

## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS: IMPLEMENTING FOREIGN EXPERIENCE INTO THE NATIONAL HEIS PRACTICE

<sup>a</sup>RENATE VAINOLA, <sup>b</sup>OKSANA MIKHEIEVA, <sup>c</sup>ZHANNA PETROCHKO, <sup>d</sup>NATALIYA MYROSHNSCHENKO, <sup>e</sup>OLENA VAKULENKO

<sup>a,b,d,e</sup>*Department of Social Education and Social Work, Faculty of Social Law, National Pedagogical University named after M. P. Drahomanov, Kyiv, Ukraine*

<sup>c</sup>*Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Work, Human Institute, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine*  
 email: <sup>a</sup>vainola@ukr.net, <sup>b</sup>mixeeva2007@ukr.net,  
<sup>c</sup>z.petrochko@kubg.edu.ua, <sup>d</sup>myroshnata@ukr.net,  
<sup>e</sup>olvak2007@ukr.net

**Abstract:** Ukraine is undergoing reform of higher education and the transition of a professional training system for social workers to implement a competency-based approach. In particular, the reform involves the introduction of HEIs standards of higher education in the "social work" discipline. This article aims to form recommendations to improve the professional training of social workers based on foreign experience in implementing leading educational practices. The research methodology is based on the comparative analysis and evaluation of HEIs educational programs of the first, second, and third levels of social workers' training. The HEIs system in Ukraine does not have clear-cut requirements for the training program of future social workers. Each HEI develops it according to the established and approved template in this particular institution taking into account available human, material, and technical resources and needs of the society; it is licensed and accredited. Educational training programs for social workers are developed according to higher education standards. HEIs also create educational programs for social workers in Ukraine, taking into account the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework based on European and national standards and the principles of quality assurance in education. The HEI analysis of educational programs' profiles of social work training shows the introduction of a competency-based approach to the training of future professionals. It is reasonable to include such descriptors as the application of knowledge and understanding, formation of judgments, and ability for further learning and development.

**Keywords:** Social work, educational training programs, social workers, social specialist training.

### 1 Introduction

The social workers' professional training system in Ukraine is transitioning to the introduction of a competency-based approach to their work. Social workers dealing with different population categories should have a set of integral, general, professional competencies defined at the national level within the higher education standards in 2019–2021 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022). This practice corresponds to the foreign experience of training social workers, where a competency-based approach is combined with practical specialists' training based on evidence-based healthcare (Parker, 2007; Damron-Rodriguez, 2008).

Competency in different disciplines means demonstrating that acquired knowledge, values, and skills can be integrated into practice (Carraccio et al., 2002). For example, in the United States, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation adopted a competency model for social workers in 2000 (Damron-Rodriguez, 2008). Education and assessment based on the competency model have two components: defining the specific skills needed for the profession in clear, measurable terms with performance level indicators; and assessing skill acquisition using measurable criteria (Hackett, 2001).

Competency-based and evidence-based education of social workers in Ukrainian health care is a relatively new area of training in higher education institutions. Moreover, the practice of social workers in Ukrainian health care is not yet a typical phenomenon today (Slozanska, 2019; Klos, 2021). Therefore, high-quality training of future and already practicing social workers for health activities is based on progressive foreign practices.

This article aims to form recommendations for improving social workers' professional training based on foreign experience while implementing the leading educational practices.

### 2 Literature review

Many academic papers are devoted to the problems of social workers' professional training for working with different categories of the population in other countries (USA, UK, and Australia).

The professional training of future social workers is understood as a process that provides mastering of theoretical, practical, and scientific-methodological foundations of professional activity, development of special practical skills and abilities, formation of value orientations, personal qualities, and professional culture important for social work, orientation to prolonged professional personal growth and improvement (Slozanska, 2019). The training of future specialists involves the formation of the professional and necessary competencies, professional and personal qualities, moral and ethical culture, and values while studying in HEIs, which contains subsystems (cognitive, practical, motivational, and values), through involvement in various types of classroom and extracurricular work (academic, functional, research, project, volunteer, individual, educational, permissions) to form readiness (theoretical, practical, and psychological) to various types of professional activities (Slozanska, 2019).

