

Social Work Professionalization

Comparison of Laws in Selected ASEAN Countries

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History and progress of social work



This paper provides a comparative analysis of social work professionalization in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. By examining the different approaches across the countries, Malaysia's policymakers will have examples of practices that have been effective elsewhere and adopt these to suit the context of Malaysia.



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Part 1

Introduction

Over the last decade, the Government of Malaysia has achieved much progress towards strengthening the social service workforce, as evidenced by the National Competency Standards for Social Work Practice (2010), the creation of the Malaysian Social Work Profession Council, the Mapping of the Social Service Workforce in Child Protection (2022) and the drafting of the Social Work Profession Bill. The Government also signalled its commitment to implementing a holistic and comprehensive approach to social service workforce strengthening by signing the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community, and the accompanying Roadmap (ASEAN Roadmap for the implementation of the Ha Noi Declaration).

Drafting the Social Work Profession Bill is a milestone towards formally recognizing and regulating social work as a profession. Although efforts to advance the Social Work Profession Bill have been ongoing since 2010, it has not yet been tabled in Parliament. This legislation is crucial for establishing professional standards, ensuring proper training, and safeguarding public safety. It seeks to enhance social services, particularly for vulnerable groups, and will provide legal recognition and support for social workers, thereby improving their capacity to deliver high-quality services.

This paper provides a comparative analysis of social work professionalization in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. By examining the different approaches across the countries, policymakers will have examples of practices that have been effective elsewhere and adopt these to suit the context of Malaysia.



ASEAN regional efforts in professionalizing social work

ASEAN nations have made significant progress in strengthening social work, highlighted by the 2020 Ha Noi Declaration, which outlines 11 essential steps for enhancing the social service workforce, including developing legislation to define social workers' roles (in collaboration with potential partners such as professional associations, UN agencies, CSOs, iNGOs), creating strategic plans for workforce strengthening, standardizing accreditation systems, promoting national professional associations, and working towards regional professional recognition. This progress is further supported by the establishment of the ASEAN Social Work Consortium in 2011, which fosters formal recognition of the profession, facilitates the exchange of ideas and resources, and builds partnerships for research and capacity-building; and the ASEAN Social Work Journal, published by the Indonesian Social Work Consortium, which provides a platform for sharing research and best practices to address challenges in social welfare policies across the region.



1.1 What is a law on the social work profession?

The purpose of a law on social work is to recognize social work as a profession, to regulate the professional qualifications of social workers, and to establish and enforce standards of practice for social workers to ensure quality service delivery. Social work laws usually include:

- a definition of “social work” and “social worker”.
- establishment of a governing / regulatory body for the social work profession.
- designation of an authority responsible for developing practice standards and a code of professional ethics for social workers.
- standardized qualifications required to be a social worker.
- process for registering and licensing social workers, managing complaints, and revoking licenses for ethical breaches or other misconduct.

Laws on the social work profession generally do not regulate the responsibilities and activities of social

workers in a specific area of expertise, such as social work with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the justice system, health care and mental health.

Instead, the mandate, authority and functions of social workers in each field are addressed under issue-specific laws (such as the Child Act 2001). However, a law on the social work profession is essential foundational legislation that provides the legal framework for the progressive professionalization of social work.

1.2 Rationale for a social work law

Social workers are on the front line of service delivery, dealing with the most pressing social issues facing Malaysia's society today, including violence against children, crime and juvenile delinquency, family violence, drug and alcohol addiction, vulnerable elderly and persons with disabilities, poverty, and the widening gap between rich and poor. Social service workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental, professionals and para-professionals – commonly work across a spectrum of social welfare, social protection, child protection, education, health and justice positions.

International experience¹ shows that:

- A well-planned and recognized cadre of social workers is central to effectively delivering prevention and response services that assist children, families and marginalized or vulnerable groups. Social workers play an essential role in communities by identifying people at risk of harm and facilitating access to appropriate social services.
- Social work is critical to reducing poverty and can directly and positively impact vulnerable families and individuals by ensuring access to vital social assistance programmes and services.
- In particular, the most critical element of a well-functioning child protection system is a strong social service workforce with a clear mandate, appropriate resources and relevant training and supervision. A well-planned, trained and supported social service workforce plays a vital role in identifying, preventing and managing risks to children, responding to situations of vulnerability and harm, and assisting children and families to recover from emergencies and crises.
- Lack of investment in the social service workforce undermines all other efforts to build or strengthen a sustainable system, including enforcement and implementation of policies and laws, operability and effectiveness of case management systems, and service delivery.

The lack of recognition for social work in Malaysia significantly impacts the quality of services in several ways:

- **Absence of qualified professionals:** Without legal recognition and regulation, there is a shortage of properly trained social workers in critical settings like hospitals, schools and social welfare departments. This absence hinders proper treatment and follow-up for those in need.
- **Unregulated practice:** Anyone can call themselves a social worker without legitimate qualifications or training, potentially leading to substandard or inappropriate care for vulnerable individuals.

- **Lack of professional development:** Without recognition, social workers have limited opportunities for continuous professional development, which is crucial for staying updated on best practices and emerging social issues.
- **Reduced public trust:** The lack of a regulatory framework makes it difficult for the public to distinguish between qualified social workers and those without proper training, potentially eroding trust in social services.
- **Delayed case handling:** Government welfare officers, who are often not recognized as professional social workers, may face bureaucratic processes and short deadlines, leading to delays in handling and settling cases.
- **Misconceptions about the role:** Many people, including other professionals, do not understand what social workers do, often confusing social work with charity. This misunderstanding can lead to inappropriate expectations and undervaluation of social services.
- **Limited career options and remuneration:** The lack of professional status often results in inadequate pay and limited career advancement opportunities, leading to disillusionment among social workers and potentially driving qualified individuals away from the profession.
- **Inconsistent service quality:** The lack of standardized practices and professional oversight can lead to inconsistent quality of services provided across different settings and regions.

The passage of the Social Work Profession Bill is seen as a crucial step to addressing these issues by providing legal recognition, establishing professional standards, ensuring proper training and qualifications, and improving the quality and consistency of social services for vulnerable populations in Malaysia.

Globally and in the Southeast Asia region, countries that have made the most progress in strengthening the social service workforce have developed a strong foundation of laws and policies to govern the social work profession. Regulating social work is increasingly

1 Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (GSSWA) Framework for Strengthening the Social Service Workforce; UNICEF and GSSWA (2019) Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Service Workforce for Child Protection; Huebner, G. (2016) A Review of Legislation and Policies that Support the Social Service Workforce in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries, Global Social Services Workforce Alliance; GSSWA The State of the Social Service Workforce Reports 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

seen as an essential step towards enhancing the status and effectiveness of the profession, defining and enforcing ethical practice, and promoting the interests of both social workers and their clients.² In Malaysia, having a law on the social work profession would improve the quality and effectiveness of social services by ensuring:

- 1. Professional recognition and status:** The Social Work Profession Bill would legally recognize social work as a profession, elevating the status of social workers and reinforcing public trust in their services. This recognition aligns Malaysia with other ASEAN countries that regulate the profession, such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia.
- 2. Regulation and standards:** The bill would establish an independent regulatory body to ensure the quality and standards of social work practice. This includes setting minimum education qualifications and ongoing professional development requirements for social workers, ensuring that practitioners are adequately trained and qualified.
- 3. Protection of clients and beneficiaries:** The bill would protect social service beneficiaries by ensuring that social workers adhere to the highest professional standards. This includes creating awareness among the public about what to expect from professional social workers and ensuring that social workers are accountable for their actions.
- 4. Enhanced training and resources:** The bill would outline the required adequate resources, training, and support for social workers, enabling them to deliver higher-quality services. This would address the current issues of inadequate training and a lack of professional development opportunities.
- 5. Improved service delivery:** Legal recognition and regulation would ensure that only qualified individuals practice social work, improving the consistency and quality of services. This would help deliver proper treatment and follow-up for those in need, particularly in critical settings like hospitals, schools, and social welfare departments.
- 6. Career development and remuneration:** The bill would enable proper remuneration and career development opportunities for social workers, making the profession more attractive and sustainable. This could help retain dedicated individuals in the field and reduce social work graduates moving overseas.
- 7. Public safety and accountability:** The bill would include provisions for mandatory registration and licensing of social workers, which would enhance accountability and protect the public from unqualified practitioners. This regulatory framework would ensure that social workers meet professional standards and are held accountable for their practice.

How a law on the social work profession improves social services



Overall, the Social Work Profession Bill aims to create a comprehensive framework for the social work profession in Malaysia, ultimately benefiting the most vulnerable populations by ensuring high-quality, effective social services. The law will also contribute to achieving several core pillars for improving the social service workforce agreed to by the Government under the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community, specifically:

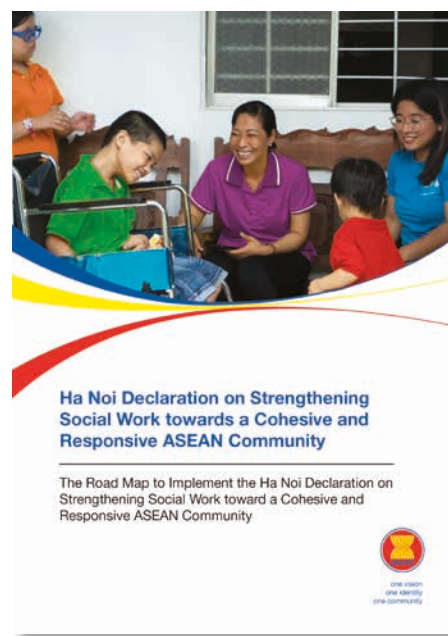
Pillar 1 *Develop and strengthen legislation and policies on social work, including defining, reinforcing and enhancing the roles and functions of social workers, validate and create (if any) social work positions in social welfare, health, education and justice systems covering the areas of prevention, response, and rehabilitation at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Such legislation and policies are aimed at addressing professional practice gaps, enhancing professionalization and competencies, promoting standards and accountability, increasing efficiency and effectiveness.*

Pillar 3 *Adopt, standardize and strengthen accreditation, certification, registration and licensing systems for social workers and para-social workers...*

Pillar 5 *Promote the establishment of national associations or councils of social workers, support collaboration with professional associations or councils, both government and non-government...*

As well as the accompanying Road Map to Implement the Ha Noi Declaration, which further commits to:

1.3 *Develop and adopt legislation specific to the profession of social work, which also recognizes and underpins the wider social service workforce. Ensure that laws in other sectors also define the roles, responsibilities, and requirements of social work in that sector, where applicable. Where relevant legislation is already in place, member states are encouraged to review and, where necessary, amend existing laws to ensure their relevance to current realities of social work and the social service workforce development in the country.*



1.4 *Develop or strengthen relevant secondary legislation and policy for social work. At a minimum, this includes:*

- *Regulations, minimum standards and standard operating procedures for social workers and related workforce in different roles and settings.*
- *Regulations on roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals and mechanisms for their supervision, where possible, by professional social workers.*

Developing legislation such as the Social Work Profession Bill is ideally done through a consultative process that engages various stakeholders to ensure that the laws are comprehensive and representative of the community's needs. The Malaysian Association of Social Workers, along with other professional bodies, plays a crucial role in the professionalization of social work by advocating for policies that align with international standards and participating in the legislative process to ensure that social work practices are effectively regulated and recognized. These organizations are essential in facilitating dialogue between the Government and social workers, ensuring that the legislation reflects the practical realities and challenges social workers face in the field.



