The purpose of the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance Interest Groups is to advance knowledge, discussion and tools related to a thematic area of concern to the Alliance members. They are task-focused and result-oriented groups of Alliance members who have expertise in the thematic area. Interest Groups are launched by the Steering Committee and facilitated by two co-chairs who manage the implementation of activities or the development of products on behalf of the Alliance.

Based on member feedback, there is broad interest in the role that para professional workers play in the larger social service system. For the purposes of this initial announcement of the interest group, a working definition, which can be reviewed and clarified by the Interest Group is: a social service worker who delivers services and provides supports typically at the community or neighborhood level, whether paid or unpaid, with government, NGOs or community and faith-based organizations and who has received training outside of a formal degree program. The group they work for is recognized by, referred to or endorsed by government systems or structures and subject to oversight by the organizations that they are reporting to or by government. Workers in this category have a broad range of titles such as Community Case Manager, Child Protection Officer, Auxiliary Social Worker, Para Social Worker, Community Child and Youth Care Worker, Social Welfare Extension Workers, Volunteer Children's Officer, etc. It is recognized that the social service workforce is dynamic and context specific and different countries use different terminology. However, innovative approaches and promising practices can be identified, particularly when commonalities emerge across multiple settings.

This Interest Group will explore and consolidate perspectives from multiple contexts and cultures on terminology and key considerations concerning the role of this category of workers. The group will establish a work plan and implement activities and/or develop products intended to advance knowledge, discussion, or solutions related to this topic (see Interest Group General Description). The group may determine any number of areas to be covered, such as one or more of those listed below for illustrative purposes:

1. Role of workers - What types of work do different para professional social service workers perform? What are the boundaries around their roles -- what should and shouldn't they be doing? How do they coordinate with other fields, such as community health workers?
2. Location and work settings – In what types of settings are para professionals typically found?
3. Establishing programs – How are needs for new workers identified and by whom? What are key considerations in assessing needs and context, identifying gaps and designing implementation?
4. Recruitment – What are the lessons learned for the recruitment of these workers? Who is involved?
5. Training – What are components of successful training models? What examples exist and how adaptable might these examples be? What measures can be taken to ensure that training is tied to the actual competencies needed to carry out the work?
6. Remuneration and incentives - What types of monetary and non-monetary support has the most impact on incentivizing good performance and retention? What evidence currently exists about incentives for these workers? How to best address sustainability of incentives?
7. Supervision and support – What types of support and supervision are needed and most effective?
8. Career advancement – Are there models of systematic career paths for this type of worker?
9. Standards – What standards and other guidelines have been developed to ensure that workers provide quality service and uphold values, ethics and principles of do no harm?
10. Linkages to the broader social service system – What key elements enable successful linkages and result in higher quality services and support?
11. Program evaluation and research – How are communities monitoring and evaluating programs? How can programs contribute to the evidence base?
12. Cross-sectoral learning - What lessons can we extract, adapt and learn from the extensive recent research and meta studies done in other sectors, such as on community health workers?