Stone (2016), based on a study of the competencies of 17 practicing social workers in England, identified differences between competencies in teaching practice and competencies in social work practice. The basic knowledge, skills, and values acquired during training are insufficient for effective social work practice. The professional needs characteristics such as resilience, emotional intelligence, and an individualized approach to teaching. Teater & Chonody (2018), based on a study of the educational role in the evidence-based practice of social workers, identified an average level of specialists' preparation for "evidence-based practice" (EBP). With the increasing role of EBP, education does not provide future professionals with sufficient competence in this area, which means the need to implement EBP in educational training programs. Rollins (2020), while examining the relationship practices of 16 social workers and clients in Australia, found the importance of social work practice, which must also be integrated into educational programs to ensure the social workers' effectiveness. Battaglia & Flynn (2020), based on a review of 53 articles from Europe on the students' transition to social work practice, identified its difficulties due to a lack of knowledge regarding the change from educational to work practice. The importance of practice in educating future social workers is addressed by Csoba & Diebel (2020), where the authors noted the limitation in students' practical skills due to reduced contact with social services and target groups during the pandemic. Fisher-Borne, Cain & Martin (2015) argue for the need to integrate the cultural competency model into educational practice. Gould & Taylor (2017) explore the theory and practice of reflective learning for social workers. The importance of reflective practice in teaching social workers is noted by Hermesen & Embregts (2015). Bogo (2015) explores the importance of "field education" as the most significant component of educational programs to train social workers and develop their competence, which substantially impacts social services' quality. At the same time, teachers note the problem of finding effective pedagogical practices and integrating them into the educational process.

Thus, scientific studies of social workers' training point out the vital role of the following components:

- 1) competencies' development during the training;
- 2) the importance of evidence-based practice (EBP) during students' training;
- 3) the importance of ensuring an effective transition from learning to practice;

- 4) the importance of social workers' cultural competence;
- 5) the importance of "field education".

The mentioned components basically reflect the importance of the competency-based approach to the professional training of social workers through the different pedagogical practices.

### 3 Methodology

The study conducted an analysis of educational programs for training future social workers in Ukraine, elaborated in such higher education institutions as:

- 1) National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" (2022);
- 2) National University "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (2022);
- 3) Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University (2022).

The choice of HEIs was based on the "Top 200 Ukraine 2022" ranking developed by the Center for International Projects "Euroeducation" in partnership with the international experts' group IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (Education, 2022).

In this article, we also analyzed the higher education standards for specialties 231 "Social Work" approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine:

- 1) The standard of higher education: the first (bachelor) level of higher education: Decree of 24.04.2019 No. 557 2019/2020.
- 2) Standard of higher education: the second (master's) level of higher education: Decree of 24.04.2019 No. 556 2019/2020.
- 3) The standard of higher education of the third (academic and scientific) level of higher education, the Ph. D. title: Decree of 30.12.2021, No. 1495 2022/2023 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022).

These standards are the foundation for developing educational and professional training programs for social workers in Ukraine. They describe learning objects and goals, theoretical meaning, methods, techniques and technologies of training, tools, and equipment, and the specialists' competencies (integral, general, special (professional and specialized) competencies).

### 4 Results

#### 4.1 The model of future social workers' professional training in Ukraine

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" (2014), as of July 1, 2014, Ukraine has introduced a multi-level (initial level (short cycle), first (bachelor) level, second (master) level, third (academic and scientific) level of higher education) and various grades (junior bachelor, bachelor, master, Ph. D. / Doctor of Arts and Doctor of Sciences) system of social workers' training. The training is carried out on educational and scientific programs under the state academic standards developed for each level of higher education (HE) within the specialty. If the programs are successfully completed, the individual is awarded the appropriate HE grade and is granted an undergraduate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree in social work.

Future social workers at HEIs are taught full-time, part-time, and distance learning. The primary normative documents which regulate and determine the content of the educational process at Ukrainian HEIs are educational, educational-professional, and educational-scientific programs, training programs curricula, individual students' curricula, and disciplines' educational and working programs. The applicants' admission for specialty 231 "Social Work" in Ukrainian HEIs is on a competitive basis upon provision of the state sample document on the previously obtained educational (educational qualification) level and copies of its supplement; copy of the certificate (s) of external

independent evaluation (for applicants with complete general secondary education) or examination sheet unified professional entrance test (in cases determined by these Rules).

