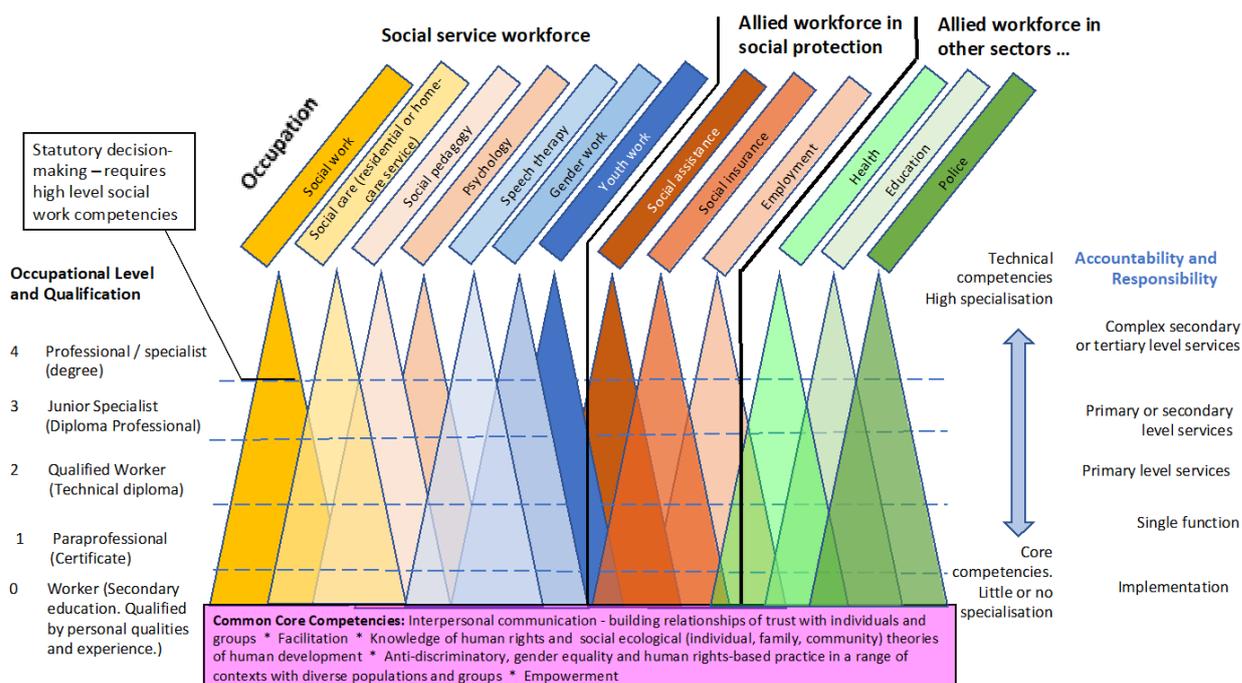


SUMMARY CALL TO ACTION ON SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE STRENGTHENING IN THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION

The call to action seeks to ensure that **functions, competencies and qualifications across the social service workforce are aligned** so there will no longer be unqualified professionals in roles requiring professional competencies and there will be a range of personnel deployed across a range of services with the right qualifications for the competencies and responsibilities of their position.

Figure 1 The social services and allied workforces: competencies framework



Source: OPM and P4EC

AGREED DEFINITIONS OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE AND ALLIED WORKFORCES USED IN THE CALL TO ACTION

1. Social workers with university degrees in social work and employed in statutory decision-making or in social work roles in social service-providing organisations. In countries where social work is a protected title, qualified social workers can be employed in any sector and still be considered part of the social service workforce.

2. Professional specialists are employed in social service-providing organisations and have professional qualifications other than in social work. In the ECA region these typically include social pedagogues, psychologists, lawyers and speech therapists (defectologists), occupational therapists (ergotherapists), physiotherapists or other therapists employed by social service providing organisations.

3. Paraprofessionals are employed in social services in roles that do not have a requirement for any kind of specialised formal education but require training to ensure the specific responsibilities and functions of the role can be executed. This can include home help care workers (often given the job title 'social workers' in some parts of the ECA region), residential care workers, foster carers, youth outreach workers, personal assistants for persons with disabilities and other personnel who play an important role in delivering social services, often under the supervision of professional social workers.

