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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SOCIAL PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS AS A PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF A SOCIAL WORKER IN WARTIME

The article substantiates the relevance of monitoring and evaluation of social programs as a component of the professional competence of a social worker in wartime. The full-scale war in Ukraine has both increased the need for evidence regarding the relevance, effectiveness and impact of social and humanitarian programs and made it much harder to obtain. The main challenges of conducting monitoring and evaluation in the wartime context are characterized: the high mobility of recipients of social services, restricted access to certain territories and population groups, the loss or rapid obsolescence of administrative data, the difficulty of conducting repeated measurements, the security and ethical risks of data collection, and the instability of the external conditions of program implementation. Particular attention is paid to the methodological complexity of evaluating the impact of social programs amid a multiplicity of social and humanitarian interventions and the influence of a considerable number of external factors. The authors argue that outcomes should be distinguished from impact, and attribution from the contribution of a social program to the changes achieved. The authors propose their own definition of the M&E competence of a social worker as an integrated ability to methodologically substantiate, plan and conduct monitoring and evaluation of social programs, to work critically with data and to use the evidence obtained for professional and managerial decision-making. Within the structure of this competence, analytical-methodological, research-instrumental, evaluative-interpretive, managerial, ethical and context-adaptive components are distinguished. The experience of developing the M&E competence of students at the second (master's) level of higher education within the educational and professional program "Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Programs" at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University is described. The prospects for developing this professional competence in order to ensure the evidence base of social work and the quality of social services during the war and the post-war recovery of Ukraine are determined.

***Keywords:** monitoring, evaluation, social project, program, social service, social worker, martial law, professional competence of a social worker.*

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МОНІТОРИНГ І ОЦІНЮВАННЯ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ ПРОЄКТІВ І ПРОГРАМ ЯК ПРОФЕСІЙНА КОМПЕТЕНТНІСТЬ СОЦІАЛЬНОГО ПРАЦІВНИКА В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ

У статті обґрунтовано актуальність моніторингу й оцінювання соціальних програм як складової професійної компетентності соціального працівника в умовах війни. Показано, що повномасштабна війна в Україні одночасно посилила потребу в доказах щодо релевантності, результативності та впливу соціальних і гуманітарних програм і суттєво ускладнила процес їх отримання. Схарактеризовано основні виклики здійснення моніторингу й оцінювання у воєнному контексті: високу мобільність отримувачів соціальних послуг, обмеження доступу до окремих територій і груп населення, втрату або швидке застарівання адміністративних даних, складність проведення повторних вимірювань, безпекові та етичні ризики збору інформації, нестабільність зовнішніх умов реалізації програм. Особливу увагу приділено методологічній складності оцінювання впливу соціальних програм в умовах множинності соціальних і гуманітарних втручань та дії значної кількості зовнішніх чинників. Обґрунтовано необхідність розрізнення результатів, впливу, атрибуції та внеску соціальної програми у досягнуті зміни. Запропоновано авторське визначення МіО-компетентності соціального працівника як інтегрованої здатності методологічно обґрунтовувати, планувати та здійснювати моніторинг і оцінювання соціальних програм, критично працювати з даними та використовувати отримані докази для професійного й управлінського прийняття рішень. У структурі цієї компетентності виокремлено аналітико-методологічний, дослідницько-інструментальний, оцінювально-інтерпретаційний, управлінський, етичний та контекстно-адаптивний компоненти. Розкрито досвід формування МіО-компетентності здобувачів другого (магістерського) рівня вищої освіти в межах освітньо-професійної програми «Моніторинг і оцінка соціальних програм» Київського столичного університету імені Бориса Грінченка. Визначено перспективність розвитку відповідної професійної компетентності для забезпечення доказовості соціальної роботи та якості соціальних послуг під час війни та повоєнного відновлення України.

Ключові слова: *моніторинг, оцінювання, соціальний проєкт, програма, соціальні послуги, соціальний працівник, воєнний стан, професійна компетентність соціального працівника.*

Problem statement. The full-scale war has substantially transformed the social sphere, changing not only the scale and structure of social problems but also the conditions of social workers' professional activity. Forced displacement of the population, the destruction

of housing and social infrastructure, the loss of sources of income, family separation, injuries and disability, the psychosocial consequences of the war, and the needs of veterans and their family members and of residents of frontline and de-occupied communities have led to the launch of many state, municipal, civil society and international social and humanitarian programs.

