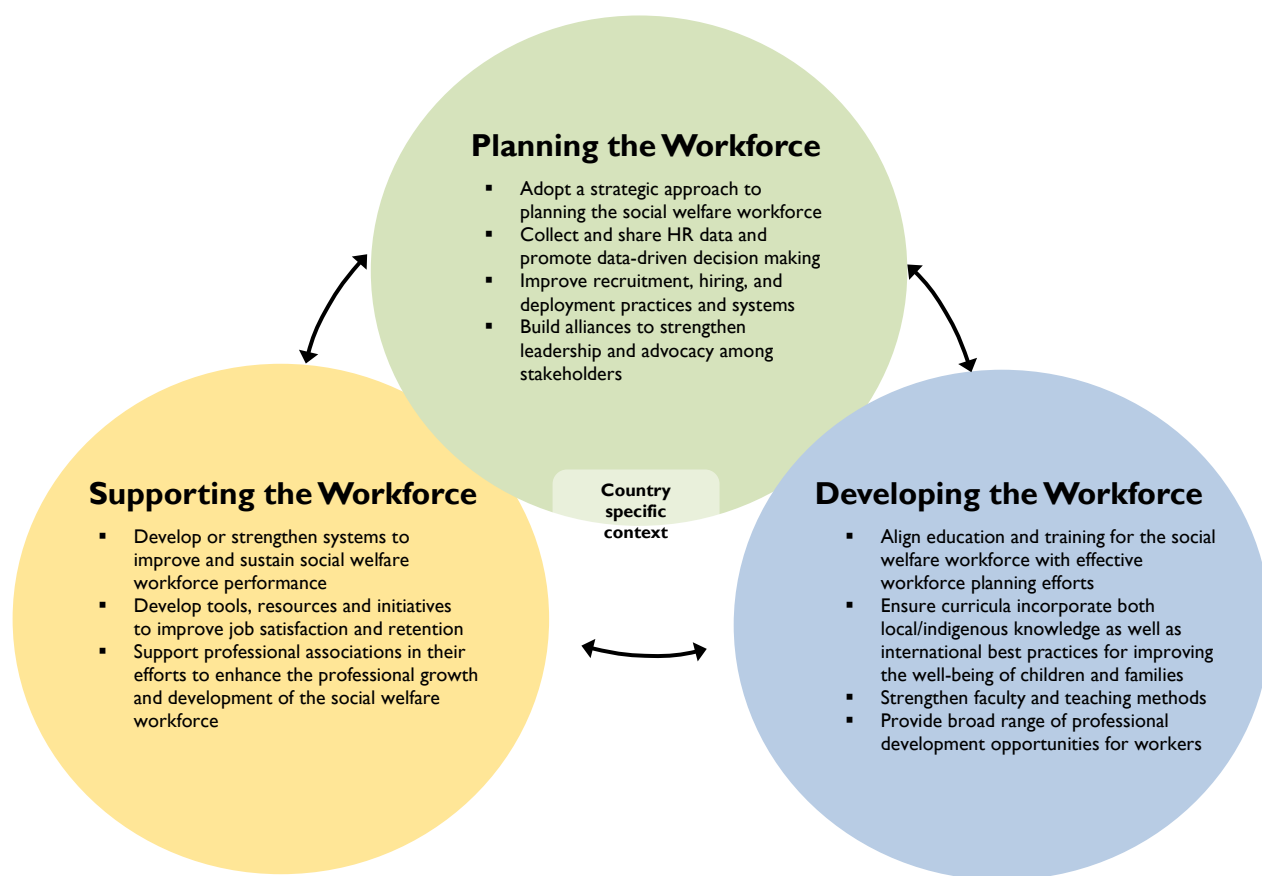


Guiding Principles for the Development of Para Professional Social Service Workers

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of principles that will be a useful base for utilizing para professionals as well as delineating functions and competencies related to how social service para professionals can be trained, developed, deployed and supported. Social service para professionals play a critical role in helping vulnerable groups including children and their families as part of governmental, non-governmental, private sector and local responses.

These principles provide guidance for how a para professional would typically work as a direct care worker in the social service sector next to or supporting the work of a professional in the same field. Given that the social service workforce is conceptualized as an inclusive concept, these workers may be related to various professional groups, e.g., social work, child and youth care work, and community development, among others.