Professional training of future social workers in Ukrainian HEIs is carried out on the optimal combination of theoretical and practical training components using a credit-based modular learning system. The latter is defined as a model of the educational process based on various modular learning technologies and academic credit units (credit points). The system's structural elements are credit, pass-fail credit, content module, and module.

In the Ukrainian HEIs system, there are no sufficiently clear requirements for the training program of future social workers. Each HEI develops it per the established and approved in this particular institution sample, taking into account available human, financial and technical resources the society needs. Each HEI licenses and accredits them. The authority that carries out the educational program licensing is the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The Ministry issues licenses for educational activity based on a favorable opinion of the National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education and re-issues and revokes them. At the end of the license validity term, the accreditation procedure determines the specialists' training level compliance with the licensed specialties. The authority responsible for accreditation is the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2017).

Educational and professional training programs for social workers are developed based on the standards of higher education in specialties 231 "Social Work", approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Standard of higher education: first (bachelor) level of higher education: Decree of 24.04.2019 No. 557 2019/2020; Standard of higher education: second (master) level of higher education: Decree of 24.04.2019 No. 556 2019/2020; Standard of higher education third (educational and scientific) level, Ph. D. degree: Decree of 30.12.2021 No. 1495 2022/2023 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022).

The higher education standards are state regulatory documents for determining a set of requirements for the content and results of educational activities at higher education levels of the specialty "231 Social Work" in the discipline of "23 Social Work". At least 35 % of the educational program should ensure general and special (professional) competencies in the specialty "231 Social Work in the discipline of 23 Social Work", defined by the higher education standards. The higher education institution determines the remaining 65 % of the general and special (professional) competencies. For HEIs in Ukraine, the selection of specific (professional, disciplinary) competencies from the TUNING project lists (which are not exhaustive) is recommended. In addition, learning outcomes should be correlated with competencies. Therefore, each HEI develops a matrix of correspondence of specific competence standards to the descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework – NQF (knowledge, skill, communication, autonomy, and responsibility), and a correspondence matrix of particular learning outcomes and competencies defined by the standard.

Social work specialists' training programs in Ukraine are developed by HEIs, taking into account the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework, based on European and national standards and principles of quality assurance in education. In addition, they take into account labor market requirements for workers' competencies. The National Qualifications Framework describes 8 specialists' qualification levels according to the development of knowledge, abilities / skills, communication, responsibility, and autonomy (Supreme Council of Ukraine, 2022).

In Ukraine, 72 HEIs provide professional training for social workers, the largest number of which are concentrated in the Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Lviv regions. The profile

analysis of HEIs' educational programs for training social work specialists shows that there is a learning structure and main sections (Table 1):

- 1) general information;
- 2) purpose of the educational program;
- 3) characteristics: objects and goals, orientation, focus, program features;
- 4) graduates' suitability for employment and further education;

- 5) teaching and assessment;
- 6) program competencies;
- 7) program learning outcomes;
- 8) resource provision for program implementation (human, financial and technical, informational, educational and methodological);
- 9) academic mobility (national, international, teaching foreign seekers for higher education).

Table 1: Educational programs profile for specialty 231 "Social work": key components of the program

