



**SELECT CASE STUDIES AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UKRAINE**

September 2025

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International Experience in Core Competencies and In-Service Training of Social Sector Workers

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Glossary

Accreditation	in this context, refers to a formal review and approval of education and training programs.
Certification	in this context, refers to a formal review and approval of qualified workers.
Competency framework	a structured set of core and specialist competencies that describe what effective social work practice looks like, often elaborating on foundational knowledge, practical skills, values and ethics, continuous learning and reflective practice of the social sector workforce.
Continuing professional development	is often associated with the mandatory requirements for professional development associated with maintaining registration or authorization to work in that field. Otherwise known as CPD, it is the process of maintaining and improving workers' skills, knowledge and know-how.
Fitness to practice	a person (worker) can practice safely and effectively because they have the relevant skills, knowledge, character and health to do so. ¹
In-service training	professional training or professional development activities for staff to fulfil their current position.
Occupational Standards	in Ukraine, these standards set out competencies required of workers for specific jobs and positions. These standards describe the tasks, responsibilities and skills needed to perform a particular role effectively.
Pre-service education	education or professional training for individuals prior to fulfilling a position or role.
Reflective practice	a continuous cycle of self-observation, evaluation, and improvement, allowing social workers to learn from their experiences and enhance their skills. ²
Registration	in this context, refers to a formal system used to document all workers of a certain profession (i.e., social workers) who are practicing in that field.
Regulation (of the workforce)	often includes registering social workers, setting professional standards, ensuring continuing professional development and handling fitness to practice concerns. ³
Social sector workforce	refers to workers who support families and children through child protection and social protection/social services.

1 / Social Work England. (n.d.). What we mean by fitness to practise. <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/concerns/what-we-mean-by-fitness-to-practise/>

2 / Tripod Partners. (n.d.). The importance of reflective practice in social work. <https://www.tripodpartners.com/career-advice/social-work/the-importance-of-reflective-practice-in-social-work/#:~:text=Reflective%20practice%20in%20social%20work%20is%20essential%20for%20professional%20development,experiences%20and%20enhance%20their%20skills>

3 / Professional Standards Authority. (n.d.). Social Work England. <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/organisations-we-oversee/regulators/social-work-england>

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the context of social work has changed significantly. This is particularly relevant for Ukraine, where the war has deepened inequalities, increased the complexity of needs and vulnerability of the population, and accelerated reforms related to European integration.⁴ Ukraine is prioritizing the development of the social service delivery system to meet the growing demand for support for communities, families, and individuals. This is reflected, in particular, in the development of the draft National Strategy for the Development of the Social Service Delivery System and the **National Strategy for Ensuring the Right of Every Child in Ukraine to Grow Up in a Family Environment (2024–2028)**. These processes have raised the bar for the professional competency of social sector workers, going beyond the traditional provision of social assistance.⁵ Social workers now need knowledge, skills, and abilities in the areas of trauma-sensitive practice, economic inclusion, and cross-sectoral cooperation,⁶ as well as other competencies needed to respond effectively to contemporary social challenges.

BACKGROUND AND METHOD

The National Social Service of Ukraine (NSS) is authorized to implement state policy in the field of social protection, in particular, to ensure the high-quality of social services. Recognizing that social sector workers play a key role in achieving national priorities, NSS is considering strategic investments to support the professionalization and development of human resources in the sector.

With support from UNICEF Ukraine and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, a series of country case studies and examples related to human resources in the social sector, including regulation, continuous professional development and supportive supervision, were developed.

This document focuses on the importance and role of the national system of core competencies in addressing these issues. Aspects related to supportive supervision are presented in a separate report. It is also worth noting that a comprehensive social sector workforce assessment was conducted in four oblasts of Ukraine (Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Lviv and Volyn).

CONTEXT

Ukraine has a solid foundation for further development. There is general agreement that professional standards and higher education standards relating to the social sector, as well as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), should comply with European requirements. The professional standards in Ukraine define the necessary competencies for employees and are developed in accordance with Ukrainian regulations, in particular, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 373 “On Approval of the Procedure for Developing, Implementing, and Revising Professional Standards” and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1453 “On Amendments to Resolution No. 373 of May 31, 2017.” Professional standards also take into account the provisions of the Methodological Recommendations of the **National Qualifications Agency** on the Development of Professional Standards.⁷

Ukraine is in the process of bringing its National Qualifications Framework in line with the requirements of the European Commission. In the future, it should be fully implemented, particularly in the social sphere. This involves eliminating inconsistencies and discrepancies between existing higher education standards in social work and professional standards in the social sphere.

FINDINGS

An analysis of other countries’ experiences has revealed that effective practices include:

- the existence of a reliable legal framework for regulating and professionalizing the workforce (Romania, United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, France);
- establishing requirements for continuous professional development (United Kingdom, Romania, Germany);
- identifying priority training topics (usually child protection, safety, trauma-sensitive practice, mental health, case management, and support for persons with disabilities);
- establishing a national body or commission to identify training needs (Romania);
- accrediting education providers (Romania, Poland, United Kingdom).

4 / Cedefop (2022). European Qualifications Framework (EQF) 2022—Ukraine.

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ukraine_-_european_inventory_of_nqfs_2022.pdf (pp. 1–8; pp. 36 and pp. 39–40)

5 / Semigina, T. (2025a). From emergency to empowerment: Competency shifts in Ukrainian social work. Current achievements and prospects for socio-economic development: Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific and Practical Conference (pp. 153–157). Research Europe.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392155580_From_emergency_to_empowerment_competency_shifts_in_Ukrainian_social_work

6 / Trueell, R. (2022). Ethics of social work in action: Ukraine. *International Journal of Values and Ethics in Social Work*, 19(3), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.55521/10-019-302>

7 / Semigina, T., & Balanyuk, Y. (2023). Boosting occupational standard elaboration in the context of economic reforms. Economic reform in the context of international cooperation: mechanisms and strategies: proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference (Zaporizhzhia, March 10–11, 2023) (pp. 118–122). Liha-Pres.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening and implementing a national competency system for social workers requires updating and modernizing professional standards in the social sphere, ensuring their compliance with the National Qualifications Framework and the legislative and regulatory framework, as well as harmonizing professional and educational standards. Developing and updating standards can be part of a broader, gradual process of regulating the activities of social sector workers. Such regulation may include establishing requirements and systems for the registration of social workers and their completion of a minimum amount of continuing professional education. The introduction of this regulation and the strengthening of competencies will raise expectations for the professional activities of social workers, contributing to the growth of their objective and subjective levels of professionalism.

The development and implementation of institutional structures, frameworks, and regulatory systems is a long-term goal. In many countries, this process has taken several years, and in some cases, more than a decade. Many of the countries mentioned in this report are still gradually developing and improving such systems. Therefore, the recommendations outlined here attempt to present the critical elements of this work in stages, with a focus on the long-term vision.

Based on the National Qualifications Framework, as well as regulations and methodological recommendations on professional standards, the following provisions lay the foundation for discussing further steps for the next five years.



SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (1–2 YEARS)

DEVELOP AND UPDATE EXISTING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES, ensuring their compliance with CMU Resolution No. 373 and CMU Resolution No. 1453, as well as the Methodological Recommendations of the National Qualifications Agency on the development of professional standards. This process, led by the Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity of Ukraine and the National Social Service of Ukraine, will contribute to the modernization of professional standards in line with the NQF.

REVIEW AND BRING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN LINE WITH UPDATED PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS. This process can be started by reviewing sample job descriptions to determine the next steps to fully harmonize them with the standards.

ALIGN EDUCATION STANDARDS APPROVED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE with professional standards in the social sphere to ensure that graduates acquire the competencies necessary in practice, facilitate a smooth transition from education to professional activity, and improve the overall quality and relevance of education and training in the social sphere.