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Part 2

Comparative analysis (Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore)

This section provides a comparative analysis of social work professionalization laws across the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore, focusing on key domains such as legislation, regulatory and governing bodies for the social work profession, registration and licensing (qualification requirements), complaints and disciplinary procedures, and requirements for continuing education and professional development.

Social work professionalization laws: key domains



Legislation



Regulatory and governing bodies for the social work profession



Registration and licensing (qualification requirements)



Complaints and disciplinary procedures



Requirements for continuing education / professional development

The purpose of a law on social work is to recognize social work as a profession, to regulate the professional qualifications of social workers, and to establish and enforce standards of practice for social workers to ensure quality service delivery.



2.1 Legislation

In the context of professionalizing social work within the region, several national legislations and regulations play crucial roles:



Philippines

1. **Social Work Act of 1965 (Republic Act No. 4373):** This established the social work profession in the Philippines and created the Board of Social Work under the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC).
2. **Magna Carta for Public Social Workers 2007 (Republic Act No. 9433):** The Magna Carta gives legal rights and privileges to public social workers, including detailed information about employment conditions and salaries. It also gives legal force to ethical standards set by the profession.
3. **Regulating Sundry Provisions Relative to the Practice of Social Work Act 2016 (Republic Act No. 10847):** This Act lowered the age requirement from 21 to 18 for applicants taking the board examination for social workers, providing for continuing social work education and upgrading the sundry provisions relative to the practice of social work.
4. **Continuing Professional Development Act 2016 (Republic Act No. 10921):** This act requires CPD as a mandatory requirement for the renewal of Professional Licenses (Identification Cards) for all regulating professions including Social Workers.



Thailand

1. **Criminal Procedure Amendment Act (No. 20) (1999)** clearly mentions the mandate of social workers in the interviewing of those who are under 18 years of age in criminal procedures.

2. **Social Welfare Promotion Act 2003 (B.E.2546):**

The Act defined social welfare in Thailand as systems, mechanisms and actions to address social problems and improve quality of life covering areas such as education, health, housing, employment, recreation and judicial process. This law established a framework for social welfare provision in Thailand. It provided a legal foundation for social work practice as social workers play a crucial role in implementing the Act's provisions.

3. **Social Work Profession Act 2013 (B.E.2556):**

This legislation formally recognizes social work as a profession and establishes a framework for registering social workers under the new act. The passage of this law was an important milestone for the social work field in Thailand, providing official recognition and standards for the profession.



Indonesia

1. **Social Welfare Law No. 11/2009:** This law regulates social welfare services in Indonesia, which includes the framework for social work practice. It outlines the qualifications, responsibilities and ethical standards for social workers.
2. **Law on Social Worker (Undang-Udang tentang Pekerja Sosial) No. 14/2019:** This law specifically focuses on social work and provides a legal framework for its practice and regulation in Indonesia.



Singapore

While there is no single comprehensive law specifically for social workers in Singapore, social workers are guided by various laws and regulations governing health and human services more broadly, which impact their practice. These include:

1. **Accreditation System for Social Workers and Social Service Practitioners 2009:** This system, launched jointly by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, National Council of Social Service, and Singapore Association of Social Workers, establishes a framework for professional accreditation in social work. It aims to ensure professional standards,

promote continuing education, groom leaders, and improve the professional image of social workers in Singapore.

2. **Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) 1993:** This act provides for the care, protection, and rehabilitation of children and young persons. It outlines the responsibilities of social workers in handling cases involving children and young persons who need care or protection.
3. **Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2010:** This act governs the decision-making process for individuals who lack the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves. Social workers may assess mental capacity and support individuals and their families in decision-making processes.
4. **Women's Charter 1961:** This legislation aims to protect and promote the rights of women and families in Singapore. It includes provisions related to family violence, maintenance, and the welfare of children, which social workers may need to address in their practice.
5. **Vulnerable Adults Act (VAA) 2018:** This act protects vulnerable adults who are unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or self-neglect. Social workers are crucial in identifying and intervening in cases involving vulnerable adults.
6. **Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act 2010:** This act regulates the admission, detention, care and treatment of individuals with mental health conditions. Under this act, social workers may be

involved in the care and support of individuals with mental health issues.

7. **Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2012:** This act governs the collection, use and disclosure of personal data in Singapore. Social workers must ensure that they handle clients' personal data in compliance with the PDPA.
8. **Employment Act 1968:** This act regulates the employment conditions and rights of workers in Singapore. Social workers working in employment-related services must be familiar with the provisions of this act.
9. **Workplace Safety and Health Act 2006:** This act aims to ensure the safety and health of employees at work. Social workers in occupational social work or employee assistance programmes must know this legislation.

There is no statutory definition of social work in Singapore. However, these laws and policies, along with the Code of Professional Ethics and the National Social Work Competency Framework (NSWCF) established by the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), provide a regulatory framework that guides the practice of social workers in Singapore. Social workers are seen as an integral part of the social service workforce in Singapore, focusing on social justice and advocacy with solid support from the state to promote professional standards and recognition.

Table 1: Social work legislation in each country

Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Work Act (1965) 2. Magna Carta for Public Social Workers (2007) 3. Regulating Sundry Provisions Relative to the Practice of Social Work Act (2016) 4. Continuing Professional Development Act (2016) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Welfare Promotion Act (2003) 2. Social Work Profession Act (2013) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Welfare Law (2009) 2. Law on Social Worker (2019) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is no single comprehensive law specifically for social workers. 2. Accreditation system (2009)



2.2 Regulatory and governing bodies for the social work profession

Professional associations typically manage the governance of the social work profession though the structure of these organizations can vary. Social worker associations enhance social work's professional identity, visibility, growth and development. They are generally independent, non-government bodies run by and for their members, funded by member fees and dues. The main functions of these social worker associations are usually to:

- raise the profile of social workers and promote public understanding of the profession.
- foster professional identity and cohesion.
- develop a professional code of ethics and standards of practice for social workers.
- promote professional development and continuing education.
- act as a regulatory or licensing body (in some countries).
- advocate on behalf of the profession; and
- promote international collaboration and experience sharing with other social work associations.

Establishing a social worker association is a common strategy used by countries to support and promote the profession's development. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), a global network of social work associations, has 141 country members worldwide.³ Under the IFSW, five regional groups are organized: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the

Caribbean, and North America. Each group focuses on regional social work issues and development initiatives.

Associations are typically governed by laws and regulations. However, in Malaysia, the national social worker association, the Malaysian Association of Social Workers, was established independently by social work professionals without clear recognition under the law.

Giving legal recognition to the association under the law would help to strengthen its mandate, visibility, and credibility. Although social workers are a self-governing profession, a law would give the social work association authority to develop a code of ethics and practice standards and to register and license social workers. However, more commonly, a separate licensing Board or Council performs the function of licensing and registration of social workers.

In the Philippines, for example, the Board is made up solely of social work practitioners, whilst in Thailand, the Board includes a mix of social work practitioners and Government representatives. In Indonesia, an independent social worker organization, the Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI), is responsible for developing professional standards and issuing registration certificates. In Singapore, there is no state-mandated licensing of social workers through law; however, the Singapore Association acts as a regulatory body and maintains a register of licensed professionals through its accreditation system. The Accreditation System is overseen by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB) which is appointed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development. It is administered by the Accreditation Secretariat of the Singapore Association. The current chairman for the SWAAB is the Director-General of Social Welfare and the board is also made up of social work practitioners.

Social worker associations enhance social work's professional identity, visibility, growth and development.

3 International Federation of Social Workers (ifsw.org)

Table 2: Regulatory body types and funding sources

	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore
Regulatory body	Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers (PRBSW)	Social Work Professions Council	Ikatan Pekerja Sosial Profesional Indonesia – Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI)	Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board
Governance	Operates under the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC)	Operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security	Fully independent	Maintained by the Singapore Association of Social Workers (1971)
Established	1965	2013	2008	2009
Type	Board	Council	Association	Board
Members/staff	Social work practitioners	A mix of social work practitioners and government representatives	Social work practitioners	Social work practitioners (with the chair being from the government)
Funding source	Full government funding through the Public Regulatory Commission	Government subsidies, licensing fees paid by social workers, and income generated from other sources	Membership and registration fees paid by social workers	Government allocations and co-contributions from SASW obtained mainly from income generated from operating their training centre



In the Philippines, the regulatory body for social work is structured under the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), with specific oversight and regulatory functions delegated to the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers (PRBSW). This structure ensures that social work practice in the Philippines meets established standards of competence,

ethics and professionalism, thereby safeguarding the interests of practitioners and the public they serve. The regulatory body has several key roles and responsibilities to ensure social workers' competency, ethical conduct and professional standards.

Overall, the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers plays a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of social work practice in the Philippines. Through its regulatory functions, it supports the professional growth



Philippines Republic Act No. 4373

The Philippines' law, as amended by Republic Act 10847, established the

Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers, which is under the administrative control and supervision of the Professional Regulation Commission. It is composed of a chairperson and four members who the President of the Philippines appoints from a list of three nominees submitted by the Accredited and Integrated Professional Organizations (AIPO). The Act says the functions and duties of the Board include:

- to issue, suspend and revoke registration certificates for social work practice.
- to investigate the conditions affecting the practice of social work in the Philippines and, whenever necessary, adopt such measures as may be deemed proper for the maintenance of the good standing and the ethics of the profession of social work; and
- to investigate violations of the Act or its rules and regulations, including authority to issue subpoenas to secure the appearances of witnesses and the production of documents.
- subject to the approval of the President and with the advice of the Commissioner of Civil Service,

to set ethical and professional standards for the practice of social work in general and adopt rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Regulations issued under the Act further state that the Board is responsible for:

- maintaining a roster of social workers.
- prescribing a Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Social Work.
- prescribing the subjects in the Social Work Licensure Examination, construct test questions, score and rate examination papers.
- prescribing guidelines and criteria for continuing professional development programmes for social work.
- hearing and investigating any violation of the Act, regulations, the Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Social Work.

The law says that as compensation, the chairman and members of the Board are entitled to a specified sum for each applicant examined.

and development of social workers while safeguarding the public interest.

The PRBSW is fully funded by the government, which is essential for its operations and regulatory functions. This funding is typically allocated through the PRC's annual budget, which is submitted and approved by the Department of Budget and Management in the Philippine Congress. The funding and income sources of the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers (PRBSW) in the Philippines are primarily derived from government allocations, as they are part of the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), which falls under the Department of Labour and Employment. In

terms of running costs of the PRBSW these are shared as part of the Department of Labour and Employment so precise running costs are unattainable. However, the board members receive a salary rating for all government employees at a grade level of 28.⁴

Outside of their regular operations and functions, the board has some instances where it has other commitments with partners and receives contributions from private individuals. For example, for their social responsibility programme, the board has received contributions through material, labour or expertise from social work professionals.⁵

4 Interview with PRBSW board members August 2024.

5 Interview with PRBSW board members August 2024.

The PRC is also authorized to collect fees for examination, registration, certification and other miscellaneous fees as approved by law, which shall be deposited into the Bureau of the Treasury account and recorded as income in the National Government books. For example, the PRC collects fees for:

- **Registration and licensing:** The PRC collects fees from individuals and organizations seeking registration and licensing to practice social work. This includes fees for examinations, renewals, and other administrative services related to regulating social work agencies and practitioners.
- **Continuing professional development (CPD):** The PRC collects fees related to CPD, including the application for accreditation as a CPD provider, CPD programmes and self-directed learning. For instance, local CPD providers pay a fee of P5,000 for accreditation, CPD programmes cost P1,000 per offering, and self-directed learning is P500 per application.⁶ Registered social workers are required to complete CPD courses to maintain

their licenses. The fees collected from these courses contribute to the board's income, as local government units (LGUs) and employer organizations are mandated to support the professional development of social workers, which may include funding for CPD activities.