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Developed by the Interest Group on Para Professionals
of the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance
www.socialserviceworkforce.org

Overarching Principles

1. The para professional social service workforce should receive recognition by their peers, the broader professional social services workforce, civil society, as well as organs of state. This should be underpinned by a certification process and the development of policies and procedures that documents the competencies, functions and occupational standards developed. This should encompass general as well as contextual competencies, functions and occupational standards – taking the specific context of a country into consideration.
2. The strengths perspective, which views the wisdom, assets and knowledge of individuals, groups and communities as potential resources, should be at the core of the competencies being sought for para professional social service workers.
3. Para professional social service activities should respect and incorporate knowledge of community and familial cultural contexts to sustain equity for diverse groups incorporating understanding and commitment to ethical principles.

Principles Related to Planning the Workforce

4. Clear descriptions of functions, roles and the skills necessary to fulfil the responsibilities at each level in each field should be outlined in job descriptions.
5. While definitions and job descriptions concerning para professional social service workers may vary between countries and programs all should meet some minimum functional definitions and standards.
6. Employment opportunities, inside and outside of government should be developed. Public-private partnerships need to be actively sought to facilitate the absorption of new graduates of training programs, with positions already approved in the schema of services offered.
7. Opportunities for research that can demonstrate the impact of para professional social service workers need to be identified, promoted and utilized.

Principles Related to Developing the Workforce

8. A career ladder should be accessible to all social service para professionals. It should be underpinned by further education where credit for prior training and work experience is given, and which leads to professional advancement. This includes the ability to take on higher level roles and increased salaries when demonstrating the necessary abilities and competencies.
9. A “lattice” approach should enable para-professionals to shift focus laterally across professional areas as well as vertically up the career ladder, so that they can realize their interest and talents for on-going professional growth.
10. Training that addresses core specified learning outcomes within the context of standardized and regularly updated curricula should be provided for para professionals. Training should be framed in courses that can be used as stepping stones/career ladders through the advancement of their education. Training should culminate in the awarding of certificates.

11. Recognition should be given to the fact that when a para professional worker attains a higher level of education or progresses to a more advanced level of social service work, this is a positive outcome. However programs need to take into account the need for follow-up, refresher courses and training to replace workers who were thus promoted.

12. Opportunities for training and deployment of para-social service workers should, as far as possible, be situated in their places of residence or as close as possible to the ward/villages where they come from.

13. An adult-learning approach, which is participatory and problem-solving-oriented, should be taken in all training of para professional social service workers.

14. As a core strategy, training should incorporate indigenous knowledge and approaches and be adapted to specific national and cultural contexts.

Principles Related to Supporting the Workforce

15. Retaining competent and trained para-professionals at the community level to support the development of effective services where they are most needed (proximate to the children, families, communities they are to serve) should be a key objective of the development and support for a para professional social service workforce.

16. Appropriate incentives and compensation should be given to para professionals for the work they are doing as well as to help them sustain their work over time. All para professional social service providers - whether volunteering or being compensated - need to be provided with basic materials and wherever possible, refunded for expenses such as transportation. Minimum remuneration levels should be established for different types and levels of para professional work, recognizing the skills, knowledge and effort involved in undertaking the work and allowing for a basic decent level of living for the workers and their dependents.

17. All para professionals should work under supervision of qualified para professionals or professionals. Supervision and support mechanisms should be put in place in order to support para professional social service workers in their work and for their personal and professional growth. Innovative approaches to supervision and support including job sharing and shadowing should be considered. This will also create stronger and more positive linkages between para professional and professional social service workers. Supervision also helps to ensure that the practice and performance of para professionals stays within any policy or legislative framework that clarifies roles and responsibilities and guarantees accountability and rights.

18. Para professionals require specific provisions for support and care and encouraging self-care to empower and sustain them in their work. They often come from the very communities that they work in and provide services in difficult conditions that could threaten both their wellbeing and the sustainability of their services. It is imperative that mechanisms for support, management, supervision and empowerment are established to ensure social connectedness and that these mechanisms and relevant wellness programs are appropriately planned and financed.