IDENTIFY PRIORITY TOPICS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT that are necessary for the Children's Services to effectively support families and children in the current environment. When identifying such topics, the results of the Study of the Capacity of Social Sector Workers in Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, and Kharkiv Oblasts, conducted with the support of the NSSU and UNICEF, should be taken into account, as well as any additional data where employees report on the training they believe is necessary to better perform their work.

REVIEW EXISTING STATE AND/OR REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS THAT COVER PRIORITY AREAS, TO ENSURE ALIGNMENT WITH UPDATED OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS. Programs that align with updated standards should be formally approved, certified and disseminated for implementation in the regions, and training should be provided to the Children's Service staff.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (3–5 YEARS)

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL REGULATORY BODY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS, approved at the legislative level. The regulator would have authority to register social workers, a mandate to ensure their continuing professional development and take action in cases of non-compliance with professional standards.

IDENTIFY WHICH CATEGORIES OF WORKERS WILL BE REGULATED. It is advisable to start by regulating one or two positions or qualifications, gradually expanding coverage over time. It is recommended to start with priority roles—such as social workers, child protection specialists, and social managers—who handle more complex cases involving families and children in difficult life circumstances. Once these positions have been regulated, gradually expand the regulation to other positions and qualifications.

Once the regulatory body is established, mobilize efforts across the country to register all existing practitioners. It is important to **ENSURE THAT WORKERS DO NOT FEEL THREATENED ABOUT LOSING THEIR JOBS.** This can be done by implementing measures to upgrade workers' skills where appropriate.

ESTABLISH MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL REGULATIONS. In addition, develop a system to record individual workers' CPD achievements as a condition for maintaining their registration/certification to practice.

GRADUALLY INTRODUCE A SYSTEM FOR REVIEWING AND FORMALLY APPROVING ADDITIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS. This involves defining the powers and structure for performing this function, with options ranging from this being a government function (Poland), to an independent national body (Romania), to a private-sector function (England).



7 March 2025, Valky, Kharkiv region, Ukraine – Olena walks through the Resilience Centre in Valky with her five-year-old son Nikita and a social worker (right).
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7 March 2025, Valky, Kharkiv region, Ukraine – Olena walks through the Resilience Centre in Valky with her five-year-old son Nikita and a social worker (right).
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Purpose and Audience

This document is the result of a rapid assessment of global practices. It aims to provide information to the National Social Service of Ukraine, the Coordination Centre for Family Upbringing and Child Development, UNICEF Ukraine and their partners to strengthen the capacity of workers responsible for providing social services and ensuring family care for all children. This document describes key global and European competencies to provide information for updating relevant competencies in Ukraine. It also contains the results of case studies that illustrate various advantages, structures and options for Ukraine to take into account in its efforts to strengthen human resource capacity in the social sector.



Methods

The information presented in this document was obtained through a review of relevant documents available online. NSS selected countries for case studies about employee training: Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Partners working in France and Sweden also provided descriptions of the structures and practices in their countries. Other examples from different countries cited in the document reflect promising practices identified during online research. The findings presented are limited to information that was readily available from these sources and only for select countries. No interviews were conducted to confirm data or provide additional information.

Background

In recent years, the context of social work has changed significantly. This is particularly relevant for Ukraine, where the war has deepened inequality and increased the complexity of needs and vulnerability of the population, as well as accelerated reforms related to European integration.⁸ These processes have raised the bar for the professional competency of social sector workers, going beyond the traditional provision of social assistance.⁹ Social workers now need knowledge, skills and abilities in the areas of trauma-informed practices, economic inclusion and cross-sector collaboration,¹⁰ as well as competencies needed to respond effectively to contemporary social challenges. At the same time, the transition to digital services has become a necessity. Systems, such as the **Unified Information System of the Social Sphere (UISSS)**, require social workers to develop digital competencies, understand digital ethics, and provide assistance to clients with varying levels of digital literacy. These changes mean social work increasingly requires adaptability, technological confidence, and a proactive approach.¹¹

Ukraine has a solid foundation for further development. There is general agreement that professional and higher education standards relating to the social sector, as well as the National Qualifications Framework, should comply with European requirements. Professional standards in Ukraine define the necessary competencies for employees and are developed in accordance with Ukrainian regulations, in particular, Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 373 “*On Approval of the Procedure for Developing, Implementing, and Revising Professional Standards*,” and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1453 “*On Amendments to Resolution No. 373 of May 31, 2017*.” Professional standards also take into account provisions of the Methodological Recommendations of the National Qualifications Agency on the Development of Professional Standards.¹²

As a temporary measure—until all professional standards have been fully developed—current legislation allows

the use of so-called “qualification characteristics.” These characteristics are considered a legacy of the Soviet system, established as a norm of labor regulation in the Labor Code. They have been used in the social sector for a long time, with the latest version of the relevant reference book of qualification characteristics of workers’ professions (Issue 80 “Social Services”) approved in 2017. However, the link between these characteristics and modern competency models is weak: the reference book was approved before the process of bringing the NQF in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the adoption of new legislation on social services, and the active development of professional standards.

There is agreement that Ukraine should be guided by European standards, in particular, the European Qualifications Framework, which should be integrated into national professional, educational and training systems.^{13,14,15} Ukraine is currently in the process of bringing its National Qualifications Framework (NQF) into line with the requirements of the European Commission. The NQF aligns with eight levels of the EQF. However, efforts are still needed to ensure that the NQF is fully used in the social sector. Currently, the standards for higher education in social work and existing professional standards for social workers show significant inconsistencies and discrepancies in the defined competencies.^{16, 17}

Strengthening and implementing a national competency system for social workers requires updating and modernizing professional standards in the social sector, ensuring their alignment with the existing NQF, the regulatory framework, and harmonizing educational and professional standards.

To support this effort, this document examines competency systems and documents, both international best practices and examples from countries that can be applied to the Ukrainian context. The document also provides practical examples and comparisons between countries, specifically related to the professional development of social workers.

8 / Cedefop (2022). *European Inventory of NQFs 2022 – Ukraine*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ukraine_-_european_inventory_of_nqfs_2022.pdf (pp.1-8; p.36 and pp.39-40).
9 / Semigina, T. (2025a). *From emergency to empowerment: Competency shifts in Ukrainian social work*. Modern achievements and prospects of socio-economic development: Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific and Practical Conference (pp.153-157). Research Europe. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392155580_From_emergency_to_empowerment_competency_shifts_in_Ukrainian_social_work

10 / *Ibid.* Truell, R. (2022). Social Work Ethics in Action: Ukraine. *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, 19(3), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.55521/10-019-302>

11 / Semigina, T. (2025b). *Advancing digital social services in Ukraine: A race between innovation and readiness*. Strategic Directions of Science Development: Factors of Influence and interaction. Proceedings of the 6th International Scientific Conference (pp. 95-102). Vinnytsia: UKRLOGOS Group. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390486236_ADVANCING_DIGITAL_SOCIAL_SERVICES_IN_UKRAINE_A_RACE_BETWEEN_INNOVATION_AND_READINESS

12 / Semigina, T., & Balanyuk, Y. (2023). *Boosting occupational standard elaboration in the context of economic reforms*. In: Reforming economics in the context of international collaboration: mechanisms and strategies: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference Zaporizhzhia, March 10–11, 2023) (pp. 118–122). Liha-Pres.