- **Accreditation:** Organizations that wish to be accredited as social work agencies must pay fees associated with the accreditation process. This includes assessments and evaluations conducted by the board to ensure compliance with established standards.

In the Philippines, the law formally recognizes the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers under the Professional Regulation Commission. It requires all registered social workers to become members of the Accredited and Integrated Professional Organizations (AIPO), which is currently the Philippine Association of Social Workers, Inc. (PASWI).

In the Philippines, social workers can be members of multiple professional associations. Several organizations cater to social workers, each focusing on different aspects of the profession. However, these associations are not currently considered AIPO, and therefore, membership is not compulsory under the law.

The main organizations are:

- National Association of Social Work Education, Inc. (NASWEI)
- Association of Local Social Welfare and Development Officers of the Philippines, Inc. (ALSWDOPI)
- Association of Medical Social Workers of the Philippines, Inc. (AMSWPI)
- Philippine Association of Court Social Workers, Inc. (PACSWI)
- National Council of Social Development, Inc. (NCSD)

These associations collectively work to promote the professional development of social workers, advocate for social justice, and improve social welfare services in the Philippines.



Philippines Republic Act 10847, Amending Republic Act No. 4373

SEC. 27. Integration of the Social Work Profession: "All registered and licensed social workers shall be united and integrated into one national organization, which shall be accredited by the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers, subject to the approval of the Professional Regulation Commission, as the AIPO for social workers. All registered and licensed social workers shall become members of the AIPO and shall consequently be entitled to all the benefits and privileges incidental thereto upon payment of the required fees and dues. Membership in the AIPO shall not be a bar to membership in any other professional organization."

⁶ CPD FAQs retrieved from <https://www.prc.gov.ph/sites/default/files/CPD-FAQs-2020.pdf>

Additionally, there is the Social Work Management and Consultative Council, which includes representatives from various government departments and social work organizations and plays a role in overseeing the welfare and development of public social workers as mandated by Republic Act No. 9433, also known as the “Magna Carta for Public Social Workers”.

It operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, with an executive board made up of representatives from government agencies, the Thailand Association of Social Workers, higher education institution and social work professionals.

The Social Work Professions Council in Thailand typically includes the following components and functions:



In Thailand, the Thai Association of Social Workers was established in 1958 as an independent professional governing body to represent and advocate on behalf of professional social workers. The Law on Social Work Professions in 2013 established the Social Work Professions Council to represent and regulate the profession. It is the central regulatory authority overseeing the profession of social work in Thailand.

- **Regulatory functions:** The Council regulates social work practice by setting standards for education, qualifications and professional conduct. It also oversees the registration and licensing of social workers to ensure they meet established criteria.
- **Policy development:** The Council develops policies and guidelines for social work practice, ethical standards and professional development. It works to align these policies with national priorities and objectives in social welfare and development.



Thailand Social Work Profession Act, B.E. 2013

The law established the Social Work Professions Council as a legal entity with the following powers and duties:

- to register and issue a license to a person applying to be a social work professional.
- to specify standards of practice for social workers.
- to issue orders punishing a social worker for acts contrary to social work standards and ethics.
- to promote the education, training and research on the social work profession.
- to certify diplomas of different institutes as meeting the qualifications needed to be licensed as a social worker.
- to provide an opinion and recommendation relating to preparing the social work education curriculum in the higher education level of an educational institute.

- to maintain the honour, right, fairness and to promote progress in the social work profession, unity and welfare for members; and
- to be a representative of social work profession practitioner of Thailand.

The law says the Council may obtain income from the State budget, registration fees from members, and donations. The work of the Council is managed and executed by the Social Work Profession Council Board, which consists of representatives from specified government ministries (defence, social development and human security, interior, justice, labour, education, public health), as well as representatives from the Royal Thai Police Headquarters, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Thailand Association of Social Workers, two representatives from higher educational institutions, four NGO representatives, and 16 ordinary members of the Council elected by members.

- **Enforcement and oversight:** The Council monitors registered social workers' compliance with regulatory requirements. It investigates complaints and takes disciplinary action against practitioners found violating ethical standards or professional conduct guidelines.

To support its functions, the Council of Social Work in Thailand employs various mechanisms:

- **Committees and working groups:** These are established to focus on specific areas such as ethics, licensing, CPD and standards development.
- **Training and capacity building:** The Council may organize training programmes, workshops and seminars to enhance social workers' and stakeholders' skills and knowledge.
- **Collaboration with stakeholders:** The Council collaborates with government agencies, academic institutions, professional associations, and civil society organizations to promote the development and advancement of the social work profession.

The Council of Social Work is funded through subsidies from the Government's annual budget⁷, registration fees paid by social workers, private donations, and income generated from examinations, training courses and/or seminars. These funds support the annual operational expenses, regulatory activities and initiatives undertaken by the Council⁸ to promote the professionalization of social work in Thailand. At the same time, the Council recognizes the necessity of securing adequate financial resources for future needs to ensure the sustainability of its operations and services over time.⁹



Indonesia

The regulatory and governing body for social work in Indonesia is the Ikatan Pekerja Sosial Profesional Indonesia – the Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI). Established in 2008 by Indonesian social workers, IPSPI is an independent, self-reliant, and legally incorporated organization responsible for improving its members' competence, career, protection and welfare.¹⁰ It collaborates with domestic and international institutions, joining the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 2011 to participate in global discussions and bring international perspectives to Indonesian social work practice.¹¹

The Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI) plays a critical role in regulating and supporting the social work profession in Indonesia. The key role and responsibilities of IPSPI are:

- **Formulation and enforcement of a Code of Ethics:** IPSPI is responsible for establishing and enforcing a code of ethics that all social workers in Indonesia must adhere to.
- **Certification and registration:** The organization certifies social workers, administers the professional oath and issues registrations for social workers. This ensures that all practising social workers meet the necessary qualifications and standards.
- **Supervision and regulation:** IPSPI supervises social work practice, ensuring that social workers comply with professional standards and ethical guidelines. It also has the authority to impose sanctions for violations.
- **Professional development:** The association provides legal assistance, guidance and professional development opportunities for its members. This includes training, seminars and other activities aimed at improving social workers' skills and knowledge.

7 From inception, the Social Work Professions Council received THB 4 million from the annual government budget, however after the COVID pandemic this subsidy was reduced to THB 2 million annually.

8 The Social Work Professions Council annual expenses equate to approximately THB 3 million per year.

9 The Social Work Professional Council has accumulated a target of THB 22 million to achieve this sustainability goal.

10 Indonesian Social Worker Association || IPSPI – Ikatan Pekerja Sosial Profesional Indonesia – International Federation of Social Workers (<https://www.ifsw.org/member-organisation/indonesia/>)

11 <https://www.ifsw.org/member-organisation/indonesia/>



Indonesia Law On Social Workers No. 14 2019

The law says that social workers shall form a Social Workers' Organisation which is an independent, legal body to improve the competence, professionalism, protection and welfare of social workers. All social workers are required to become members of the Organisation. It is responsible for:

- a. developing a code of conduct for social workers.
- b. carrying out social worker registration.
- c. increasing knowledge, competence and dignity of social workers; and
- d. supporting and supervising social workers doing social work practices.

To carry out these responsibilities, the law says that the Organisation has authority to:

- a. establish and enforce the social worker code of conduct.
- b. provide legal assistance to social workers.
- c. carry out coaching and development of social workers.
- d. determine whether a person fulfils the requirements for social work registration.
- e. issue and revoke STRs [registration certificates].
- f. determine whether or not a violation of the code of ethics occurred based on the results of the investigation.
- g. impose sanctions on social workers who do not meet the standards of social work practices or who violate the code of conduct; and
- h. cooperate with internal and external institutions in the country for the implementation of social work practices.

- **Advocacy and cooperation:** IPSPi cooperates with domestic and international institutions to implement social work practices and advocate for the profession. This includes partnerships with organizations like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).
- **Improvement of member welfare:** The organization works to improve the competence, career prospects, protection and welfare of its members. This includes efforts to enhance public recognition and respect for the profession of social work.
- **Implementation of legal mandates:** Following the enactment of Law Number 14 of 2019 on Social Workers, IPSPi plays a crucial role in implementing the legal framework that governs the profession. This includes socializing the law and ensuring compliance among social workers.
- **Support in crisis situations:** IPSPi provides psychosocial support during disasters and other emergencies, highlighting the critical role of social workers in such contexts.

By fulfilling these roles and responsibilities, IPSPi ensures that social workers in Indonesia are well-equipped, ethically guided and professionally supported to meet the diverse needs of the communities they serve. IPSPi's main source of income is membership fees, as all Indonesian social workers are legally required to become members.

In Indonesia, the Law on Social Work provides detailed guidance on the responsibilities and authority of an independent, legal body to improve the competence, professionalism, protection and welfare of social workers (see box above).

The Indonesian Association of Schools of Social Work (IPPSI), an umbrella organization for Indonesian schools of social work, also plays a significant role in the development and reform of social work in Indonesia, addressing challenges and promoting initiatives to enhance the field of education. Primarily, the IPSPi and the IPPSI are involved in various initiatives and collaborations within the field of social work in Indonesia. While there are many other associations related to social work in Indonesia, it is not easy to find specific details and information about them.

In addition, the Indonesian Social Work Consortium (ISWC) publishes the ASEAN Social Work journal which provides a platform for sharing research and best practices in social work across the ASEAN region. The ISWC is a networking forum comprised of 15 government and non-government social work organizations, social workers and social work education associations in Indonesia. It was established on 10 August 2011, as part of the ASEAN social work consortium initiative.



Singapore

In Singapore, the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) was established in 1971. It is the national professional association that represents social workers in Singapore. SASW is managed by an Executive Committee composed of volunteer practitioners who serve outside their full-time jobs. A team of full-time paid staff provides secretarial and executive assistance to implement activities and services. SASW works closely with government agencies like the Ministry of Social and Family Development and the Ministry of Health to address professional needs and sector-specific issues. The association has different chapters (e.g., Medical Social Work, School Social Work, Family Social Work, and Disability Social Work) to cater to the needs of members in various sectors.

While SASW membership is voluntary, all social workers in government-funded programmes are expected to be accredited using the accreditation system launched in April 2009. The accreditation system is overseen by the Social Work Advisory and Accreditation Board (SWAAB), which is appointed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) and maintained by the SASW.

The SASW's key functions include:

- **Operating the Family Resource and Training Centre (FRTC) for professional development:** The Training Academy offers various programmes

to help social workers meet their Continuing Professional Education requirements.

- **Advocating for the social work profession:** SASW participates in discussions on the development and status of the social work profession in Singapore.
- **Providing support and networking opportunities for social workers:** SASW engages with social work students to provide support and networking opportunities as they enter the field.
- **Maintaining the Register of Accredited Social Workers:** SASW maintains a Register of Accredited Social Workers to ensure professional standards. Accreditation involves adherence to the SASW Code of Professional Ethics.

To support its activities and initiatives, the SASW is mainly funded by grants from the government budget each year. SASW currently has a five-year funding agreement (2022-2026) with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). During this time, SASW will submit annual budget requests to MSF to support various initiatives and generally cover the cost of human resources, running costs and any additional planned activities. For example, this budget covers most of the operational costs for the accreditation system and covers some site programme costs such as the supervision service as well as the mentorship programme, and covers most of the costs to maintain the salary of staff. However, the Association must maintain the cost associated with hiring and running their office premises through co-payments. To meet these co-payments and other associated costs, the association generates income from the training programmes they offer at the Family Resource and Training Centre.¹²

Budget statements and details of SASW's costs are published each year in the SASW Annual Report, which is available on the SASW website. Government funding enables the SASW to fulfill its mission of advancing social work as a profession, fostering high standards of practice, and providing support and development opportunities for social workers in Singapore.

