

## Editorial

### 100 years of Social Work: Global Discussions and Perspectives on the Discipline’s Past, Present and Future

The ninth issue of the Revista Propuesta Críticas en Trabajo Social is published a few days before the commemoration of the centenary of Social Work in Chile and Latin America, and this is not accidental but an explicit act to commemorate a significant event for Social Work at a global level.

In Chile, on 4 May 1925, 42 “girls” and “ladies” began their social service studies at the School of Social Service under the Junta de Beneficencia, as described by Leo Cordemans (1927b, p.113-114) in his paper presented at the National Conference of Social Service, and published in full in the journal Servicio Social.

The Santiago School of Social Service was the first school founded in Latin America, and the entry of this group of women not only inaugurated a new profession but also instilled and strengthened a social and political movement that was fighting for women’s rights at the time. Many would have pursued higher education in various feminised professions, including new careers such as Social Service (Zárate and del Campo, 2021).

This global movement also includes other countries, as this table presented in the first issue of the Social Service Journal shows.

EN EUROPA:	
Alemania. . . . .	31
Gran Bretaña. . . . .	10
Bélgica. . . . .	8
Francia. . . . .	4
Países Bajos. . . . .	4
Austria. . . . .	3
Suecia. . . . .	3
Suiza. . . . .	3
Finlandia. . . . .	2
Polonia. . . . .	1
Italia. . . . .	1
Tchecoslovaquia. . . . .	1
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EN AMÉRICA:	... 71
Estados Unidos. . . . .	23
Canadá. . . . .	1
Chile. . . . .	1
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Total. . . . .	... 25

96 Source: Cordemans (1927a, p.9).



Some of these were social service schools attached to the university, like the schools in Anglo-Saxon countries, while others were independent schools, like those founded in Chile in 1925 and then in 1929. This same model was followed by the Escuela del Museo Social Argentino (1930), highlighting the innovative character of these projects.

One hundred years later, we commemorate this event and acknowledge the changes experienced in this profession and discipline, one of Latin America's oldest social sciences. In this ninth issue, we have sought to highlight nine changes that social work faces today concerning its foundational elements and that constitute challenges for the next century:

- 1) A change of name, where social service is replaced by social work, paraphrasing Durkheim in his doctoral thesis (1987) (originally published in 1893), and which accounts for structural and societal aspects of a discipline that recognises its origins and research influences, but also changes in approaches and ways of understanding the individual-society relationship, dynamising its social identity over time.
- 2) A change of institutional frameworks, where this project is inscribed, going from more independent schools to departments or schools fully incorporated into the structure of higher education institutions in their faculties, such as in Argentina or Brazil with the faculties of social work.
- 3) The first school founded in Santiago was followed by the creation of other schools in Latin America due to the demand for social visitors and, later, social workers. The graduates of the Alejandro del Rio School played a special role in this task, contributing to the founding of schools in the cities of Mendoza, Argentina, as well as in Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador and Ecuador (Solis, 1985). Today, in Chile, the number of institutions offering social work courses exceeds 40 universities, distributed from Arica to Punta Arenas (Servicio de Información de Educación Superior, 2024).
- 4) A career exclusively for women (Deegan, 2001), which after the first quarter of a century began to progressively incorporate men (1952), with special entry modalities for the under-represented gender, in a movement towards gender equality.
- 5) An extension of the years of study, from 2 years (divided into 4 semesters) in 1925, with theoretical courses and practical work, towards an undergraduate education reaching, in formal terms, 9.5 semesters, with continuation of studies at postgraduate level.
- 6) An increase in enrolment, from 42 people in the first year of 1925 to more than 2331



- students enrolled in the first year of social work in Chilean universities (SIES, 2024).
- 7) A training that initially had no specialisations but which soon identified fields of study such as childhood, school service, hospital care and industry (Cordemans, 1927b), and which today takes on other facets and global challenges, such as international social work, social work and the environment, disaster contexts, among others.
  - 8) A graduation paper consisting of a social thesis, presented to a jury and based on the experiences acquired during their stays and corroborated by appropriate readings (Cordemans, 1927b, p.119-120), to a monographic type of graduation paper, linked to experiences, research and/or intervention, which gives rise to diverse products differentiated by schools and intuitions that award professional degrees (Rubilar, 2022).
  - 9) A Social Service journal created in 1927 with the purpose of “serving as a link between all those interested in social issues” (Cordemans, 1927b, p.120) to a multiplicity of journals and dissemination media (Muñoz et al., 2021), some of them under the auspices of universities or study centres, publishing houses or companies responsible for the dissemination of the knowledge produced. In Chile in 2024, 11 disciplinary journals were attached to universities, and one journal published by the Professional Association was registered (Red de Investigación Trabajo Social, 2025).

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With these nine distinctions, we invite you to review eight articles that make up this ninth issue. These include retrospective research and analysis and critical readings about the profession’s past and the identity of the pioneers, contained in three papers: an analytical proposal of historical memory by Ingrid Álvarez (Chile), a review of the production of knowledge from two complementary approaches by Claudia Bermúdez (Colombia), and the article by Margarita Rozas (Argentina) and Camila Véliz (Chile), in a clear interdisciplinary dialogue.

Also included in this issue are debates on the reform processes that the discipline underwent in the 1960s and 1970s, around the movement known as the reconceptualisation of Social Work, contained in the article by Renzo Tiberi (Argentina). In this conceptual approach, two other articles are published that discuss the denaturalisation of the notion of social intervention, based on the contributions of Juan Saavedra (Chile), which is complemented by the article prepared by a team of researchers led by Ronald Zurita (Chile), who develop a bibliometric analysis of the scientific production generated under these names.

The disputed approaches and issues that challenge social work in past, present and future schemes are present in the article by Paul Garret (Ireland) and the review of his book at the end of this issue. Also included in this issue is a review of the Magister in



Social Work research production carried out by Tania Kruger (Brazil) in the framework of a programme of internships and regional mobilities.

This special 100th-anniversary issue opens with a greeting from James Midgley (USA), Dean Emeritus of the University of California, Berkeley, who explicitly links social work and social policy, highlighting the links between different social work traditions and their international reach.

Finally, this issue includes the complete publication of the first part of an unpublished interview conducted in 2011 by Teresa López Vásquez (deceased in 2023) with Professor Teresa Quiróz Martín (deceased in 2019). The transcription of this conversation allows us to remember and honour two significant social work personalities with an international imprint that recognises their legacy today. This interview and other materials are part of the Teresa López Vásquez Fund, donated by her family to the University of Chile (2025). The second part of the interview will be published in the tenth issue. This fund has been made possible thanks to the contributions of the ANID/CONICYT/FONDECYT 1230605 project, for which we thank you for your contribution to the disciplinary memory.

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As an editorial team, we hope that the works and approaches presented in this issue will contribute to critical thinking, contribute to memory and allow us to illustrate, even if only briefly, some elements of the trajectory of a century-old discipline; we look forward to seeing you in the following journal issue, which emphasises perspective views on the future of social work and its transformations, the identification of emerging contexts and new professional fields, and the challenges of training in contexts of transformation and change.

**Gabriela Rubilar**

Editor-in-Chief Magazine



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