13 / *Ibid.* Semigina, T. (2025a). *From emergency to empowerment: Competency shifts in Ukrainian social work*. Modern achievements and prospects of socio-economic development: Proceedings of the 2nd International Scientific and Practical Conference (pp.153-157). Research Europe. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392155580_From_emergency_to_empowerment_competency_shifts_in_Ukrainian_social_work

14 / Baidarova, O., Karagodina, O., & Fedchenkov, V. (2020). *Is this model of professional competencies applied to the needs of workers involved in protecting children's rights and interests in Ukraine?* Bulletin of the Academy of Labor, Social Relations and Tourism. 1–2, 80–96.

15 / Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. Order No. 518, dated March 29, 2017. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0518739-17#Text>

16 / Semigina, T. Recognition of professional qualifications in social work: debatable issues (2022). *Proceedings of the 3rd All-Ukrainian Scientific and Practical Conference “Social assistance and social work: Contemporary challenges”*. Lutsk Lutsk National Technical University, Pp. 90–93.

17 / Baidarova, O.O. (2024). *In the midst of reforms: Priority tasks of building a system in Ukraine for developing social workers’ professional competencies*. In: Modern Theory and Practice of Social Work in Ukraine and Abroad: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference (Lviv, November 14–15, 2024) (Pp 221–225). Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.

Workforce Competency Systems

UNDERSTANDING COMPETENCY SYSTEMS

A competency framework is a structured set of core and specialized competencies that describe what effective social work practice looks like. They typically cover:



Basic knowledge (for example, human rights, social justice, child development).



Practical skills (case management, assessment, intervention, advocacy).



Values and ethics (professional integrity, respect for diversity).



Continuous learning and reflective practice.

Competency frameworks define the knowledge, skills, values and behaviors that social workers need to be effective in their profession. Their purpose is to:

Ensure consistent quality of services, regardless of where a professional is trained, educated or works.

Form a common professional identity, which is especially important for systems undergoing reform.

Provide a clear benchmark for education, licensing, and continuing professional development.

Support accountability to the public, employers, and service users by defining what can be expected from qualified professionals.

Competency frameworks also protect vulnerable children and families by clearly defining safety standards, human rights-based practices, and cultural competence. As stated in the International **Global standards** of the Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), social work education must be based on 'clearly specified objectives and expected higher education outcomes,' that ensure graduates are able to 'understand the interconnection between the practice at all levels—micro, mezzo, and macro.'¹⁸

Overall, competency frameworks are necessary for training workers because they:

- Define what competent practice looks like.
- Ensure education and training are relevant and effective.
- Support consistent assessment and recognition of the workforce.
- Promote professionalization and the status of the workforce.
- Promote ethical, reflective, and inclusive practices.
- Enable the comparison of qualifications at the international level and support worker mobility.

A competency-based approach is considered the foundation for developing staff training systems that respond to labor market needs.¹⁹ This approach became widespread in the 1960s in the United States and has since been applied in many European countries. It allows for clearer definition and consistent arrangement of training content. At the same time, this approach has both advantages and limitations, especially when working with experienced professionals or in tasks that rely heavily on professional judgement. In particular, one limitation is that competency frameworks may not adequately reflect how experienced workers use tacit knowledge, intuition, or ethical reasoning in dynamic situations. These forms of expertise are hard to standardize or assess through checklists or test questions. A competency-based approach looks at how well a person can apply their skills in real-life situations, in professional settings, with individuals and communities. It emphasizes practical aspects rather than just theoretical knowledge, but it does not always reflect the full depth of professional decision-making in practice. Workers use their understanding of different situations to handle complex tasks in the appropriate context.²⁰ Their competencies enable them to perform complex and demanding tasks with confidence and professional skill.

18 / IASSW, (pp. 6–11) Retrieved from: <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training-program/>

19 / Baidarova, O., Karagodina, O., & Fedchenkov, V. (2020). *Is this model of professional competencies applied to the needs of workers involved in protecting children's rights and interests in Ukraine?* Bulletin of APSVT, 1–2.

20 / Kilakoski, T. Basarab, T. European Union, Council of Europe. (2022). Competence frameworks and competence-based approaches in youth worker education and training in five European countries. https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/131344248/Competence_frameworks.pdf/1fe47c41-e2eb-3e58-1a0c-042e7f73fed3

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCY SYSTEMS

Competency systems are the cornerstone of consistent, high-quality social work because they:

- 1 Provide clarity in defining what professionals should be able to do: competency frameworks provide a clear description of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values expected of social workers or child protection professionals. This clarity ensures that learners, educators and employers share a common understanding of what effective practice looks like.
- 2 Link education to real-world practice: competency frameworks are often developed based on research and consultations with practitioners, ensuring that they are relevant to real-world working conditions. This approach helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that qualifications are relevant and graduates are ready for professional practice.
- 3 Support evaluation and ensure recognition of skills: competency frameworks enable systematic evaluation of learning outcomes. In many countries, they serve as the basis for qualification structures and certification processes.
- 4 Promote the professionalization and raise the status of the workforce: Having defined competency frameworks helps to professionalize social work by:
 - Establishing common standards that distinguish qualified professionals from untrained volunteers.
 - Supporting regulatory bodies and professional associations in promoting recognition, career pathways, and continuous development.
- 5 Provide flexibility to recognize non-formal and informal education: social work, child protection work, and youth work often involve experiential and non-formal learning. Competency systems can help capture and recognize this learning. Such an inclusive approach encourages practitioners from diverse backgrounds to engage in continuous professional development and gain credit for experiential learning.
- 6 Enable comparability, mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications across countries: European frameworks, such as the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**, and national frameworks aligned with it, help compare qualifications across countries. This is important for:
 - Promoting the mobility of workers between countries;
 - Supporting mutual recognition of qualifications; and
 - Developing exchange programs and transnational cooperation.
- 7 Promote reflective and ethical practice: some competency frameworks go beyond listing tasks and skills by integrating values, ethics, and self-reflection. This is particularly important in social, child protection and youth work, where ethical dilemmas and value-based decision-making are key elements of practice. For example, Columbia University's **Social Work Practicum Manual** illustrates this in practice: students are assessed on specific competencies to ensure they are prepared to work safely and effectively with diverse communities.²¹

Overview of Global Practices

Globally, competency-based systems are an integral part of professional social work. Some examples include:

- **The IFSW & IASSW Global Standards:** Developed through consultation in 125 countries, they define minimum expectations for educational programs worldwide, requiring curricula to integrate knowledge, ethics, and skills to achieve competence.²² They explicitly call for a competency-based approach to prepare social workers for work in a variety of contexts. The standards also describe the competency profile of social work educators, emphasizing that educators must combine personal, interpersonal, social and organizational competencies.²³
- **European Union:** Many countries²⁴ align professional competencies with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to ensure comparability and mobility.
- **United States:** Programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education use a detailed set of core competencies to assess student learning. For example, at Columbia University, each student is evaluated based on competencies such as engaging diversity, applying evidence, and demonstrating professional ethics.²⁵

All these international standards and practices emphasize structured, competency-based assessment of learning outcomes that combine classroom learning with practice, ensuring graduates meet professional standards. They also provide high-quality examples and a foundation on which Ukraine can build to improve its own competency system.

22 / IASSW Global Standards for **Social Work Education** (pp.10–15).

23 / Global Standards of the International Association of Schools of Social Work for Social Work Education (pp. 10–15).

24 / Including Germany, Romania, Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Poland, France, Georgia, etc., countries of the European Economic Area, including Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, as well as additional candidate countries, including Ukraine, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. To check which countries have their NQFs aligned with the EQF, please visit this website with the **European inventory of NQFs | CEDEFOP**.

25 / Columbia University Social Work Practicum Manual (pp. 70–94)



Examples from Europe

THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)

The EQF is effectively a pan-European reference system for regulated professions. It helps make worker qualifications from different European countries easier to understand and compare, and serves as a common reference point for worker education and training. It does this by using **eight reference levels, defined in terms of learning outcomes**—focused on what someone knows, can do, and the level of responsibility they can take on, rather than the duration or place of their learning. For example, reference level eight defines the highest and most advanced and specialized skills and responsibilities, while reference level one describes the most basic, simple tasks and requirements.