4. Allied workforce in social protection: social protection administrators and specialists work very closely with the social service workforce and are usually overseen by one Ministry in a unified social protection system and are concerned with assessing eligibility for and administering cash assistance, social insurance, pensions, benefits and employment benefits and services. In some countries, social workers based in the community are tasked explicitly with supporting access to benefits and social assistance, but they do not assess eligibility or calculate and confer benefits and therefore are part of the social worker category of the social service workforce rather than the allied workforce in social protection.

5. Allied workforce in other sectors: professionals, specialists and paraprofessionals employed in health, education, justice etc. - including health system family doctors, home-visiting nurses, health mediators, alcohol and drug addiction specialists and counsellors, mental health doctors and nurses; and in other sectors: education mediators, employment service personnel, social pedagogues or other education resource personnel employed in schools and kindergartens etc¹.

6. Practitioners employed in statutory decision-making or in performing social work tasks that require professional competencies in social work and have no social work degree. Examples include some personnel engaged in statutory decision-making in child protection systems (such as local authority guardianship and trusteeship specialists) who do not have a social work degree or equivalent certification. The call to action aims to eliminate this category of personnel by 2030.

THE CALL TO ACTION

The governments of the region are called upon to act upon the principles of:

1. Agreeing to a common set of definitions of the social service and allied workforces in the ECA region

Adopt the Call to Action workforce definitions for a medium to long-term period through to 2030 to facilitate pursuit of a common ECA regional agenda on social service workforce strengthening and regular comparative monitoring.

2. Effective long-term planning of the social service workforce and aligning functions, processes, competencies and qualifications

- Defining the functions, processes and responsibilities of the social service workforce and the required qualification and competencies for the positions they occupy across the system.
- Comprehensive long- medium- and short- term plans for social service workforce strengthening including actions for developing and supporting the workforce.
- Personnel with responsibilities for participating in statutory decision-making processes have higher-level technical competencies, ethical codes of practice and necessary professional support.
- Reasonable caseloads for optimum effectiveness at different levels of the system. For qualified social workers, no more than 10-20 clients per social worker for complex casework.
- By 2030 no longer having unqualified personnel in positions requiring higher level competencies, especially child protection statutory decision-making positions.
- Financial mechanisms in place to underpin workforce planning to ensure equitable deployment of the social service workforce in hard to reach and excluded communities.
- Adequate investment to meet minimum obligations for workforce strengthening.
- Gender, disability and ethnic balance in the social service workforce at all levels.

¹ For more examples see Concept Note: ECA Regional Conference on social work and social service workforce strengthening, October 2018

3. Developing the competencies of the social service workforce

- All social work and other specialist Bachelor degrees aligned with international standards and latest developments. Periodic review of curricula to incorporate core competencies and ensure relevance to current and emerging social policy priorities in all sectors and services.
- Capacity building for the academics researching, teaching and supervising practice placements for the social service workforce professions.
- Incentives to support deployment of social work and other professional specialist university students to excluded communities.
- Significant pre-service practice experience in a range of social services as part of all social work or other professional specialist university degrees.
- Funding to support robust in-service training for all social service workforce personnel.
- Induction training for all social service workforce personnel taking up new positions.
- Continuous in-service professional development for social workers at all levels.
- Paraprofessionals and practitioners performing social work tasks are adequately supervised by social workers and accessing training to build required competencies and ethical values.
- Support for training to build career pathways for social workers, other professional specialists and paraprofessionals including for experienced professionals to enter management and other higher-level roles in policy-making and research.
- Technology advances to support greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the work of the social service workforce.

4. Supporting the social service workforce

- Adequate pay, working conditions and contractual terms for social service workforce personnel that are commensurate with the health and education sectors.
- Adequate financial support and safety measures for community-based outreach work
- Ethical codes of practice and professional supervision in place and enforced for social service workforce personnel in positions with direct work with clients.
- Managers and policy makers with responsibilities for social service workforce deployment, support, planning and development are competent to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Recognising that many of the social service workforce are women, ensure investments in workplace safety and dignity.

5. Developing the allied workforces

Strengthened core competencies of the allied workforces through:

- Pre-service training of the allied workforces with outreach, early identification, referral and joint casework functions or functions requiring core interpersonal communication, person-centred and community engagement competencies.
- In-service training and continuous professional development for the allied workforces with social work functions supported by incentives and funding for multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary education and training programmes.

This Call to Action document was produced by the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office with technical support from Oxford Policy Management.