicating with policymakers and national and international journalists.

Each week we come together to show solidarity, support and friendship, and to learn from each other. As social work educators, we can form our own circles of help and support:

- Learn from the people directly affected by the war, according to the principles of social work starting where people are at and valuing their lived experiences and local knowledges.
- Sharing social work knowledge about responding to armed political conflicts and coping with the stresses these create to anyone in need of support.
- Sharing some “practice wisdom” (e.g., watch the news only once a day, go for a walk, exercise, socialise and cook together).
- Gather the right information about the situation in Ukraine and inform other people about what is going on.
- Aim to support the refugees from Ukraine who have come to our countries, ensuring support, advocacy and self-help initiatives or work with the Ukrainian diaspora in different parts of the world who are working to provide humanitarian aid.
- Connect to the Social Work for Peace initiative.
- Meeting people affected by war, inviting them to lunch, to a theatre play, or a concert to help them restore a sense of normalcy under extreme conditions.

We base our initiative of social work in solidarity and support with Ukraine activities on fundamental principles of human rights, and social work expertise in working during armed political conflicts. We do not forget the need to attend also to anti-racist social work principles, work with children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, gender-aware social work that addresses the special dangers that women face in wars, and social work ethical principles.

### **We ask IASSW members to support people in Ukraine and schools of social work in Ukraine. What can you do?**

- Pay IASSW membership for schools of social work and individual social work academics in Ukraine for 2022 and 2023.
- Collect donations and contact our colleagues (Prof. Oksana Boyko: [oksana.boyko@ukma.edu.ua](mailto:oksana.boyko@ukma.edu.ua); [boykoo@ukr.net](mailto:boykoo@ukr.net); Raisa Kravchenko: [vgo.coalition@gmail.com](mailto:vgo.coalition@gmail.com)) to get addresses or organisations that work directly with the people on the ground and give the money and materials to the families.
- Consider showing solidarity with Ukrainian colleagues, such as involving your students or and/colleagues in writing proposals for scholarships for social work students and social work scholars at risk, for projects, and solidarity events.
- Spread the word and take action to stop the war.
- Start to teach on social work in armed political conflicts on a regular basis as an integral part of social work education.

#InSolidaritywithUkraine

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President of the Eastern European Subregional Association of Schools of Social  
Work

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