WHAT REFERENCING MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Each EU member state is expected to undergo a formal referencing procedure to ensure that a country's NQF corresponds to the EQF. Referencing²⁶ shows how national qualification levels correspond to eight EQF levels, serving as a bridge between the national education system and the European language of the EQF.

NQFs are generally developed by creating a structure that reflects the EQF principles, defining learning outcomes and then aligning qualifications with the NQF. This process is managed through a national body that oversees the development and implementation of the NQF. In Ukraine, this is the responsibility of the National Qualifications Agency.

Once the alignment process is complete, countries can indicate the EQF level in their qualifications documents. This gives qualifications international recognition and comparability. For example, if a country aligns its social work qualifications with its NQF, it can indicate that, for example, a social work level 8 is the same as the EQF level 8, indicating that it meets the highest qualifications for the profession, per European standards.

The alignment of the NQF and EQF is important because it provides:

TRANSPARENCY,

so that employers, universities and individuals across Europe can understand what a qualification level means in another country. For example, it ensures that a qualified social worker in one country has comparable knowledge and skills to a qualified social worker in another country.

MUTUAL TRUST,

so when country A says, 'Level 6 equals EQF Level 6,' country B can rely on this, while students and workers can present their qualifications abroad. For example, in Romania, a bachelor's degree is classified as NQF Level 6, which corresponds to EQF level 6, while an advanced vocational qualification in Germany (*Meisterbrief*)²⁷ also corresponds to EQF Level 6. Even though the qualifications differ in nature (academic and vocational), the process of comparing the NQF and EQF shows that to obtain these qualifications, comparable levels of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities are required.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNTRIES TO MODERNIZE,

document and refine their own national systems in line with standardized levels.

²⁶ / Referencing is a rigorous and transparent process that involves national authorities, EU-level scrutiny and regular updates.

²⁷ / A higher-level vocational qualification in Germany, mainly for skilled trades and crafts, equivalent to a professional bachelor's degree.

Although the EQF classifies qualifications based on learning outcomes, it emphasizes what a person knows and can do, i.e., it provides a clear competency orientation, making it function like a competency system. As a result, NQFs aligned with the EQF naturally follow a competency-based approach.

DEFINING AND ASSESSING CORE COMPETENCIES: EXPERIENCES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, ROMANIA, GERMANY, FRANCE, AND SWEDEN

The examples in this section focus on the United Kingdom, Romania, Germany and France, highlighting their different approaches to defining, implementing and regulating competencies. Sweden's approach is also described, although it does not involve a centralized, national core competency framework for the social sector. Other approaches to workforce regulation and development that do not center on core competencies are not discussed here.

ENGLAND

- In England, **Social Work England** (SWE) is the statutory regulatory body established under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. SWE sets standards for education and training, approves courses, registers practitioners, sets required **continuing professional development** (CPD) and exercises disciplinary influence over practitioners.
- SWE ensures compliance with care competencies, known as **professional standards** (what a social worker must know, understand, and be able to do), which include ethical expectations aligned with global norms such as the IFSW & IASSW principles. In addition, there is The **Professional Capabilities Framework** (PFC), developed by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), which guides education and development, though it is not statutory.
- Compliance with SWE's professional standards is verified through the initial approval of training, registration renewal, CPD audits and **fitness to practice** investigations conducted by SWE. The **Professional Standards Authority** (PSA) oversees SWE's effectiveness.
- SWE requires each registered social worker to submit two different types of CPD per year, at least one of which must include peer reflection—a structured conversation about learning and its impact on practice.

SCOTLAND

- In Scotland, the **Scottish Social Services Council** (SSSC) sets Codes of Practice and **National**

Occupational Standards (NOS). This organization also registers social workers and **investigates professional misconduct**. The Care Inspectorate regulates service providers by inspecting services for compliance with quality standards.

- Like in England, competencies ensure compliance with qualification standards for entry into the profession, require continuous professional development, and serve as a benchmark for disciplinary proceedings. Failures in proficiency identified during a fitness to practice review can result in removal from the professional register, which means losing the right to practice.
- In Scotland, as in England, ethical conduct is monitored through fitness-to-practice reviews, and violations can lead to professional sanctions.

ROMANIA

- The structure of professional social work in Romania is relatively young, with the main legal basis being the Social Assistance Law 292/2011 and related government decrees, in particular Government Decree "On the Provision of Social Services" O.G. 68/2003,²⁸ which defines the professional qualifications and legal framework for social work as a profession.
- Requirements for qualifications and continuing education are established by law, for example, CPD and "the continuous improvement of professional knowledge and skills and their application in practice" (Law no. 466/2004 on the Status of the Social Worker) are mandatory for social workers registered with the National College of Social Workers (**Colegiul National al Asistentilor Sociali din Romania—CNASR**), which acts as the regulatory body for the profession. Social workers must continuously improve their professional knowledge and strive to raise the quality standards of the profession. However, the mechanisms for monitoring and recording CPD are still not fully enforced, and professional oversight of the workforce is still developing.
- All social workers (public sector, NGOs, schools) must meet the educational qualification requirements set by law. However, there is no centralized register or disciplinary board comparable to those in England or Scotland.
- Core competencies of social workers under the Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity are established through the Employment Directorate and set out in Government Decision No. 23/2022, in accordance with national and European legislation and social inclusion policies.²⁹ For social workers registered with CNASR, competencies are defined by the College and apply to both public and private sectors, with an emphasis on improving service

29 / See <https://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/munca/economia-sociala/9-transparenta/legislatie/munca/2637-2013-02-04-directia-ocupare-prezentare-si-atributi>

quality through evidence-based recommendations and continuous professional development.³⁰ CNASR emphasizes that strengthening knowledge and practical skills is essential to improving the quality of service delivery and the attractiveness of the profession.

- Competencies are the basis for the accreditation of educational programs and granting the right for a worker to practice, but further practice is largely regulated by the employee or the employer themselves. CPD is encouraged but not always mandatory and is not systematically monitored, so compliance with basic competency requirements is not yet fully ensured.
- The ethical code of social worker issues developed by CNASR emphasizes human rights and dignity, professional integrity and responsibility, based on European standards. However, ethical standards are not integrated into a centralized system for verifying fitness-to-practice.

GERMANY

- There is no single statutory national competency framework in Germany. Instead, the **German Association for Social Work** (DGSA) has published a Core Curriculum for Social Work Studies and an additional Qualifications Framework, which defines the minimum content expected in bachelor's and master's programs.
- Education is monitored by university accreditation bodies and state-level educational authorities. Unlike in England, there is no central register of social workers and no statutory fitness to practice systems. Social workers in public or statutory institutions (for example, youth welfare offices, rehabilitation services) work in accordance with federal or land laws, but there is no national professional register. The DGSA Qualifications Framework focuses primarily on the educational process and does not set mandatory standards for practice.
- The competencies defined by the DGSA shape the content of educational curricula but are not enforced by a central regulator. Professional identity and expectations may also be influenced by guidelines set by employers (especially in public sector rehabilitation services).³¹
- In Germany, there is no central regulatory body to monitor continuing professional development in social work. Some standards for rehabilitation

and youth services come from the Social Code and sector-specific guidelines, but there are no nationwide audits.