12 Interview with SASW August 2024

To regulate the social work profession, the Accreditation System for Social Workers and Social Service Practitioners was launched on 1 April 2009 by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, National Council of Social Service and Singapore Association of Social Workers. The accreditation system was put in place to:

- ensure professional standards of social work practice.
- promote continuing education and training of social workers and social service practitioners.
- groom leaders to guide young Social Workers and social service practitioners; and
- improve the professional image of social workers and social service practitioners.

The Accreditation System is overseen by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB) which is appointed by the Ministry. It is administered by the Accreditation Secretariat of the Singapore Association of Social Workers and the board comprises 14 members, made up of social work professionals with the chairman being the Director-General of Social Welfare from the Ministry of Social and Family Development.



2.3 Registration and licensing (qualification requirements)

Another component of laws governing the social work profession is a clear stipulation of the requirements to be qualified and licensed to practice social work. The process for being licensed as a social worker commonly includes:

- completion of a degree or diploma from an accredited university or educational institution.
- completion of a specified number of practice hours under supervision.
- a standardized competency examination (in some countries); and
- registration and licensing by the licensing body, granting legal approval to practice.

Most laws on the social work profession make it mandatory for anyone engaged in social work practice to obtain a license or practice certificate. Anyone without a license who practises social work, who uses the title of “social worker,” or who otherwise holds themselves out as a social worker commits an offence.

Another component of laws governing the social work profession is a clear stipulation of the requirements to be qualified and licensed to practice social work.

Table 3: Comparison of registration and licensing requirements

	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Singapore
Education requirements	Bachelor of Science in Social Work or Master of Social Work	Bachelor's or master's degree in social work	Bachelor's degree in social work	Bachelor's degree or graduate diploma in social work
Practical experience	1,000 case hours of supervised field practice by a supervisor	Not specified	At least one year of supervised practice	1,000 hours of supervised practice (for RSW)
Examination	Social Worker Licensure Examination	Licensure examination by Council of Social Work	Competency examination	Online Ethics Quiz (75% pass mark)
Cost and affordability	13.52% of their annual salary	1.11% of the annual salary in Bangkok	0.69% of a lower monthly salary	Less than 0.2% annual income
Unique features	Mandatory membership in Accredited and Integrated Professional Organizations (AIPO)	Four-year grace period for workforce without social work degrees. Persons with sociology and psychology backgrounds may be accepted as social workers during this grace period	Professional oath required. Social Work Practice permit should be issued by district/city government also	Two-tier system: Registered Social Worker-Provisional (RSW-P) and Registered Social Worker (RSW)



To become a registered and licensed social worker in the Philippines, social workers must register with the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) to obtain a professional license to practice. To do so, they must meet the following qualification requirements:

- **Educational requirement:** Bachelor of Science in Social Work or a Master of Social Work.
- **Field experience:** The social worker must complete 1,000 case hours of Supervised Field Instruction certified by the appropriate supervisors.
- **Licensure examination:** The social worker must pass the Social Worker Licensure Examination, a written test designed to assess the candidate's knowledge and skills in social work. The exam generally covers four main areas: Human Behaviour and Social Environment, Social Welfare and Ethics, Social Work Methods, and Field Practice.
- **Registration:** A social worker must register with the PRC to receive their professional license after passing the licensure exam.

In the Philippines, the law prohibits anyone from practising social work without proper registration.

An online platform, the Examination and Registration Information System (LERIS), has been developed by the PRC to streamline various processes for professionals, including social workers. It serves to streamline the application process by assisting professionals to:¹⁴

- apply for their licensure examination online, selecting exam dates and venues.
- register and obtain PRC ID through the system.
- renew professional licenses online using LERIS.
- update personal information, contact details, and other relevant data.
- schedule appointments for various PRC transactions.



Philippines Republic Act No. 4373 (as amended by Republic Act 10847)

The Philippines law states that, unless exempt from registration, no person shall practise or offer to practise social work in the Philippines or be appointed as a social worker or to any position calling for a social worker in any social work agency (whether private or governmental), without holding a valid certificate of registration as a social worker issued by the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Work. The offence is punishable by a fine of between 100,000 and 200,000 pesos, or imprisonment of between six months and two years.

- upload some of the required documents, though physical submission is still necessary for certain items.
- facilitate online payment for various PRC services.

By using LERIS, social workers can conveniently manage their professional registration and licensing requirements without physically visiting PRC offices for many transactions, saving time and effort in the process. PRC has also partnered with shopping malls to set up offices for in-person verification, which ensures the identities and qualifications of the applicants and helps to prevent fraudulent activities such as impersonation, use of false documentation, and unauthorized practice of social work.

To register, social workers must obtain proof of payment for initial registration and a Certificate of Good Standing

13 SOCIAL WORKER | Professional Regulation Commission (prc.gov.ph)

14 <https://www.prc.gov.ph/requirements/social-worker>

(COGS) issued by the Philippine Association of Social Workers Inc. (PASWI). PASWI charges at least P1,850 for issuing the Certificate of Good Standing and for initial registrants, PASWI collects the following fees:

- P550 as membership fee
- P600 as advanced membership fee for two years
- PASWI then deducts P300.00 (representing a year's membership fee)

It is estimated that a social worker may need to spend at least P13,350 (approximately USD\$715) to fully comply with renewal requirements every three years, including 45 units of Continuing Professional Development, Fees for the Certificate of Good Standing and PRC processing costs.¹⁵

The initial salary for social workers is not considered high, with a starting salary being around P300,000 per year (approx. USD\$5,290) or P25,000 per month (approx. USD\$436).¹⁶ The fees to obtain a professional license can be quite burdensome for a new social worker earning an average of P25,000 per month. The costs represent 13.52 per cent of their annual salary, which could result in financial strain or stress for practitioners. The high cost of compliance has led to calls for the suspension of these additional requirements, and many social workers find it challenging to afford the renewal expenses given their modest earnings.¹⁷



Thailand

Thailand's law defines certain social work duties as "licensed social work profession", which can only be carried out by a person who is a licensed social worker. This includes social work carried out under specified laws (Criminal Procedure Code, the law on child protection, the law on protection of domestic violence victims, the law on labor protection, the law

on rehabilitation of drug addicts, the law on social welfare promotion, the law on mental health, the law on juvenile and family court), social work profession in governmental agencies, and other social work practice as stipulated by Rules.

The Social Worker Professions Act (2013) established the Social Work Professions Council. The objectives of



Thailand Social Work Profession Act, B.E. 2013

The law makes it an offence for a person to perform

a licensed social work profession or any other acts which lead people to believe that s/he has the right to perform a licensed social work profession if that person does not hold a license from the Council of Social Work Profession. However, it makes the following exceptions:

- to help other people following the duty of a good person, which is a social responsibility.
- students, university students, or any other people who have practised or trained in the supervision of governmental higher education institute or other institute which are permitted by the government to be established, governmental social work institute or any higher education institute or social work institutes under the supervision of approved social work profession.
- officials from the governmental agencies or private organization who are assigned to perform duties under the supervision of approved social work profession.
- consultant or expert who perform approved social work profession, approved by the Board.

15 <https://www.change.org/p/professional-regulatory-board-for-social-work-suspend-new-requirements-for-filipino-social-workers-renewal-of-professional-id-card>

16 Social Worker Salary Philippines - SalaryExpert

17 <https://www.change.org/p/professional-regulatory-board-for-social-work-suspend-new-requirements-for-filipino-social-workers-renewal-of-professional-id-card>

the Council are to ensure that the rights and benefits of service users are met through setting standards and requiring social workers to be ethically accountable. This involved developing standards, encouraging professional education, and protecting the rights and dignity of the profession and its members and was considered a pivotal step in upholding professional standards. The Council is also primarily responsible for the licensing process, where previously, this responsibility was not assigned to any specific agency.

To become a registered social worker in Thailand,¹⁸ individuals typically need to:

- hold a bachelor's or master's degree in social work from a recognized institution.
- pass the licensure examination administered by the Council of Social Work.

The application process for social work registration in Thailand involves:

- submitting an application form to the Council of Social Work.
- providing evidence of education, examination results, and other required documents.
- paying registration and licensure fees as determined by the Council.

The Act also grants a four-year grace period to allow the workforce without social work degrees to pass a training programme and qualify for a license. The Council determines this period, but persons with sociology and psychology backgrounds may be accepted as social workers during this grace period.¹⁹

To obtain a license for the first time, the cost is approximately THB2,200 (approximately USD\$64) for new graduates, which includes a THB200 licence fee

and exam fees of THB2,000 (approximately THB1,000 per subject for a total of two subjects).²⁰ A newly graduated social worker in Bangkok can expect to earn around THB16,500 per month (approximately USD\$483)²¹ making licensing equivalent to about 13.3 per cent of a new social worker's monthly or 1.11 per cent of the annual salary in Bangkok. Considering these factors, the registration fee of THB2,200 could be considered relatively affordable for new graduates, especially those earning at the higher end of the salary range. It is worth noting that affordability is subjective and depends on individual circumstances, living costs, and other financial obligations.



In Indonesia, social workers' registration and licensing requirements are governed by the Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI). Indonesia passed Law Number 14 of 2019 on Social Workers, which provides legal recognition and regulation of the social work profession. This law marked a significant milestone for social workers in Indonesia, providing a legal basis for practice standards, education requirements, and professional development. Under the law, to practise social work in Indonesia, individuals must:

- have a bachelor's degree in social work
- complete at least one year of supervised practice
- pass a competency examination
- become a member of IPSPI
- take a professional oath
- register as a social worker with the Social Worker Organisation, which includes the issuance of a registration certificate.

18 Some positions may require practical experience in social work settings.

19 The Social Service Workforce in the East Asia and Pacific Region: multi-country review. Retrieved from The Social Service Workforce in the East Asia and Pacific Region | UNICEF East Asia and Pacific

20 Interview with Anyamanie Buranakanond August 2024

21 This figure represents the median salary for entry level positions in the field. Retrieved from Salary: Social Worker in Bangkok, Thailand 2024 | Glassdoor

The IPSPI charges approximately USD\$10 for social workers to obtain registration and for renewal.²² A new social work graduate in Indonesia can expect a relatively modest starting salary, with average salaries for a social worker ranging from IDR1,000,800 to IDR3,060,000 per month (USD\$120 to USD\$300).²³ However, these figures may vary depending on location, employer and specific job responsibilities. It is important to note that entry-level positions typically offer salaries closer to the national minimum wage, which is lower than average for graduates with little to no experience as they are more likely to earn less than average salary. However, when matching salaries against the registration fee set by the Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association, the fee to obtain and maintain registration is relatively obtainable as this represents a small fraction of a social worker's monthly income (at the lower salary end this would equate to 0.69 per cent while at the higher salary end this would equate to 0.27 per cent), making it a manageable expense for new graduates.

By law, social workers should obtain a registration certificate from IPSPI and a Social Worker Practice Permit, which the district/city government is supposed to provide as a grant of authority to carry out social work practice.²⁴ However, so far, only social workers in the Jakarta region have been able to obtain a Practice Permit. In all other locations, there have been issues as most local governments currently do not have the systems in place to process these permits due to limited resources.²⁵



Singapore

In Singapore, there is no state-mandated licensing of social workers through law. The Accreditation System for Social Workers and Social Service Practitioners which is similar to licensing and meets the requirements expected of licensing²⁶ declares to clients the standard of social work practice and assures them that they are dealt with by professionals who adhere to a code of practice.