Key components	Component description
Program Features	Use of interactive methods, professional and situational modeling, and principles of Liberal Art Education in the educational process. Realization of the student's personal potential with high human values, development of creative (creative) abilities, and humanism. Training competent specialists capable of meeting the needs of the individual in the complex circumstances of life and, in general, ensuring the competitiveness of NauKMA graduates in the national and international labor markets. Compliance of the educational program with the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training. A particular emphasis in the undergraduate program is placed on the academic virtue of applicants for education at NaUKMA. The teaching of some disciplines (by students' choice) in English. The content of the key disciplines of the curriculum is adapted to the programs of relevant disciplines in foreign partner universities, taking into account the requirements of major employers.
Teaching and learning	Problem-based learning. Lecture classes are interactive scientific, and cognitive in nature. In practical courses are standard case methods and preparation of presentations on the use of modern professional software. The emphasis is made on personal development, group work, ability to present the results of the work, which contributes to the formation of understanding of the need and readiness to continue self-education during the whole period of professional activity. Prevailing teaching methods and techniques: active (problem-oriented, interactive, project, research, information), etc. Organizational forms: classroom-based, distance, mixed, independent, individual, and integrative learning.
Integral competence	The ability to solve complex, specialized, practical problems in the field of professional activity or the learning process involves applying specific theories and methods of social work and is characterized by complexity and uncertainty of conditions.
General competencies	GC1. Ability to think abstractly, analyze and synthesize. GC2. Ability to plan and manage time. GC3. Ability to learn and master modern knowledge. GC4. Ability to use knowledge in practical situations. GC5. Ability to conduct research at an appropriate level, the ability to search for, process, and analyze information from a variety of sources. GC6. Ability to communicate in the national and foreign languages, both orally and writing. GC7. Ability to work in an international context. GC8. Skills in the use of information and communication technology. GC9. Ability to be critical and self-critical. GC10. Ability to take the initiative, adapt and act in a new situation. GC11. Ability to work both in teams and alone. GC12. Ability to communicate with representatives of other professional groups at different levels (with experts from other disciplines/social activities).
Specialty competencies	SC1. Ability to analyze the existing regulatory and legal framework regarding social work and social welfare. SC2. Ability to analyze mental properties, states, and processes, formation, development, and socialization of personality, development of social group and society. SC3. Ability to work on preventing social risks, difficult life circumstances, and prevention and resolution of social conflicts. SC4. Ability to understand the organization and functioning of the social protection system and social services. SC5. Ability to study a social problem through research methods in a specific situation. SC6. Ability to assess clients' difficulties, needs, unique characteristics, and resources. SC7. Ability to develop ways to overcome problems and find effective methods of problem-solving. SC8. Ability to provide assistance and support to clients, taking into account their individual needs, age differences, gender, ethnicity, and other characteristics. SC9. Ability to interact with clients, members of different professional groups, and communities. SC10. Ability to adhere to ethical principles and standards of social work. SC11. Ability to perform supervisory functions in social policy and social service delivery. SC12. Ability to shape and implement social work communications. SC13. Ability to justify, make professional decisions concerning social work clients, and take responsibility for their consequences. SC14. Ability to maintain the level of knowledge and continually improve their professional training in the field of social work. SC15. Ability to prepare documents for evaluation and monitoring, to interpret and use analytical information.

Source: National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" (2022); National University "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (2022); Boris Grinchenko Kyiv University (2022).

At the heart of the educational program, design is the competency-based approach using ECTS, where achieving the planned results of training in an educational program provides for a particular time spent by the student. In other words, the student's necessary and sufficient amount of academic load, expressed in the ECTS credits (1 credit ECTS is 30 hours), 1 semester – 30 credits ECTS, academic year – 60 credits ECTS. The educational program provides for the allocation of disciplines of two types: compulsory ones and disciplines at the student's free choice following the educational program's profile. The block of general studies includes academic disciplines aimed at forming general competencies in higher education, particularly emotional intelligence, outlook, organizational, and communication skills. The block of professional training includes academic disciplines aimed at creating unique professional competencies in the discipline of the applicant for higher education, particularly for all specialties

of a particular branch of knowledge and supporting character. The block of professional training includes academic disciplines aimed at forming unique professional competencies in the applicant's specialty for higher education, in particular, the subject area and professional direction. Students' academic load includes all types of work (independent, classroom, lab, research, etc.) per the curriculum.

#### 4.2 Statistics on the social workers' training in Ukraine

At the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year in the discipline of "Social work" in Ukraine, 2 728 people were enrolled for the first time for HEIs specialists training. The total number of students was 9 295, of which 7 179 were women. The total number of graduates was 2 725 (2 177 women) (Table 2). Compared to the 2020–2021 academic year, the number of

trained/graduates in HEIs was 1 639 fewer compared to the number of first-time enrollees, which was 173 more.

Table 2: Specialists' training at HEIs at the beginning of 2020/21 and the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year in Ukraine, particularly in the "Social Work" discipline

	Number of newly enrolled applicants to HEIs	Number of students	Female students	Number of HEIs graduates	Female graduates
Total specialists educated at HEIs, academic year 2020/2021	277 057	1 131 213	599 852	358 808	189 493
Specialists in the Social Work field	2 555	9 980	7 732	4 359	3 458
Proportion of specialists in social work, %	0,92	0,88	1,29	1,21	1,82
Total specialists educated at HEIs, academic year 2021/2022	239 218	1 045 251	562 210	253 825	138 070
Specialists in the Social Work field	2 728	9 295	7 179	2 725	2 177
Share of Social Work specialists, %	1,14	0,89	1,28	1,07	1,58

Source: Ukrainian National Statistics Committee (2022 a; 2022 b).