- The **German Professional Association for Social Work** (DBSH) has a voluntary Code of Ethics for its members, which aligns with IFSW & IASSW principles.³²

FRANCE

- The **Association Nationale des Assistants de Service Social** (ANAS) is a professional association that developed a code of ethics as the document that defines the standards of professional conduct for Social Service Assistants. The code is regulated under the **France Compétences Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles** (RNCP) and outlines the expected competencies, activities, and professional roles.
- The ANAS' code of ethics serves as a guide for Social Service Assistants in their professional activities, and the provisions of the code are binding on all individuals who hold a diploma in the field.³³ Responsibility for addressing serious violations of the code of ethics rests with several entities, depending on the severity of the violation.
- Requirements for the continuous professional development of Social Service Assistants are not standardized nor centrally regulated. CPD is available, but its accreditation and approval are decentralized.

SWEDEN

- Sweden does not use a centralized core competency framework for social workers as other countries do. Instead, competencies are integrated through higher education curricula in social work and regulated indirectly by the **National Board of Health and Welfare** (Socialstyrelsen), which oversees the licensing of professions in the health and social care sectors.
- Competencies are verified through the accreditation of university programs in social work. As in Germany, employers (mainly municipalities) play an important role in assessing competencies in practice.
- Work is currently underway to introduce new types of qualifications in the **Swedish Qualifications Framework** (SeQF). Still, continuous professional development and a professional register for all social workers have not yet been implemented. It should be noted that some specialist positions have higher requirements.

30 / See https://www.cnasr.ro/storage/app/media/uploads/12c6a09675620f589055800ba6ceceee/2020/01/cnasr_catalog-a5_-148x210mm-_lowres_protect-1-bun-de-print.pdf

31 / See <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11392882/>

32 / The DGSA and the DBSH are both important organizations for social work in Germany with different focuses. The DGSA (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit*) emphasises the scientific discourse and international cooperation within the field of social work, acting as a platform for exchange and discussion among researchers and practitioners. The DBSH (*Deutscher Berufsverband für Soziale Arbeit*) is a professional association and trade union that represents social workers in matters of occupational policy and advocates for their interests in the workplace.

33 / Association nationale des assistants de service social (ANAS). (n.d.). Le code de déontologie. https://www.anas.fr/Le-code-de-deontologie_a735.html

Table 1 summarizes the experience of various European countries in the functioning of structured competency systems.

Table 1. Competency systems: authority, oversight and application

Country	Who sets the competencies	How competencies are verified	Application to the public and private sectors	Use in regulation
United Kingdom (England and Scotland)	SWE and SSSC together with professional bodies (PFC)	Approval of education/training programs, registration of practitioners, CPD, and fitness to practice checks	Applies equally to all sectors	Entry requirements, CPD monitoring, and disciplinary measures
Romania	National law 292/2011, CNASR, and academic guidelines	Accreditation of degrees, verification by the employer	Applies equally to all sectors	Qualifying practice; limited current regulation
Germany	DGSA (core curriculum and Qualifications Framework), social sector—specific guidelines (Social Code)	University/state accreditation	Sectors are not differentiated	Shapes education; no centralized application
France	<i>Association Nationale des Assistants de Service Social</i> (ANAS) France Competence (RNCP qualifications)	Ethical violations are reported; description of qualifications in the RNCP	Applies equally to all sectors	Registration of diplomas ensures national recognition, and ethics guided by ANAS
Sweden	Higher education curricula and qualifications framework, ³⁴ National Board of Health	Accreditation of degrees, <i>Socialstyrelsen</i> , employer checks	Sectors are not differentiated	No centralized framework, qualifications aligned with EQF, no centralized enforcement

Thus, the information summarized in Table 1 shows the following:

- In the UK, competency systems are regulated centrally (by SWE and SSSC) and apply to all social service providers.
- Romania has legislation in place to ensure competencies and regulation of social workers, but implementation is underway.
- In Germany, the competency frameworks are descriptive and education-oriented; regulation is fragmented and depends on the specific state.
- In France, national regulation of qualifications is combined with ethical guidelines (ANAS). Regulation

of the social sector is carried out by several bodies, with a strong focus on municipal-level oversight.

- In Sweden, competencies are embedded in educational programs and employment requirements rather than in a centralized competency system.

The UK, Germany and Romania use the EQF and nationally agreed frameworks to develop and assess the competencies of social workers. These frameworks define competency descriptions for different fields and professions.³⁵ The other countries considered—Bulgaria, France, Poland and Sweden—have different approaches to regulating the workforce, and do not ensure full compliance of social sector regulation with EQF requirements.

³⁴ / Sweden's NQ—**SeQF (The Swedish Qualifications Framework)** social sector regulation is not yet fully aligned with the EQF. See the **Swedish NQF inventory** for details.

³⁵ / For example, while Germany does not have a separate national competency framework for social workers or child protection professionals (training and standards vary across the 16 federal states, and their development happens at the local or institutional levels), they use the *Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit* (DQR) and EQF to guide development and assessment of social work competencies.

Table 2 describes the main elements of a competency system. It provides examples from Germany, Romania, England, Ireland, Scotland and France. It is not intended to compare countries but to show why social work competency systems are important and the benefits they can offer, for Ukraine to consider when enhancing its competency framework.

Table 2. Illustrative examples of competency systems in different countries

System element	Examples	Advantage
1. Clarity about what professionals should do	Germany: <i>Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit (Qualification Profile for Youth Work)</i> contains eight levels of competency descriptions in various sectors (not only social). For professions in the social sector, it defines expectations regarding knowledge, skills, and professional behavior. There are four main categories of competencies (operational, personal, professional self-awareness, and scientific-theoretical basis). This helps both educators and practitioners understand expectations and tailor training accordingly.³⁶ England: <i>The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)</i> defines nine areas of competence (e.g., professionalism, knowledge, intervention and skills, critical reflection and analysis, etc.), specifying what social workers should demonstrate. The British Association of Social Workers describes this as the basis for education in social work. Romania: <i>The Romanian National Qualifications Framework (ROQF)</i> has adopted EQF descriptors, specifying what social workers should know and be able to do at each of the eight levels, making competencies transparent. This has helped clarify training requirements and professional expectations. Over three years, this has contributed to improved service quality and better coordination between counties.³⁷ France: The National Register of Regulated Professions and Certifications (RNCP), managed by <i>France Competences</i>, defines the knowledge, skills, and competencies for each qualification, including <i>the State Diploma in Social Work Assistance</i>. This registration makes professional expectations transparent for educators and practitioners.	Clear competency requirements promote trust in the profession and ensure consistency in practice.
2. Anchoring education in real practice	Scotland: <i>The Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice</i> integrate professional standards directly into university education programs and practical training. Students are assessed on their competency in real-life practical situations. Romania: Validation (confirmation) of informal learning outcomes recognizes competencies acquired through work, ensuring that education meets the real requirements of the profession.³⁸ Germany: <i>The Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit (Youth Work Qualification Profile)</i> was developed based on interviews and surveys of youth work professionals to reflect practical requirements.	Embedding competencies into practice ensures that graduates are well prepared and can work effectively right away.

36 / Kilakoski, T., Basarab, T., European Union, Council of Europe (2022). *Qualifications frameworks and competence-based approaches in the education and training of youth workers in five European countries*. https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/131344248/Competence_frameworks.pdf/1fe47c41-e2eb-3e58-1a0c-042e7f73fed3

37 / European Commission (2019). Report on the comparison of the Romanian NQF and the EQF. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/romania_-_european_inventory_on_nqf_2018.pdf

38 / European Commission (2019). Comparison report between the Romanian NQF and the EQF (pp. 8–9).