The SASW manages an accreditation system to ensure professional standards. Professional social workers are required to be registered and accredited to practise. To be accredited, social workers must have recognized social work qualifications (which is, at the minimum, a bachelor's degree) acceptable to the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB) from either the National University of Singapore²⁷ or Singapore University of Social Sciences (formerly known as SIM University).²⁸

To gain accreditation, social workers must choose one of two categories to apply to:

- Registered Social Worker – Provisional (RSW-P): For new graduates/entrants
- Registered Social Worker (RSW): For practising social workers

To register, applicants must also meet specific criteria for each category (see next page).²⁹

To register as a social worker in Singapore, a social worker must be accredited by the Singapore Association of Social Workers. Social workers can apply for accreditation online; currently, there are no fees for accreditation and renewal. However, if social workers wish to become members of the Singapore Association

22 Interview with Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI) August 2024

23 Social Worker Salary Indonesia - Salary Expert

24 IPSPI-Code-of-Ethics-.pdf (ifsw.org)

25 Interview with Indonesian Consortium for Social Work August 2024

26 SASW Accreditation system retrieved from <https://accreditation.sasw.org.sg/application.do?action=show>

27 Bachelor of Arts (Social Work), Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours) in Social Work, Graduate Diploma in Social Work or Master of Social Sciences (Social Work)

28 Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Social Work (Honours), Graduate Diploma in Social Work

29 SASW Accreditation system retrieved from <https://accreditation.sasw.org.sg/application.do?action=show>

Singapore

Accreditation as a Registered Social Worker – Provisional

To qualify as a Registered Social Worker – Provisional (RSW-P):

- ☒ Possess at least a bachelor's degree or Graduate Diploma in Social Work recognized by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB)
- ☒ Provide two character references from peers and/or employers (known for no less than 3 years)
- ☒ Have an offer of social work employment or employed as a social worker in a social service agency, government agency, hospital, Institutes of Higher Learning, registered charity or society engaged in social work practices in Singapore
- ☒ Less than one year of post-qualification full-time social work experience locally
- ☒ Obtain a pass (75% mark) in the Online Ethics Quiz at the point of application

Singapore

Accreditation as a Registered Social Worker

To qualify as a Registered Social Worker (RSW):

- ☒ Possess a recognized social work qualification in accordance with the university's programme requirement
- ☒ Provide two character references from peers and/or employers (known for no less than 3 years)
- ☒ Have at least one year of post-qualification full-time social work experience locally
- ☒ Obtain a pass (75% mark) in the Online Ethics Quiz at the point of application
- ☒ 80 hours of relevant in-employment training
- ☒ 1,000 hours of supervised practice obtained from employment after completing social work qualification

To gain accreditation in Singapore, social workers must choose one of two categories to apply to and must meet specific criteria to register for each category.

of Social Workers, there are various membership types with associated fees. The details of those fees are shown in the table below.³⁰

The Singapore Association of Social Workers has some additional provisions for subscription fees, such as S\$20, which is often waived for new applicants. For applications approved between October and March, the fee is halved, and the reinstatement fee of S\$20 is waived for members whose membership has lapsed, provided there are groups of 10 applications or more. There are also special membership fees for retired social workers aged 62 and above, which are reduced to half, though relevant administration fees for reinstatement or new applications still apply to them. On top of this, the Association also imposes no fees for the accreditation and renewal of social workers under the SASW accreditation system.³¹

These fees are relatively modest compared to the potential earnings of a new social worker graduate, who typically earns between S\$3,600 and S\$4,034 per month.³² Given these salary ranges, the annual membership fee of S\$60 to S\$80 represents less than 0.2% of new graduates' yearly income, making it generally obtainable for most new social workers. Additionally, student memberships at reduced rates are available, which can help ease the transition for recent graduates. This fee structure ensures that social workers in Singapore can maintain their professional status and continue their practice with minimal financial burden.

As part of the changes to the accreditation requirements, an online ethics quiz was introduced to further strengthen ethical standards. This online tool is used to assess social workers' comprehension of ethical guidelines, dilemmas and decision-making processes.

Table 4: Singapore Association of Social Workers: Fees

Membership type	Entrance fee	Subscription fee
Ordinary Membership	S\$20 (waived for renewal or conversion)	S\$60 per year
Provisional Membership	N/A	S\$60 per year
Associate Membership	S\$20 (waived for renewal or conversion)	S\$60 per year
Student Membership	N/A	S\$10 per year

30 Retrieved from <https://online.sasw.org.sg/mainPage.do?action=showMemFees>

31 SASW Accreditation FAQs. Retrieved from <https://accreditation.sasw.org.sg/faqs>

32 <https://www.salaryexplorer.com/average-salary-wage-comparison-singapore-social-worker-c196j6511>



2.4 Complaints and disciplinary procedures

Another common component of a law on the social work profession is procedures for receiving and investigating complaints about social workers and imposing appropriate accountability measures, including revoking a person's authority to practice. The authority to manage complaints about a social worker's conduct generally rests with the same Association / Board / Council responsible for registration and licensing. Thailand and Indonesia have also established separate Ethics Committees under their governing bodies to manage disciplinary matters. To facilitate the investigation process, laws in the Philippines and Thailand give the Council quasi-judicial authority to compel the production of documents and statements from witnesses, and in Singapore, although there is no formal law, complaints and disciplinary procedures are handled by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB).



Philippines

In the Philippines, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) is responsible for regulating and supervising social workers through the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers (PRBSW). The PRBSW enforces the laws and regulations that dictate social workers' conduct.

Professional misconduct in the context of Philippine law refers to actions or behaviour that violate the ethical or legal standards set for professionals in various fields, including social work. Under the law, there are stated grounds for disciplinary action, including fraudulent practices such as falsifying credentials or deceiving

clients for personal gain, violation of professional codes such as the social work code of ethics, or criminal behaviour.³³

The disciplinary process generally involves the aggrieved party filing a formal complaint with the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers under the PRC. Then, an internal investigation is conducted to evaluate the merits of the complaint. If the investigation finds sufficient evidence, a formal hearing is held, and after the hearing, the board will decide if penalties are required, such as suspension, fines, or revocation of the license.

The law regulating social work practice includes penal provisions for various offences related to unauthorized or improper social work practice. These offences can result in fines or imprisonment. The law also states that social workers' registration can be denied or revoked if they are convicted of a criminal offence involving moral turpitude or are found guilty of immoral or dishonourable conduct.³⁴



Philippines Republic Act No. 4373

The law states that the Professional Regulatory

Board for Social Workers has the power to revoke or suspend the validity of a certificate of registration of a social worker for unprofessional conduct, malpractice, incompetency, serious ignorance of or negligence in the practice of social work, or for making use of fraud, deceit, or falsity to obtain a certificate of registration. Certificates of registration can only be revoked after due notice and hearing. The law says that in investigating violations, the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers is empowered to issue subpoenas, secure witnesses' appearances and produce documents.

33 Professional Misconduct Philippines (respicio.ph)

34 Section 20 of Republic Act No.4373



In Thailand, handling complaints and disciplinary procedures for social workers is primarily overseen by the Ethics Committee in accordance with Section 5 of the Social Work Profession Act. This act established the Ethics Committee to manage complaints and disciplinary actions against social workers. According to Section 35 of the Act, Ethics Committee members must be fair, honest, qualified and not have prohibited characteristics, i.e., being a regular member, practising the social work profession with a license for no less than the period specified in the regulations, never having been punished for misconduct against the ethics of the social work profession, and not holding the position of the president of the Social Work Profession Council or being a committee member or other subcommittee member. When a social worker comes from a specialized field, the Ethics Committee can appoint a subcommittee to investigate the facts. The subcommittee may come from the ethics committee itself and an external subcommittee with knowledge of a particular area and expertise in that field for procedural fairness.

The Act also provides for a range of possible disciplinary measures for the Ethics Committee to conduct disciplinary procedures against those social workers acting contrary to social work professional standards, including issuing a warning letter, probation, withholding of license for a specified period up to two years, or withdrawal of license. A person whose license has been withdrawn may ask to have the license restored once three years have elapsed.³⁵ A person who has been subject to a disciplinary measure has the right to appeal the decision to the Social Work Professions Council Board. The decision of the Board shall be made in the form of Order of the Social Work Profession Council, and it shall be final. This framework ensures that social workers adhere to ethical standards and provides a mechanism for addressing grievances within the profession. If there is civil action involvement and a person is sued, they can be punished according to the penalty provisions specified in section 45, section 46



Thailand Social Work Profession Act B.E. 2013

Thailand's law includes more detailed guidance on managing complaints of malpractice. It establishes an Ethics Committee consisting of a chairperson and between five and nine members of the Board. Where a complaint has been received, or it appears to the Ethics Committee that any social work professional has acted contrary to professional ethics, the Ethics Committee must initiate an investigation without delay. The law says that the process for investigation and consideration of an allegation will be further regulated by Rules, and states that in carrying out an investigation, the Ethics Committee has the power to order any person involved to give a statement or to submit documents or objects.

and section 47. The penalty can be a fine not exceeding THB20,000 and imprisonment for not more than one month, or a fine not exceeding THB1,000, or both.³⁶



In Indonesia, the handling of complaints and disciplinary procedures for social workers is primarily overseen by the Indonesian Association of Social Workers (IPSPI) through an Ethics Committee, which manages complaints related to ethical breaches or professional misconduct by social workers. Complaints against social workers can be filed with IPSPI and through investigation by the Ethics Committee. If a social worker is found to have violated professional standards or ethical guidelines, IPSPI can impose various disciplinary actions, including reprimands, mandatory training, suspension, or revocation of membership.

35 Section 34 of Social Work Profession Act, B.E. 2013

36 Section 45, 46 and 47 of Social Work Profession Act, B.E. 2013

37 Interview with IPSPI August 2024

If a social worker or social service worker commits an illegal act, civil actions can be taken against them under Article 1365 of the Indonesian Civil Code. This article provides the legal basis for civil liability for unlawful acts causing loss. Victim survivors can seek remedies for wrongful acts, including compensation for damages. Additionally, Indonesian law ensures legal, economic and social protection for workers, including those in social services, emphasizing the enforcement of human rights and legal protections. While not specific to social work, this legal framework provides a basis for potential civil actions against individuals who cause harm through unlawful acts and breaches of ethical standards, which could potentially form the basis of civil action.



Singapore³⁸

In Singapore, complaints, disciplinary procedures, and deregistration of social workers are primarily handled by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB), which is responsible for upholding standards of professional conduct and the code of ethics for the social work profession through the accreditation system. To be considered by the Board, complaints must be lodged in writing using the official Complaint Form against accredited social workers who are Registered Social Workers – Provisional (RSW-P), Registered Social Workers (RSW), or Registered Social Service Practitioners (RSSP) for breaching the Code of Professional Ethics. SWAAB handles the complaints directly for accredited social workers and may initiate disciplinary procedures if necessary. For unaccredited social workers employed by government or social service agencies, SWAAB refers complaints to the social worker's employer for investigation and appropriate action. In egregious cases, disciplinary action can result in dismissal from service, and in civil court proceedings, the social worker has the right to engage a lawyer or represent themselves. However, legal assistance schemes are available for those who cannot afford legal representation. If they are liable, the social worker may face consequences such as disciplinary action from SWAAB, potential revocation of their accreditation, or civil penalties as determined by the court.



