

Building a resilient social services workforce

Round Table

European Parliament, Brussels

7 November 2023 ; 14:30-16:30 CET



Executive Summary

This is the executive summary of the Briefing '[Building a Resilient Social Services Workforce](#)' published as a follow-up to the European Social Network's (ESN) 2023 annual roundtable at the European Parliament. The discussion centred on the evidence gathered through a comprehensive questionnaire developed for ESN member organisations that covered social services workforce roles and responsibilities, qualifications and skills, recruitment and retention, regulation, planning and future needs.

Read the full briefing for a more comprehensive review of challenges related to labour shortages and how developing, retaining, and attracting the right workforce are key success factors for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and related initiatives like the Care Strategy.

Social Services Workforce Roles and Responsibilities

Social workers, alongside care and support workers, were identified as pivotal professionals in delivering effective social services. Supporting them to be effective in delivering services requires ongoing training, adequate supervision, and development support. However, bureaucratic hurdles, funding constraints, and poor working conditions emerge as significant challenges hindering their ability to fulfil their roles effectively.

Qualifications and Skills

There is a clear distinction between the qualifications required between more qualified workers and less-qualified ones. While there are a large number of formal social work education programmes within the EU, difficulties emerged in qualifications recognition across countries. On the other hand, there are few training programmes and few registration mechanisms for social care workers in Europe. Public authorities are also facing difficulties attracting young people into education, training, and the profession.

Training in Crisis Situations

Responses to the COVID-19 crisis were generally considered effective, showcasing a growing acknowledgement of the importance of cross-sector collaboration and integrated responses in crisis management. However, there is a lack of crisis management training and response preparedness that impacts the workforce's capacity to effectively respond to emergency situations.

Recruitment and Retention

Challenges include working conditions, career progression, an ageing workforce, and the difficulty to attract younger generations. Improved conditions, career development opportunities, and drivers to bring young people into the profession through the use of technology, flexible and innovative arrangements were emphasised as key recruitment drivers.

Workforce Regulation

Most regulatory bodies are based within ministries rather than set up as an independent agency. Their primary focus involves ensuring workforce quality and competency standards.

Workforce Planning and Future Needs

Reforming, investing, and strategically planning the social services workforce is crucial to extending the reach of community-based programmes and advancing a fair and equitable society.

Managing the Social Services Workforce: Looking into the Future

As societies evolve and face new challenges, the demand for social services grows, requiring a well-managed workforce. In light of this, ESN advocates for the development of a **European Strategy on the Social Services Workforce**. This strategy should seek to foster a coordinated European approach, addressing the multifaceted issues encountered by the social services workforce across Europe with a primary emphasis on enhancing the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of social services management.