3. Supporting professionalization, recognition, and status	England: Within the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), social workers demonstrate the development of their competencies through critical reflection, supervision, and formal assessment at each stage of their career.³⁹ For example, the Somerset Competency Framework details how managers should use observation, supervision, and reflection journals to assess each competency.⁴⁰ Germany: The National Qualifications Framework is integrated into higher education and professional qualifications, supporting professionalization through the implementation of qualifications into a recognized framework. The German Juleica card serves as an example of a minimum competency standard for volunteer youth leaders and is recognized at the national level. Ireland: The National Qualifications Framework includes levels that form the basis for academic and professional recognition, for example, the North-South Education and Training Committee's Standards. Scotland: SSSC registration requirements stipulate that all practicing social workers must meet competency standards, making professional status visible and respected. France: Registration with the RNCP makes qualifications officially recognized at the national level, which supports regulation, visibility, and respect for the profession, similar to how national frameworks in other countries link qualifications to professional identity.	Structured competency systems help elevate social work to the level of a regulated and respected profession.
4. Flexibility in recognizing the outcomes of non-formal learning	Germany: The National Qualifications Framework is designed to integrate lifelong learning and provides for the recognition of non-formal learning outcomes acquired outside formal education (in the workplace and during volunteer activities). Romania: Since 2014, there has been a formal system for validating the results of non-formal learning, which allows for the recognition of acquired qualifications through assessment centers. France: The French validation system allows workers to obtain qualifications (including social work diplomas) through the assessment of prior experiential learning. This provides alternative pathways and reduces barriers to formal education.	A flexible learning pathway reduces barriers to qualification and supports lifelong learning.
5. Ensuring comparability and mobility	Germany and Romania: National qualifications frameworks are aligned with the EQF, which facilitates mutual recognition of qualifications in Europe. Ireland: Alignment with the EQF and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) facilitates the recognition of Irish qualifications in other European countries. France: Alignment with the EQF ensures the comparability of competencies within the EU, facilitating the mobility of social workers.	Alignment with the EQF increases staff mobility and facilitates mutual recognition of qualifications between countries.

6. Encouraging reflective and ethical practice	Germany: <i>Qualifikationsprofil Jugendarbeit (Qualification Profile for Youth Work)</i> emphasizes the formation of professional identity and understanding of ethical principles. England: The Professional Capabilities Framework includes domains such as critical reflection and analysis, values, and ethics. In addition, other documents require practitioners to demonstrate reflection and ethical decision-making during supervision. Scotland: The SSSC codes of practice require practitioners to reflect on their own impact and adhere to an anti-discriminatory approach. Ireland: The Qualifications Framework combines critical reflection and professional values with technical skills. France: <i>The state diploma in social work</i> requires competency in ethical reflection, professional judgment, and the protection of human rights and dignity in practice.	The inclusion of reflection contributes to the development of ethical and responsible professionals.
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THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRUCTURED COMPETENCY SYSTEM FOR UKRAINE

Developing an appropriate competency system is not without its challenges: a balance must be found between general principles and specific descriptions of professional activities, and the diverse contexts in which social workers operate must be taken into account. At the same time, such systems remain the cornerstone of quality education and professional practice in social work.⁴¹ Alignment with global standards and European practices provides a solid foundation of proven models that can be adapted to Ukraine's needs. Therefore, Ukraine does not need to develop a competency system for social workers from scratch but can instead build on existing international approaches that have been proven in practice. Table 3 presents the advantages of implementing a competency system in the social sector of Ukraine.

41 / BASW The professional association for social workers. <https://basw.co.uk/about-social-work>



Table 3. Benefits of Implementing a Competency-Based Approach in Ukraine's Social Sector

Factors relevant to Ukraine	Advantages of implementing a competency system
1. Different oblasts and communities have their own expectations of social work roles. This creates confusion, inconsistent support to vulnerable families, and reputational risks for the NSS.	A competency system provides clear guidelines for improving quality, conducting supervision, and strengthening public trust by: • Improving and equalizing the quality of service across different regions. • Clarifying expectations for employees and managers. • Strengthening public trust by demonstrating that social work and child protection professions meet clear standards. • Supporting professional development, reducing burnout and staff turnover. • Optimizing recruitment by defining consistent requirements.
2. Ukraine has made commitments under the EU Association Agreement, child protection reforms and other international agreements. The existence of a competency system is now standard practice in Europe, and Ukraine has committed to reforms aligned with EU systems.	Having a competency system positions Ukraine as a country that is serious about reform and makes it possible to attract donor support for workforce development. It will help Ukraine in: • Aligning standards with the EQF.⁴² • Ensuring alignment with EU standards for child protection case management—introducing competencies that encourage the use of case management in child protection would promote compliance with EU standards of practice.
3. Limited budgets and staff shortages. Without clear competencies, it is difficult to assess whether results are improving thanks to investments in training.	A competency system helps track and demonstrate effectiveness: • Clear competencies help direct funds to real gaps. • The system enables targeted training and minimizes spending on random or ineffective training. • It increases accountability for results. It serves as a benchmark for regional professional development programs.
4. Workload and task complexity.	The gradual introduction of the competency system allows for adapting it to real conditions. First, assess existing job descriptions, practices and training content, then consolidate. The first version serves as a basis for testing, correction and gradual improvement of the quality of social work.

42 / Ukraine joined the EQF Advisory group, but as of January 2024, it had not yet taken a reference to the EQF. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ukraine_-_european_inventory_of_nqfs_2022.pdf (p.37).

Professional Development

Research shows that Ukrainian social workers recognize the value of a competency-based approach and are motivated to improve their skills and abilities when training is relevant, practical and linked to certification and career progression.⁴³ It is also well known worldwide that professional development is essential to ensure a competent, ethical, and responsive social work workforce. Continuous learning and reflective professional development are key approaches to applying core competencies. While there are other components to further apply core competencies in the workforce, one of the key components of the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance's workforce-strengthening framework is to provide a broad range of professional development opportunities.⁴⁴

Continuous professional development focuses on lifelong learning, ensuring the workforce's knowledge, skills, and abilities remain relevant and that their professional competency is continuously improving. CPD promotes career advancement and helps social workers better adapt to the needs of the context in which they work.

There are several aspects to reforming and formalizing CPD for the successful achievement and maintenance of social worker professionalization. This includes ensuring adequate legal regulation and oversight, identifying priority training programs, accrediting training providers, and ensuring quality of training delivery. Each of these areas is described below, focusing on examples of good practice. Detailed information on the situation in specific countries is available at the following links:

United Kingdom case study

Germany case study

Romania case study

Sweden case study

Poland case study

France case study

LEGAL REGULATION AND OVERSIGHT

The existence of a clear legal framework makes it possible to regulate activities of social workers—to officially register specialists, verify their compliance with professional standards and competencies and thereby improve the quality of social services.

Both Romania and England have a clear legal basis for the professionalization and regulation of social workers. These countries have laws that create independent non-governmental bodies authorized to exercise professional oversight and develop professional standards.

In Germany, Poland and France, there are no such independent bodies, and the work rather remains within the remit of ministries or government agencies. In Bulgaria and Sweden, the profession of social worker is not officially regulated.

In England, Romania, Poland, and Germany, social workers are required to complete continuing professional development to maintain their registration/licensure to practice. CPD requirements differ from country to country, ranging from academic credit systems to more flexible models that take into account different forms of learning. In France, there are no mandatory CPD requirements; however, regional authorities and employers provide opportunities for continuing education, including for social workers.⁴⁵ In Bulgaria and Sweden, there are currently no specific requirements or state regulation of continuing education for social workers.