2.5 Requirement for continuing education / professional development

A requirement for continuing professional development can help ensure that social workers have an ongoing commitment to life-long learning and to improving their knowledge and skills. However, it would only be feasible where there are sufficient in-service training opportunities available for all licensed social workers to meet the requirements.

Importance of CPD:

- CPD ensures that social workers stay updated with advances in social work practice, theories and methodologies.
- It promotes professional growth, enhances service delivery to clients, and fosters continuous improvement in the profession.
- Compliance with CPD requirements demonstrates a commitment to maintaining high standards of competence and ethical practice in social work.



Philippines

To promote continued learning and ensure that social workers remain current on emerging evidence and best practices in their field, laws in the Philippines make requirements with respect to continuing education. To renew their license or practice certificate, social workers must demonstrate that they have participated in additional in-service training or other professional development requirements. In 2016, the Government passed a Continuing Professional Development Act to enhance and upgrade the competencies of professionals, ensuring the skills and qualifications align with international standards. The law's overall aim was to improve the practice of professions in the

38 SASW Complaint Procedures. Retrieved from <https://accreditation.sasw.org.sg/jsp/mainPage/complaintProcedures.jsp>

country, contributing to national development and competitiveness. However, despite its goals, the law faced criticism for being costly and burdensome leading to calls for amendments and revisions.³⁹

To implement the Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016, the Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers issued Operational Guidelines for Social Workers, which specifies all the details and requirements for CPD.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a mandatory requirement to renew professional licenses, including for social workers. The Philippines law has a section on CPD which states that, to renew their professional identification card, all registered social workers must provide proof of earning 45 units of continuing CPD courses from an accredited CPD provider for a three-year renewal period.

In addition, all local government units and employer organizations are required to allocate the necessary funding to support the professional development of social workers in their employ, regardless of employment status, to comply with the CPD requirement. The CPD programme aims to ensure that licensed social workers continually update their knowledge and skills, stay current with developments in the field, and maintain competency in their practice. In the Philippines, compliance with CPD requirements for social workers is monitored and enforced by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) through the Board of Social Workers. The monitoring and enforcement process typically works as follows:

Monitoring compliance:

Social workers are required to document their participation in CPD activities and maintain records of completed CPD units. This documentation includes certificates of attendance, completion or participation issued by accredited CPD providers. The PRC conducts random audits to verify compliance with CPD requirements. Social workers selected for audit are

notified and required to submit documentation of their CPD activities within a specified timeframe. Audits are conducted to ensure that social workers have fulfilled the required number of CPD units and have participated in accredited CPD activities.

Enforcement:

Social workers found to be non-compliant with CPD requirements may face penalties imposed by the PRC. Penalties may include fines, suspension of license renewal privileges, or other disciplinary actions. The severity of penalties depends on the extent of non-compliance and may be determined through a review process conducted by the Board of Social Workers. The PRC reviews audit results to determine compliance status. Social workers who fail to provide adequate documentation or who do not meet CPD requirements may be subject to further investigation or disciplinary proceedings. Social workers can respond to audit findings and provide additional documentation or explanations to address any discrepancies identified during the audit. They also have the right to appeal audit results or disciplinary actions imposed by the PRC. Appeals are typically reviewed by higher authorities within the PRC or through judicial processes if necessary.

Weightage and point system:

Social workers must earn a specific number of CPD units within a given renewal period to be eligible for license renewal. The required number of CPD units is typically 45 units for a three-year renewal period. CPD units are assigned based on the duration and nature of the CPD activity completed by the social worker. One CPD unit generally equals one hour of participation in an accredited CPD activity. CPD activities must be conducted by accredited providers recognized by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) or the Board of Social Workers. Accredited providers determine the number of CPD units awarded for each activity based on the content, duration, and relevance to social work practice. Several types of CPD activities contribute to CPD units, such as:

39 <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/house-passes-bill-amendments-continuing-professional-development-law-ease-license-renewals-may-2023/> and <https://www.depedtambayan.ph/cpd-law-revised/>

- attendance at seminars, workshops, conferences, and training programmes related to social work.
- completion of postgraduate courses, certifications, or short-term training programmes that enhance professional skills.
- participation in research activities, publication of articles, or presentations related to social work.
- engagement in community service and advocacy projects contributing to social welfare and development.
- teaching or mentoring activities relevant to social work education or professional development.

Each accredited activity specifies the number of CPD units awarded upon completion.

Documentation and reporting:

Social workers must maintain accurate documentation of their participation in CPD activities and upload this information onto the online platform. This includes certificates of attendance, completion or participation issued by accredited CPD providers. Documentation must specify the title of the CPD activity, date, duration (in hours) and number of CPD units earned. Social workers submit their CPD documentation to the PRC during the license renewal process or in response to random audits conducted by the PRC to verify compliance.

Social workers in the Philippines are encouraged to regularly check the PRC website or contact the Board of Social Workers for updated information on CPD requirements, accredited providers and compliance guidelines. Compliance with CPD requirements is essential for social workers in the Philippines to maintain their professional licenses. The monitoring and enforcement mechanisms implemented by the PRC ensure that social workers continuously update their knowledge and skills through accredited CPD activities. By upholding CPD standards, social workers demonstrate their commitment to professional growth, ethical practice and the ongoing enhancement of social work services in the country.



Thailand⁴⁰

To be registered, a social worker must maintain and/or obtain credit hours for continuing professional education. For license renewal, a person needs 50 credits over three years. This can be made up of 30 points for training related to the social work field and 20 points for other general training. Usually, one hour of training equals to one credit towards registration. Sometimes obtaining the required number of credits during a three-year period can be challenging to attain for people, particularly those living in rural areas. Access to appropriate training can be difficult. Particularly when not all agencies allow time for social workers to participate in training during office hours and most training is organized in the capital of Bangkok, which requires time to travel to.

In 2020, the Social Worker Professional Council developed a Continuing Education Manual for Licensed Social Work Professionals⁴¹ which provides guidelines for continuing education activities required for social work professionals to renew their licenses. It includes various types of activities, such as professional knowledge enhancement, participation in professional development activities, short-term training courses, and self-study through information technology.

In Thailand, there currently is no dedicated institute for CPD. Instead, the social work law mandates that a licensed professional must deliver training. This requirement is stipulated across eight to nine different acts. The implication is that only individuals who have been officially licenced and recognized by SWPC can conduct training sessions that go towards credits for social workers. To organize a training, the trainer is required to submit a detailed training proposal to the council for approval. Once received the council will review and approve the training programme before training sessions can be conducted as per the approved plan. For example, sometimes training organizers put forth a social work subject, however it is delivered by someone who does not hold a social work accreditation.

40 Interview with Anyamanie Buranakanond August 2024

41 For the purpose of this report, this document could not be reviewed in detail as it is currently only available in Thai language.

In those cases, it would not be considered as a credit by SWPC.⁴² This ensures that training provided meets standards set by the government and maintains high professional quality and consistency.



Indonesia

On the other hand, Indonesia's law does not require continuing professional development, but that a person must "continuously improve and develop competence and knowledge and/or skills through education and/or training"⁴³ and to reregister as social workers, they must have "devoted themselves to social work."⁴⁴ To assist professionals with this, the IPSPI offers monthly international exchange lectures/webinars to provide opportunities for further skills development for social workers, along with the different specialized associations, which also provide their own sessions on specific topics related to their field.⁴⁵

Additionally, within the law, there are several special provisions, including one which stipulates that Continuing Professional Education for Social Work must be organized in tertiary institutions within five years from the date of the law's passage. The Indonesian Consortium, with support from UNICEF Indonesia and together with the Association of Social Work, among other stakeholders are working with the Ministry of Education to formalize this at the University of Indonesia and Padjadjaran University by October 2024.⁴⁶



Singapore

In Singapore, social workers must also fulfil continuing professional education (CPE) requirements to maintain their accreditation. The specific requirements are as follows:

- Registered Social Workers (RSW) and Registered Social Service Practitioners (RSSP) must complete 60 CPE credits during a two-year accreditation period.
- Out of these 60 credits, 40 must be from structured activities.

Structured activities include formal study courses, structured lectures, short courses, conferences, workshops and seminars. They also include both external and in-house training, provided they have clear objectives, curriculum and evaluation components. Unstructured activities contribute to the remaining credits and include various professional development activities that do not fall under the structured category. Each contact hour in these activities typically earns one CPE credit.

Social workers must submit their CPE credits through the CPE Logbook via their professional accounts on the Accreditation System website, which is overseen by the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board (SWAAB). If unable to meet the CPE requirements before the accreditation period ends, an extension of up to three years can be granted. However, during the extension period, individuals will not be accredited and will not appear on the register.⁴⁷

Singapore has a dedicated institute for continuing professional education for the social service workforce. The Social Service Institute (SSI) is a Continuing Education and Training (CET) centre dedicated to supporting the training needs of the social service sector. It offers a variety of courses and programmes aimed at enhancing the skills and knowledge of current social service professionals and new entrants into the sector.⁴⁸

42 Interview with Anyamanie Buranakanond August 2024

43 Article 42 in Law on Social Worker (Undang-Udang tentang Pekerja Sosial) No. 14/2019.

44 Article 30 in Law on Social Worker (Undang-Udang tentang Pekerja Sosial) No. 14/2019.

45 Interview with IPSPI August 2024

46 Interview with Indonesia Consortium August 2024

47 <https://sasw.org.sg/continuing-professional-education-cpe/>

48 Social Service Institute (ssi.gov.sg)



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Part 3

Key challenges and lessons learned

3.1 Key challenges



Limited understanding and recognition of the profession itself

Many stakeholders reported that recognition of social work as a profession is impacted by a cultural and historical understanding of social work being related to 'doing good in the community' and has been understood widely as volunteer/charity work. Even after the passing of the law, this perception remains commonly held in Thailand and Indonesia, not only among community members but also among politicians and lawmakers, and even other professionals. Consequently, social work is not always viewed as a legitimate or attractive profession; it is often low-paid and under-resourced, and the roles and functions of social workers in different settings are ill-defined. Policymakers often shared this perception and undermined efforts to professionalize and strengthen the workforce. In the Philippines, while social workers are well recognized, advocacy efforts still need to focus on obtaining greater public recognition of the value of social work and promoting a more positive public image of social workers.



Lack of evidence/cost benefits of strengthening the social service workforce

A common challenge in advocating for social work legislation was the very limited relevant evidence available, especially with regard to the scope and size of the workforce and cost. Without evidence, Thailand's and Indonesia's initial efforts to professionalize the workforce and increase investment were significantly weakened. Once strong research data was available, evidence-based arguments were used to enhance the credibility of the advocacy efforts and significantly moved legislative efforts along.



Lack of political will

At different stages of the legislative process, a lack of political will was one of the key challenges for Thailand and Indonesia in passing their social work laws. Without political will it was difficult to secure the necessary budget allocations and policy prioritization to pass the law. Once key relationships with policymakers were established and strengthened, policymakers worked together with advocates to gain support from others and negotiate with other parties to guide the social work law through the various stages of parliamentary debate and scrutiny. This eventually led to securing enough votes for the legislation to be agreed upon, approved and enacted into law.

3.2 Lessons learned



A key lesson learnt from the Philippines is social workers' crucial role in nation-building. In particular, how social workers are essential in addressing social issues, supporting vulnerable populations, and promoting social justice. Their work contributes significantly to the overall well-being and development of communities, which has been a cornerstone of sustainable nation-building in the Philippines.

Key insights shared:

1. Social workers provide critical support in areas such as child protection, mental health, poverty alleviation, and disaster response. Their expertise and dedication help build resilient communities capable of overcoming various social challenges.
2. Robust government support has been essential for the social work regulatory and licensing system to be sustainable and effective. This has included adequate

funding, policy support, and resources to ensure that social workers can perform their duties effectively.