The number of students in Ukrainian HEIs at the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year with an academic degree in the discipline of "Social Work" was 104 junior specialists,

517 professional junior bachelors, 27 junior bachelors, 7 222 bachelors, and 1 425 masters. The vast majority of students are full-time students.

Table 3: The number of HEIs students at the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year by academic degrees (educational and qualification levels, educational and professional degrees) in the "Social Work" discipline

Indicator	Total		Including by education forms			
	Persons	%	Full-time	Evening	Correspondence	Distance
Total	1 045 251	100,00	763 842	1 585	278 539	1 285
Junior specialist – total	33 310	3,19	30 088	117	3 105	–
Social Work	104	0,01	97	–	7	–
Professional junior bachelor – total	56 588	5,41	48 785	175	7 588	40
Social Work	517	0,05	385	–	132	–
Junior bachelor – total	3 171	0,30	2 764	–	407	–
Social Work	27	0,00	16	–	11	–
Bachelor's degree – total	686 508	65,68	522 611	759	162 306	832
Social Work	7 222	0,69	5 305	–	1917	–
Master's degree – total	265 115	25,36	159 071	534	105 097	413
Social Work	1 425	0,14	862	–	563	–

Source: Ukrainian National Statistics Committee (2022 a; 2022 b).

## 5 Discussion

HEIs educational programs in Ukraine aim to meet the current legislation concerning the academic development in Ukraine, the HEIs vision, mission, and development strategies for 2020–2025. The educational programs are aimed at training intellectual, mobile, highly qualified, cultural, and competitive specialists in social work who can integrate into the world's academic and scientific space, solve complex and complex problems of scientific-pedagogical and research-innovative nature, conduct their scientific research, create and implement modern scientific knowledge in professional activities.

The National Qualifications Framework for training social workers is based on European and national standards and principles of education quality assurance. It takes into account labor market requirements for workers' competencies. It is introduced to harmonize legislative norms in education and social and labor relations, promote national and international recognition of qualifications obtained in Ukraine, and establish effective interaction between the sphere of education and the labor market. To ensure comprehensibility, comparison, and mutual harmonization, educational and professional qualifications of social workers are described by learning outcomes formulated following the descriptors of the National Framework: knowledge, abilities / skills, communication, responsibility, and autonomy.

At the international level, comparisons and recognition of social workers' qualifications are made through comparisons of the levels and descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Within the Bologna Process, the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework provides the comparison and recognition of educational qualifications, whose levels and descriptors are aligned with the corresponding levels of the European Qualifications Framework (National

Qualifications Agency, 2022). In addition, the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (EHEA QF) introduces an outcome-based (competent) approach to higher education qualifications. An analysis of Ukrainian HEIs educational programs also demonstrates the implementation of this approach to the social workers' training. The comprehensive framework (scale) of qualifications developed for higher education institutions in Europe describes three consecutive cycles of higher education: the first, including a short one (bachelor's), the second (master's), and the third (doctorate). Dublin descriptors are used to describe the qualification framework levels, consisting of five competencies (learning outcomes):

- knowledge and understanding;
- application of knowledge and understanding;
- judgment formation;
- communication;
- capacity for further learning, development, and a credit dimension for the first and second cycles (National Qualifications Agency, 2022 b).

Qualifications for social workers are described by learning outcomes (competencies) according to these descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework: knowledge, skills / competencies, communication, responsibility, and autonomy. Therefore, it is appropriate to include descriptors such as the use of knowledge and understanding, judgment formation, the capacity for further learning, and development in social work training programs.

## 6 Conclusion

The system of HEIs in Ukraine does not have sufficiently clear requirements for training programs for future social workers. Each HEI develops it according to the established and approved template in that particular institution, taking into account

available human, material, and technical resources and the needs of society; it is licensed and accredited. Educational training programs for social workers are developed according to higher education standards. HEIs create educational programs for training social workers in Ukraine, taking into account the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework based on European and national standards and the academic quality assurance principles. The profile analysis of HEIs educational programs for social workers' training demonstrates the introduction of a competency-based approach to the future professionals' education. Therefore, it is reasonable to include such descriptors as the application of knowledge and understanding, formation of judgments, and ability for further learning and development in social work training educational programs.

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#### Primary Paper Section: A

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