43 / Baidarova, O., Karagodina, O., & Fedchenkov, V. (2020). *Is this model of professional competencies applied to the needs of workers involved in protecting children's rights and interests in Ukraine?* Bulletin of the Academy of Labor, Social Relations and Tourism, 1–2. ResearchGate DOI:10.33287/112010

44 / Global Social Service Workforce Alliance. *Developing the Social Service Workforce*. <https://socialserviceworkforce.org/the-workforce/strengthening-the-workforce/developing/>
45 / Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse. (n.d.). *La formation tout au long de la vie*. <https://www.education.gouv.fr/la-formation-tout-au-long-de-la-vie-7508#:~:text=Les%20entreprises%20ont%20une%20obligation,d%C3%A9finies%20par%20les%20branches%20professionnelles>

GOOD PRACTICES

Romania

Law No. 466/2004 "On the Status of Social Workers" establishes the National College of Social Workers (CNASR) as an autonomous, non-governmental body that regulates the profession of social workers. CNASR sets CPD requirements: a minimum of 10 CPD credit hours is required each year. Upon completion of the training, the training provider gives CNASR documentation on participant attendance and completion, and a list of trainers. CPD requirements are based on the CNASR competency standards of both CNASR and government regulations.

England

The *Children and Social Work Act 2017* established Social Work England as an independent regulatory body for social workers. The UK Department for Education sets CPD requirements in its guidance, *Develop Your Social Work Practice*. CPD is defined as a professional activity, rather than a specific number of hours or credits. Two CPD activities per year must be submitted, one of which must be peer-reviewed. Social workers must complete at least two CPD activities each year, one of which is subject to peer review. They also keep a log of their activities and submit it to the national regulatory body.

In Romania and England, failure to fulfil CPD requirements can result in losing a worker's right to practice professionally.

Germany

Continuing education is also mandatory, but it is regulated at the federal state level, so requirements vary. General principles of continuing education are defined in the National Skills Strategy. In many states, social workers are entitled to educational leave if training courses take place during regular working hours⁴⁶.

TRAINING PROGRAM TOPICS

Professional development programs for social workers in different countries cover a wide range of topics. The most common and mandatory are those related to child protection and safeguarding. Other common topics include trauma-informed practices, trauma psychology/mental health, case management, support for people with disabilities and more (see *Table 4*; information about in-service training programs in France was not available).

Table 4. Main topics of professional development for social workers in different countries

	Training Topic	Countries
1.	Child Protection/Safeguarding	UK, Romania, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Sweden ⁴⁷
2.	Trauma-Informed Practices	UK, Romania, Germany, Bulgaria
3.	Trauma Psychology/Mental Health	Romania, Germany, UK
4.	Case Management	Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania
5.	Support for People with Disabilities	Germany, Poland, Romania, Sweden ⁴⁸
6.	Human Rights/Rights-Based Practices	UK, Romania, Germany
7.	Leadership and Supervision	UK, Romania, Germany
8.	Diversity and Non-Discrimination	UK, Romania
9.	Foster Families and Alternative Care	UK, Germany
10.	Stress Management and Wellbeing	Romania, UK

46 / Azubiyo. (n.d.). *Weiterbildung soziale Arbeit*. <https://www.azubiyo.de/azubi-wissen/weiterbildung/soziale-arbeit/>

47 / A component on "children and young people" is part of the Yrkesresan program (described in this document).

48 / Part of the Yrkesresan program (described in this document).

The professional development of social workers usually involves a combination of online platforms and face-to-face learning. In some countries, additional forms of learning, such as workplace learning, are also recognized as part of continuing professional development.

1. **ONLINE LEARNING:** used in the UK, Romania, Germany, Poland, and Sweden. Includes structured online training programs, self-paced courses, recorded lectures, and/or other digital learning activities.
2. **LIVE VIRTUAL EVENTS:** offered in the UK, Romania and Poland. Includes expert-led discussions, peer-to-peer exchanges, workshops and webinars conducted via platforms like Zoom or similar.
3. **FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING:** provided in all countries. Includes seminars, professional workshops, and university courses, often on more advanced or specialized topics.
4. **ON-THE-JOB LEARNING:** considered as official CPD in the UK, Romania, and Germany. It includes supervision, peer reflection, case studies, mentoring, and leadership tasks.
5. **OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:** in Romania and the UK, participation in research, supervising, publication of articles, or work on committees are also counted as valid forms of CPD.

GOOD PRACTICES

Romania

The CNASR's Commission for Continuing Professional Training develops frameworks to guide and set expectations for training programs. The CNASR's Commission for Strategy and Professional Development helps identify training needs and develops professional development strategies on how to develop the relevant skills of social workers.

France

Regions define and implement worker training policies, including identifying training needs and developing a regional plan for social training.

Sweden

The national initiative, Yrkesresan ("The Professional Journey"), was developed by the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, and regional partners to provide training tailored to different career stages and functional areas. Participation in this program is voluntary, but 95% of municipalities have decided to join.⁴⁹ In addition, municipalities and regions identify and provide training, workshops and courses, as does the National Board of Health and Welfare. Academic institutions, research centers, and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions are also consulted to identify training topics.

ACCREDITATION OF TRAINING PROVIDERS

The models for accrediting training providers vary in the selected countries. In Romania, this function is centralized but performed by a non-governmental agency, while in Poland, it is also centralized but performed by a government body. In England, this function is privatized and belongs to independent training accreditation agencies. In France and Sweden, there is no centralized accreditation or certification of training providers.

Romania

CNASR evaluates and accredits organizations providing continuing professional training in social work. To obtain accreditation, a program must meet certain criteria, including: have the legal right to conduct training activities, have adequate technical equipment and premises, and cooperate with at least two leading social workers in

49 / Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner. (n.d.). Yrkesresan—kvalitet i varje möte. <https://skr.se/skr/integrationsocialomsorg/socialomsorg/nationellkunskapsstyrningsocialtjanst/verksamhetsutvecklingochledarskap/yrkesresan.32120.html#:~:text=Fem%20yrkesresor%20ska%20tas%20fram,Yrkesresan%20%2D%20kvalitet%20i%20varje%20m%C3%B6te>

developing and delivering the training. Providers seeking accreditation must submit detailed documentation for each training program they plan to provide. CNASR's Commission reviews applications for Continuing Professional Training, which analyzes applications and submits its conclusion and recommendation to the Executive Board of CNASR for approval. Once approved, the training organization is registered with CNASR and can offer training as a recognized provider. It is required to comply with all rules and regulations and is regularly monitored by CNASR to ensure compliance.

Poland

Institutions authorized to provide specialized training related to social work must be registered with the **Register of Development Services**, which is maintained by the **Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP)**. Registration requires meeting the following criteria, especially if institutions are seeking public funding (e.g., the European Social Fund):

Postgraduate training programs delivered by universities accredited to teach social work. ⁵⁰	Qualifications that are aligned with the Polish Qualifications Framework (PQF) and have passed a formal quality review for entry into the national qualifications register. ⁵¹ Some certifications are validated through state exams or modular courses.	The Polish accreditation system evaluates higher education programs and ensures compliance with national quality standards through reviews and remote visits. ⁵²
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To obtain accreditation, training providers must demonstrate their ability to provide training in accordance with the standards of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, have qualified trainers, and provide training curricula. A list of accredited institutions is maintained by the Ministry.

England

Accreditation of training is voluntary.⁵³ Obtaining accreditation is promoted as a cost-effective way for training providers to demonstrate the quality of their CPD programs to employers and employees. There are several private organizations that provide accreditation on a fee-for-service basis. Training providers select an accreditation body and apply, after which they can advertise their accreditation. The application and review process varies depending on the accreditation agency. For example, one accreditation agency is BASW, which offers a nine-week accreditation process. The organization seeking accreditation submits a self-evaluation of its training program, an **application**, and supporting documentation that the program meets the established criteria. Two experts review the submitted materials and present their findings to a panel, which decides whether to grant or deny accreditation.