3. Continuous professional development and training for social workers are vital. Linking CPD with a competency framework ensures that social workers maintain high standards of practice and adapt to emerging social issues.

4. Social workers often collaborate with others in a range of sectors, including health, education and law enforcement. Government backing can facilitate these collaborations, ensuring a holistic approach to addressing social issues. Social work in the Philippines is now well-recognized, particularly in medical settings.

5. Government involvement in developing and implementing policies that support social work is crucial. This includes legislation recognizing the profession's importance and providing a framework for its growth and development. On top of this, it is essential to include both private and public social workers in policy development. For example, while the Magna Carta for Public Social Workers (2007) aimed to improve salary



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levels, working conditions and career development for social workers in the public sector (government service), this did not include social workers employed in private settings (e.g. working in Non-Government Organizations). There have been strong appeals to protect the rights of private social workers in the Magna Carta.⁴⁹



In Thailand, the absence of a formal legal definition of “social work” has posed challenges in setting professional standards and qualifications for licensing social workers. Although the law defines the “Social Work Profession”, it does not clearly outline what constitutes social work itself, leading to ambiguity in practice and licensing.

The term “social work” in Thai, “sungkom songkhrau”, has multiple layers of meaning. At a subtle level, it signifies “relief,” reflecting Thai society’s benefactor-client values and hierarchical nature, rooted in ancient history. In Buddhist terms, it also means “assistance”, “solidarity” and “integration”,⁵⁰ adding complexity to defining social work legally.

Currently, only about 60 to 70% of social workers in Thailand are licensed, with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) employing a significant percentage of these licensed professionals. Despite this, the profession is still not widely recognized by the public, making mandatory licensing crucial to demonstrate professional standards. Some agencies continue to support a broad definition of social work to avoid limiting employment to only licensed social workers and not creating a closed system.⁵¹ To address these issues, stakeholders are working to establish a legally recognized definition of social work that aligns with Thailand’s cultural, social and economic context. This effort aims to amend the law to include a clear definition of social work, thereby clarifying the standards and qualifications for the profession in the country.



A key lesson learned for Indonesia is the critical importance of sustainable financial planning when implementing new social work regulations. The passage of Law Number 14 of 2019 on Social Workers marked a significant milestone for the profession in Indonesia. However, the implementation law has resulted in challenges due to inadequate long-term funding for the association to cover their ongoing operational costs, such as office space. The Association’s capacity to fulfil its mission could be enhanced with comprehensive funding that includes support for essential operational expenses, ensuring sustainable and effective service delivery. For the Association, addressing this issue is crucial to secure financial support for regulating and licensing the social work profession. This could be achieved by advocating for government support, seeking partnerships, and developing a comprehensive financial strategy to present to potential funders and stakeholders.



Singapore’s approach to regulating social work demonstrates that effective oversight can be achieved through a strong partnership between the state and the professional association to help strengthen the regulatory framework, ensuring that social workers are recognized as an integral part of the social service sector. Instead of relying on a dedicated social work law, Singapore’s highly developed government systems and strong institutional support (through strong collaboration between the government and the professional association – Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW)) enable effective professional self-regulation.

SASW plays a crucial role in setting professional standards through accreditation and training and handling ethical complaints. While the government, through the Ministry of Social and Family Development,

49 Interview with PRBSW board members August 2024.

50 Social Work Thai Values retrieved from https://ebrary.net/2156/sociology/social_work_thai_values

51 Interview with Anyamanie Buranakanond August 2024

supports this self-regulatory approach by appointing the Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board to oversee the accreditation system through SASW, providing both funding and collaborative support.

While discussions on formal legal regulation may arise as the profession evolves in the future, Singapore's experience shows that with a robust governance framework, and solid governmental support for professional standards and recognition, social work can be effectively regulated without specific legislation.

However, it is worth noting that this approach may not be directly replicated in all contexts. While self-regulation fosters professional autonomy and peer accountability, its effectiveness depends significantly on the availability of economic resources and the strength of governance frameworks. In contexts with weak governance or limited professional infrastructure, formal legal regulation may be necessary to maintain accountability and build public trust.

3.3 Recommendations

1

Leveraging evidence to support the passage of the Social Work Law

To effectively advocate for the passage of a social work law, it is recommended that a comprehensive, evidence-based approach be employed by compiling data and case studies highlighting gaps in current social work practices that could be addressed through regulation. This includes instances of malpractice, inconsistent service delivery and lack of accountability. Integrate findings from research on evidence-based practices to show how legal frameworks can support and enhance the application of effective interventions in social work. Emphasize the role of law in promoting ethical and evidence-informed practice to build a compelling case for establishing the Social Work Profession Bill, ultimately enhancing the profession's integrity, accountability and effectiveness.

Summary of recommendations

1

Leveraging evidence to support the passage of the Social Work Law

2

Awareness raising

3

Champions of change

4

Strengthen advocacy efforts

5

Promote collaboration and coordination among partners

6

Formally recognize the role of the Malaysian Association of Social Workers under the law

7

Establish and define a regulatory body or council in Malaysia

8

Develop a budget plan for establishing the regulatory body or council

2

Awareness raising

Raise awareness and address negative perceptions regarding social work by educating the public and policymakers about the vital role of social workers in society, emphasizing how the proposed law would enhance professional standards, improve service delivery and ultimately benefit vulnerable individuals and communities while also addressing common misconceptions through targeted media campaigns and stakeholder engagement. This could be achieved through events and open discussions with policymakers and the public.

3

Champions of change

Finding champions of change within government departments and legislative bodies is crucial for advocating the law's passage to support social work professionalization. This involves seeking out policymakers and public servants who demonstrate a strong commitment to social initiatives, possess excellent communication skills, and have a track record of successfully navigating complex legislative processes. Supporting these champions with comprehensive briefings, stakeholder engagement opportunities, and cross-party collaboration forums will enhance their ability to advocate for and successfully pass the Social Work Profession Bill.

4

Strengthen advocacy efforts

To effectively advocate for the passage of the Social Work Profession Bill and to overcome political concerns and potential challenges due to lack of political will. It is crucial that advocacy efforts adopt an organized, effective and multifaceted approach. This strategy could encompass the following key elements:

1. Develop a comprehensive advocacy plan that includes:
 - Educating policymakers on the importance and impact of the proposed legislation.
 - Mobilizing grassroots support to demonstrate public backing.
 - Engaging with media to raise awareness and shape public opinion.

- Building coalitions with allied organizations and stakeholders.

2. Establish a dedicated team or task force to coordinate advocacy efforts, ensuring consistent messaging and efficient resource allocation.
3. Create targeted educational materials for policymakers that address potential concerns and highlight the proposed legislation's benefits.
4. Implement a robust grassroots mobilization campaign, leveraging social media, community events, and local networks to build public support.
5. Cultivate relationships with key decision-makers and influencers in the legislative process.
6. Develop a flexible strategy that can adapt to changing political landscapes and opposition tactics.
7. Utilize data and research to support arguments and demonstrate the need for the proposed legislation.
8. Engage diverse voices within the social work community to provide varied perspectives and expertise.

By implementing this multifaceted approach, advocates can create a powerful, sustained effort that addresses the complexity of social issues, overcomes potential resistance, and effectively influences policymakers to pass this crucial social work legislation.

5

Promote collaboration and coordination among partners

To address the limited cross-sector ministerial interests, policymakers and advocates should leverage support from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to build cross-sector partnerships. Encouraging collaboration and coordination among the various sectors and stakeholders involved in strengthening the social work and social service workforce at national, regional and global levels will be essential for the ongoing advancement of the profession. This effort will ensure the provision of high-quality, coordinated, and people-centred social work and social services. At the national level, improving the current lack of coordination, engagement and understanding among different sectors regarding the

significance and role of social work and the broader social service workforce is important. The continued development of social work and enhancement of social services by both governmental and non-governmental organizations will necessitate strong cooperation among various government entities, academic institutions, national civil society organizations, disability representative groups, and other advocacy organizations. Additionally, ongoing collaboration with international entities such as UNICEF, as well as regional and multilateral organizations and donors, will be crucial.

6

Formally recognize the role of the Malaysian Association of Social Workers under the law

The Malaysian Association of Social Workers plays a key role in strengthening social work and the social service workforce by advocating for, promoting, and defending the status, recognition and working conditions of the profession and workforce, and by providing technical support to state and non-state actors. They also advocate for policy development relevant to social work and social services and support their members by promoting, enabling, or providing training, mentoring, and supervision, as well as promoting, revising and upholding a professional code of ethics. Currently, the Malaysian Association of Social Workers is an entity independent of government control. Still, they need to be formally recognized and regulated in law, with a similar mandate and status to other professional associations to ensure that their mandate is strengthened, and they maintain visibility and credibility by the public. On top of this, ongoing and consistent funding should be provided by the Government to enable the association to grow, develop and sustainably support the social work profession and social service workforce in Malaysia.

7

Establish and define a regulatory body or council in Malaysia

Malaysian policymakers should work with the Malaysian Association of Social Workers and other

key stakeholders to fully decide on the best model for establishing and defining a Regulatory Body or Council in Malaysia. To determine the most appropriate approach for regulating the social work profession in Malaysia, it is vital for decision makers to understand the advantages and disadvantages of independent versus government regulation and also consider hybrid models (see table below).

The choice for regulating social work depends on the specific context and priorities of the jurisdiction. For example, the Social Work Professions Council was formed similarly to other professional regulatory bodies in Thailand. This establishment aligned with the typical practice of creating professional councils to regulate and standardize professions, and its governance structure is consistent with that of other professional entities in Thailand.⁵²

If there is no standard approach within the country and/or a different approach is desired for establishing the social work regulatory body, it is important to understand the differences. While independent bodies often offer greater flexibility, expertise and perceived impartiality, they may face funding and public accountability challenges. On the other hand, government entities provide more direct political accountability and policy coordination but may be less nimble in responding to industry changes and could be more influenced by short-term political considerations. By carefully evaluating these factors, policymakers can determine the most appropriate regulatory approach for the social work profession in Malaysia, whether that be an independent regulatory body, a government entity, or a hybrid model.

Once the regulatory model is decided and agreed upon, the mandate of a national board/council or other regulatory body should be defined in law or otherwise recognized in government policy. Ongoing and consistent funding from the government and other sources should be determined to support the regulatory body's operation and enable capacity building of its staff.⁵³

52 Interview with Mr Chinchai Cheecharoen August 2024

53 As outlined in the Roadmap to Implement the Hanoi Declaration

Table 5: Advantages and disadvantages of different types of regulatory bodies

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Independent regulation ⁵⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater autonomy for the profession to set its own standards. • Potentially more responsive to the needs of practitioners. • May be more cost-effective than government regulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited government oversight may reduce public confidence. • Independent bodies may struggle with limited resources compared to government supported entities.
Government regulation ⁵⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government involvement can potentially enhance greater public confidence and accountability. • Government involvement can potentially result in consistent standards across different regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be less responsive to the needs of the profession, lead to slow decision making and less flexibility to adapt to changes. • Potentially higher costs due to bureaucratic processes. • Regulations may be subject to political agendas, potentially compromising professional standards.
Hybrid models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines the strength of both independent and government regulation offering flexibility and accountability. • Can enable better resourcing by leveraging government resources while maintaining professional focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing dual oversight can create complexity and potential conflicts in regulatory approaches. • Requires effective coordination between independent organization and governmental bodies to function smoothly. • Independence may be constrained where professional association would otherwise have strongly advocated for the workforce.

8

Develop a budget plan for establishing the regulatory body or council

Once the model for regulation has been determined and agreed upon, sustainable financial planning is crucial to deciding on the cost associated with implementing new regulations. A budget plan must account for the long-term costs of a regulatory body, including staffing, technology and training to ensure effective enforcement of administrative processes. Furthermore, exploring additional alternative funding sources and conducting stakeholder consultation in

an impact assessment would help identify potential financial challenges and can lead to proactive budget planning. Before establishing a regulatory body, the long-term costs associated with enforcing and administering the new social work law must be carefully considered, not just the initial implementation. This can help to inform decision-making, identify impacts, allocate resources effectively and compare regulatory alternatives to anticipate challenges, demonstrate value and ensure long-term sustainability of the proposed regulatory body for social work.

54 Independent regulation, as seen in Indonesia's current system, involves self-regulation by the Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association.

55 Government regulated systems such as in the Philippines which involves state oversight of the profession through the PRC.

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Appendix 1

Table to assist in determining which model to use to regulate the social work profession in Malaysia

To determine what type of social work regulatory body fits the context of Malaysia, decision makers can use this table to evaluate several key factors such as governance structure, funding, resources, regulatory approach, accountability, expertise, and public perception. This tool can help create a baseline measurement to determine the regulatory approach

and guide the development of a model that best suits Malaysia; whether that be an independent regulatory body, government entity or hybrid model that leverages the structured oversight and resources of government regulation while incorporating the specialized expertise and adaptability of independent regulatory bodies.

Governance structure	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established by legislation but generally operate autonomously from the government Typically have a board of directors or commissioners appointed by a governing authority Less susceptible to direct political influence which can offer more flexibility and sector-specific focus. 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often involves a structured framework, ensuring consistency and accountability.⁵⁶ Part of a government department or ministry Leadership appointed by and reported directly to government officials More subject to changing political priorities
Funding and resources	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often funded through industry fees or donations rather than government budgets, which may affect their sustainability and reach. 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funded through government budgets Resources might be more stable but can fluctuate based on political priorities and fiscal constraints
Regulatory approach	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally, more flexible in adapting regulations to industry changes May be more responsive to stakeholder input Can potentially balance industry and public interests more effectively 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulations typically require more extensive governmental approval processes May be slower to adapt to industry changes Potentially more influenced by broader political agendas

56 As seen with the Philippines Professional Regulation Commission

Accountability	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountable to their statutory mandate and governing legislation Often required to report to parliament or legislative bodies May face challenges in balancing independence with public accountability, however, may be more transparent 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly accountable to government ministers and political leadership Subject to more immediate political oversight and intervention
Expertise and focus	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often staffed by industry experts and specialists Can develop deep expertise in specific regulatory areas May be better equipped to handle complex, technical regulatory issues 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May have broader policy perspectives but potentially less specialized expertise Can coordinate more easily with other government departments
Public perception	
Independent regulatory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often perceived as more impartial and less politically motivated May inspire greater confidence in regulated industries and the public 	Government entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be seen as more directly accountable to the public through elected officials Potentially viewed as more susceptible to political influence

Appendix 2

History and progress of social work



Philippines

The professionalization of social work in the Philippines developed over several decades in the 20th century. Here's a brief timeline of key events:

Early 1900s

Medical Social Work began in the Philippines, with significant growth throughout the 20th century.

1910s-1920s

Early social work practices were established, with individualized and family-centred methods being introduced to assist clients.

1946

Philippine Association of Social Workers (PASW) was founded on November 12, 1947, and incorporated on April 18, 1948.

1964

The Philippine Association of Social Workers (PASW) first adopted a Code of Ethics. This was the original or first code for the profession in the country.

1965

Republic Act No. 4373 (An act to regulate the practice of social work) was enacted on June 19, formally recognizing social work as a profession in the Philippines. This law regulated the practice of social work and the operation of social work agencies. It required social work practitioners to have an academic degree in social work and pass licensure examinations.

1965

The Board of Examiners for Social Work was created to regulate the Profession of Social Work in the Philippines,

it consisted of a Chair and four members appointed by the President of the Philippines, with the consent of the Commission of Appointments.

Mid-sixties

Social workers actively pushed for measures to uplift the profession.

1967

Republic Act No. 5175 (An act to regulate the practice of social work and the operation of social work agencies in the Philippines) was passed, amending R.A. 4373. This law protected the rights of social workers with provisional appointments and upgraded the educational requirements for Board of Examiners members from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree in social work.

1972

Revisions to the **Code of Ethics**. Another significant revision occurred in 1998. The Code of Ethics has continued to evolve over time, reflecting changes in the profession and society.

1973

The Professional Regulation Commission was established through a **Decree No.223**. It replaced the previous Board of Examiners and began operation in 1974. The Board of Examiners for Social Work regulatory structure evolved during this time to include the PRC as a higher supervisory body. The original Board of Examiners likely transformed into the current Professional Regulatory Board for Social Workers, which continues to function under the PRC's oversight.

1988

Philippine Association of Social Workers (PASW) was re-incorporated with the Securities and Exchange Commission on October 18, 1988, changing its name to Philippine Association of Social Workers, Incorporated (PASWI).

The profession has continued to evolve over time, with more recent focuses been on developing standards and ethical frameworks:

- The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) played a crucial role in shaping social work practice and policies.
- Professional organizations were established to further develop and regulate the profession, contributing to the creation of ethical guidelines and practice standards.
- Educational institutions began aligning their curricula with international standards, incorporating core values, ethics and professional integrity into social work education.
- Professional Associations – various specialized associations emerged, including the Association of Medical Social Workers of the Philippines, Inc. (AMSWPI), reflecting the diversification of social work practice areas.
- The profession adopted global definitions and ethical principles, as outlined by international bodies like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).
- In 2023, The Code of Ethics underwent revisions to update it to ensure that it is relevant particularly to the modern day with the risks of technological advances.



Thailand

1942

Social work education and practice was founded when a 15-month social work certificate programme was formally introduced in Thailand.

1950s

The Asia-Pacific Association of Social Workers (APSW) is founded in 1952, marking an important step in organizing the social work profession regionally.

1954

The first faculty of social work (the Faculty of Social Administration) at Thammasat University is established in Thailand, marking the beginning of formal social work education in the country.

1960s

The APSW holds its first regional conference in Tokyo, Japan in 1961, helping to connect social work professionals across the Asia-Pacific region including Thailand.

1970s-1980s

The APSW establishes several important committees, including education (1975), research (1980), and social policy (1983) committees, which likely influenced social work education and practice in Thailand.

1990s

Social work education in Thailand continues to evolve, with scholars like Jaturong Boonyarattanasoontorn contributing to the field's theoretical foundations.

1998

The Faculty of Social Administration is established at Thammasat University, offering bachelor's, master's and doctorate degree programme in social work.

2000s

Social work education in Thailand becomes more established, with programme focusing on developing graduates with knowledge in social welfare and social work methodologies.

2010s

International collaborations in social work education emerge, such as the MSW Thailand Semester Abroad programme at Thammasat University's Faculty of Social Administration, offering international experiences for social work students.

2013

The Social Work Profession Act (B.E. 2556) was a pivotal moment, officially acknowledging and safeguarding the social work profession and led to the establishment of the Council of Social Work Profession to oversee the licensing of social work practitioners and regulate standards of practice.

2016

Thailand's Social Work Professional Ethic Codes were introduced, serving as guiding principles for ethical practice to ensure clients' best interests.

2017

Specialized social work programmes are developed, such as the programmes for caring for terminally ill patients, supported by the Office of the National Health Commission.

Present Day

Social work education in Thailand continues to evolve, with programmes like the Bachelor of Social Work (B.SW.) at Thammasat University's Lampang Campus preparing students for various roles in government, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies.



Indonesia

1950s-1960s⁵⁷

Social work education began to take shape, with early programs focusing on welfare and community development.

1970s

The government started to recognize the importance of social work (as part of social welfare and community development), leading to the establishment of formal education programmes in universities.

1986

Establishment of the Indonesian Social Worker Education Association (IPPSI).

1998

Establishment of the Indonesia Association of Professional Social Work (IPSPI).

2004

The Indonesian Parliament issued the **National Social Protection Law**, providing a basic legal framework for the development of a social protection system covering five major policy areas: health insurance, employment injury, old-age, pensions and death benefits.

2008

The Indonesian Professional Social Workers Association (IPSPI) was founded to improve the competence and welfare of social workers.

⁵⁷ Based on the Decision Letter of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Number: Pbs.1-5-4/5980, decided that the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) would establish a College of Social Welfare abbreviated as STKS (Sekolah Tinggi Kesejahteraan Sosial) providing undergraduate programme of Social Welfare with the degree of BSW (Bachelor of Social Work). It was the first and pioneer programme study of social work in Indonesia which was then followed by other universities such as Padjadjaran University (UNPAD) Bandung, Pasundan University Bandung, University of Indonesia Jakarta, STISIP Widuri Jakarta and so on.

2009

Social Welfare Law was passed, stipulating requirements for certification and licensing for social workers and clarifying categories within the social service workforce, including social welfare officers, professional social workers, social educators and volunteers.

2010

Stakeholders agreed to the **definition of social work**.

2011

The Indonesian Social Work Consortium was formed on August 10, 2011, bringing together social work bodies related to the professionalization of social work. IPSPI joined the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Several key activities were achieved this year including:

- Identifying standard social work **competencies**
- Adopting national **standards for social work practice**
- Agreeing to **national curriculum and teaching modules**
- Expanding social work curriculum and supervised **practicum programme** with eight main schools

- Obtaining Minister of Social Affairs **decree on certification** system
- Establishing social work **certification body** (LSPS) to conduct National Examination

2012

- Established **levels of certification** and main requirements for four levels of workers
- Created and held first **exam**
- Implemented national social work **education standards** in 35 schools of social work
- Drafting of the Social Worker Law

2013-2019

Advocacy efforts were undertaken to sell the idea of the Bill to the Ministry of Social affairs and Parliament. For example, a needs assessment was conducted, several national seminars and conferences on social work were held, and a public hearing took place in Parliament.⁵⁸

2019

The **Social Worker Law** was enacted, mandating registration and certification for social workers.



Singapore⁵⁹

1940s

Social work began to emerge as a profession in Singapore.

1971

The Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) was formed through the merger of two existing social work associations

1973

The Ministry of Education set up its first social work unit to support counselling in schools.

1990s

There was a push for greater professionalization by SASW, with the introduction of a Professional Code of Ethics and efforts to establish a registration for social workers.

58 <https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ASEAN-Regional-Workshop-Social-Service-Workforce-Strengthening.pdf>

59 Milestones - Singapore Association of Social Workers <https://sasw.org.sg/milestone/>

1991

Social work services expanded with the establishment of Family Service Centres which increased focus on providing counselling and community-based support services.

1992

Social workers celebrated the 40th anniversary of the social work profession in Singapore.

1996

SASW submitted a proposal to the government on the registration of social workers in Singapore.

1997

A government task force was set up to address the need for recognition and registration of social workers.

2001-2003

Social work was further specialized, with the launch of new chapters: medical social work (2001), school social work (2003), Family Social Work and Disability Social Work under the SASW.

2004

SASW launched the Registration of Singapore Social Workers.

2006

Social work was included in the Workforce Development Agency's Social Service Competency Map.

2015

The National Social Work Competency Framework was launched to provide standards for the profession.



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The Social Work Profession Bill aims to create a comprehensive framework for the social work profession in Malaysia, ultimately benefiting the most vulnerable populations by ensuring high-quality, effective social services.

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