50 / Konieczna-Salamatin, J. (2023). *Support for foster families in Ukraine: Systemic and structural challenges*. Acta Politica Polonica, 84(4), 67–84. <https://czasopisma.marszalek.com.pl/images/pliki/apsp/84/apsp8404.pdf>

51 / OECD. (2016). *Employment and Skills Strategies in Poland*. OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264256521-en> (p. 23)

52 / European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). (n.d.). *Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA)*. <https://www.enqa.eu/membership-database/pka-polish-accreditation-committee/>

53 / Challis, M., & Johnson, K. (2018). *BASW accreditation scheme overview guide (BAS01)*. British Association of Social Workers. Retrieved August 29, 2025, from https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/BAS01%20BASW%20accreditation%20overview%20guide_0.pdf



Summary of Findings

Table 5 below provides a comparative overview of competency and professional development systems for social workers in selected countries. It summarizes key characteristics, regulatory structures, continuing professional development requirements, and approaches to training, offering a clear picture of how different countries implement and manage social worker competencies.

Table 5. Summary of Competency and Professional Development Systems for Social Workers in Selected Countries

Parameter	UK	Romania	Germany	Poland	Bulgaria	France	Sweden
National Competency Framework for the social sector	✓	✓	✓ Complies with EQF	✓ Complies with EQF	✗ Under-development	✓ Complies with EQF	✓ Partly complies with EQF
Required CPD Credits or Hours	2 activities/yr	10 credits/yr	Varies by state	90 hrs/3 yrs	✗ Not required	✗ Not required	✗ Not required
Central Regulator	✓ (SWE, independent of govt)	✓ (CNASR independent of govt)	✗ (State ministries)	✗ Government ministries (MRPiS/PAED)	✗ (Planned under ministry)	✗ None	✗ None
Monitoring compliance with CPD requirements	✓ Strict	✓ Strict	⚠ Variable	⚠ Depends on specialization	✗ None	✗ None	✗ None
Digital CPD Platform	✓ SWE online	✓ SIMAS	⚠ Employer-based	⚠ Mixed	✗ None	✗ None	✗ None
Training Accreditation Body	✓ Privatized	✓ CNASR (centralized, independent)	⚠ By each state	✓ PAED registry (government)	⚠ Government structure (unclear)	✗ None	✗ None
E-learning Available	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗ Limited	✓	✓

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Recommendations for Ukraine

Strengthening and implementing a national competency system for social workers requires updating and modernizing professional standards in the social sphere, ensuring their compliance with the National Qualifications Framework and the legislative and regulatory framework, as well as harmonizing professional standards and education standards. Developing and updating standards can be part of a broader, gradual process of regulating the activities of social workers. Such regulation may include establishing requirements and systems for the registration of social workers and their completion of a minimum amount of continuing professional education. The introduction of this regulation and the strengthening of competencies will raise expectations for professional activities of social workers, contributing to the growth of their objective and subjective levels of professionalism.

The long-term goal is to develop and implement institutional structures, frameworks and regulatory systems. In many countries, the process has taken several years, and in some cases, more than a decade. Many of the countries mentioned in this report are still gradually developing and improving such systems. Therefore, the recommendations presented here attempt to present critical elements of this work in stages, with a focus on the long-term vision.

Based on Ukraine's National Qualifications Framework, as well as regulations and methodological recommendations on professional standards, the following considerations set a foundation for discussion of next steps for the next five years:

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (1–2 YEARS)

DEVELOP AND UPDATE EXISTING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE, ensuring their compliance with CMU Resolution No. 373 and CMU Resolution No. 1453, as well as the methodological recommendations of the National Qualifications Agency on the development of professional standards. This should include a detailed review of existing standards in the social sphere, which will include an assessment of the quality of existing standards and identify missing standards for workers employed in the field of child protection. This process, led by the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity and the National Social Service of Ukraine, will contribute to the modernization of professional standards, in line with the NQF.

REVIEW AND bring JOB DESCRIPTIONS OF THE Children's Service employees in line with **UPDATED** professional **STANDARDS**. This could start by reviewing a sample of job descriptions to determine the next steps to fully harmonize them with the standards.

HARMONIZE THE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS APPROVED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE WITH PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS in the social sphere to ensure that graduates acquire the competencies needed in practice, facilitate a smooth transition from education to professional activity, and improve the overall quality and relevance of education and training. Social work education programs should be accredited, taking into account competencies defined in the professional standards.

IDENTIFY PRIORITY IN-SERVICE TRAINING TOPICS for professional development that are necessary for the Children's Service to effectively support families and children in the current environment. When identifying such topics, it is advisable to take into account the findings from the NSS and UNICEF-supported Study of Workforce Capacity in Dnipro, Kharkiv, Lviv and Volyn Oblasts and any additional data in which workers report on the types of training they feel they need to better do their jobs. As part of this process, it may also be useful to consider the topics identified in several of the studied countries in this report. These include general training topics on child protection and safeguarding, the best interests of the child, trauma-informed practices, trauma psychology and mental health, case management, support for people with disabilities, human and child rights, and leadership and supervision.

REVIEW EXISTING NATIONAL AND/OR REGIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS THAT COVER PRIORITY AREAS, TO ENSURE THAT THEY ALIGN WITH UPDATED professional **STANDARDS**. Programs that align with updated standards should be formally approved, certified and disseminated for regions to implement and provide training to the Children's Service employees. **IDENTIFY PRIORITY TRAINING COURSES THAT CAN BE ADAPTED FOR ONLINE DELIVERY TO REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE.**

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (3–5 YEARS)

ESTABLISH A NATIONAL REGULATORY BODY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS, APPROVED AT THE LEGISLATIVE LEVEL. The regulatory body should have the authority to register social workers, ensure their continuing professional development, and take action in cases of non-compliance with professional standards. Consider different options when determining the regulatory body:

1. **A state institution** (such as within NSS or the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity): although centralized state regulation of the workforce may be perceived as 'punitive' and focusing more on legal compliance than on continuous and supported professional development, investments required are lower than what is needed to create a new independent entity (see below). It is recommended, however, that this approach include creating a new structure (e.g. division or department) within an existing state institution that will be responsible for exercising regulatory powers.
2. **A new independent structure** (following the examples of England, Scotland, and Romania): although this approach is more costly, as it requires setting up a new structure, it provides greater specialization and exclusive focus on social work. A specialized independent organization could better align its regulatory functions with the needs of the profession compared to embedding social work regulation into another regulatory agency (e.g., within the health regulatory body). This approach allows for the definition of core competencies and oversight of their implementation to be carried out by those who know the profession and are sensitive to the unique complexities of the social field.

DETERMINE WHICH CATEGORIES OF WORKERS WILL BE SUBJECT TO REGULATION. It is advisable to start with the regulation of one or two positions or qualifications, gradually expanding coverage over time. It is recommended to start with priority roles—such as social workers, child protection specialists, and social managers—who deal with more complex cases involving families and children in difficult life circumstances. Once these positions have been regulated, gradually extend the regulation to other positions and qualifications. Ensure that regulatory functions comply with Ukraine's existing laws on education, social protection, and civil service standards. In this process, the EU Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications should be applied, as well as the **EU Directive 2018/958 on proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions**.

Once the regulatory body is established, efforts should be mobilized across the country to register all existing practitioners. In doing so, it is important to **ENSURE THAT EMPLOYEES DO NOT FEEL THREATENED ABOUT LOSING THEIR JOBS**. This can be done by implementing measures to upgrade the skills of employees, where appropriate.

ESTABLISH MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL REGULATIONS. In addition, develop a system to record individual workers' CPD achievements as a condition for their registration/certification to practice professionally.

GRADUALLY INTRODUCE A SYSTEM FOR REVIEWING AND FORMALLY APPROVING ADDITIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS. This involves defining the powers and structure for performing this function, with options ranging from state subordination (Poland) to an independent national body (Romania) or a private-sector function (England).