However, more social interventions do not automatically guarantee that assistance corresponds to the actual needs of the population or that the expected social changes are achieved. With scarce resources, an unstable security situation and quickly changing needs, the key questions are how well a social program meets the current needs of its target groups; whether it achieves its intended results; what intended and unintended changes it brings about; which of its components work, for whom and under what conditions; and whether the continuation, adjustment or scaling up of the program is justified.

The need to begin the planning of social and humanitarian programs with a systematic assessment of the problems and needs of the population is particularly evident in de-occupied communities. A study of one such community showed that the destruction of infrastructure, demographic changes, population displacement, psychosocial traumatization and the disruption of the social service delivery system require constant updating of information on the situation of the population, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources, and the involvement of local actors in setting recovery priorities (Liakh & Dibrova, 2026).

As a result, monitoring and evaluation can no longer be seen only as the specialized task of a project manager, analyst or external expert. For a social worker involved in the planning, implementation, coordination and improvement of social programs and social services, the ability to work with evidence on the needs, processes, results and consequences of a social intervention becomes, in effect, a professional competence. This view agrees with recent work on the management activities of social workers, where the monitoring and evaluation of social programs is linked to decision-making and results-based management (Lekholetova et al., 2026).

In Ukraine, there is one more reason why this competence matters. The war creates a kind of **evidence paradox**: the more urgently decision-makers need timely, reliable and relevant data, the harder it is to obtain them. Danger to researchers and respondents, the inaccessibility of certain territories, the high mobility of the population, the loss of contact with program participants, the incompleteness of administrative statistics, the impossibility of adhering to planned measurement schedules, the traumatic experience of potential respondents and constant changes in context directly affect the quality of data and the possibilities for their interpretation (*Challenges of doing M&E in fragile, conflict-affected and violent settings*, 2024; Liakh et al., 2026).

The experience of Ukrainian organizations during the full-scale war also shows a tension between the need for monitoring data and the nature of the systems used to collect them. Monitoring is necessary for understanding changes in clients' needs and adapting programs accordingly; however, inflexible reporting systems may create an excessive burden on specialists and insufficiently reflect the actual activities of organizations amid a rapidly changing context (Lazarus et al., 2026).

It is especially hard to evaluate the outcomes and impact of social programs in this situation. The situation of a person or community is simultaneously influenced by a considerable number of factors: state social policy, the activities of local self-government bodies, international humanitarian assistance, interventions by civil society and volunteer organizations, changes in the security situation, employment, secondary displacement or return, and changes in family and financial circumstances. A recorded positive change is therefore not enough to attribute it directly to a specific social program (*Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, 2021).

All this calls for rethinking the place of monitoring and evaluation within the structure of the professional competence of a social worker and, accordingly, in the content of their professional training.

Purpose of the article: to theoretically substantiate the monitoring and evaluation of social programs as a component of the professional competence of a social worker in wartime; to characterize the challenges, conditioned by the wartime context, related to

the collection and interpretation of data and to the evaluation of the outcomes and impact of social programs; to reveal the possibilities for developing M&E competence in the professional training of social workers, using the example of the educational and professional program "Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Programs" at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

Analysis of recent research and publications. In recent years, the issue of monitoring and evaluation of social and humanitarian programs in wartime has received growing attention in both international and Ukrainian academic and professional discussion. Existing studies, however, tend to focus on separate aspects of the problem: needs assessment, the organization of M&E of specific programs, the evaluation of the effectiveness of particular social work technologies, the specifics of data collection in conflict settings, or the managerial functions of a social worker.

Empirical evidence of how monitoring has changed during the war comes from the study of program monitoring practices in Ukraine conducted by Lazarus et al. (2026). Drawing on 26 in-depth interviews with representatives of 24 organizations, the authors analyzed the experience of organizations that continued to implement HIV programs during the war while simultaneously responding to new humanitarian needs. The study revealed a fundamental contradiction: staff recognized monitoring as necessary for understanding clients' current needs, overseeing service delivery and adapting programs, yet described some external reporting systems as inflexible, burdensome and insufficiently sensitive to the new program reality. The authors conclude that there is a need to build monitoring systems whose data are used by the programs themselves to improve their activities, rather than merely ensuring accountability to external donors (Lazarus et al., 2026).

For social work this is a key point, since it allows us to separate **monitoring as the formal production of reporting indicators** and **monitoring as a professional tool for reflection, learning and decision-making**. The second function matters most when the needs of target groups change faster than approved plans and indicator systems.

Bakrania et al. (2021) discuss the specifics of evaluation in fragile, conflict-affected and humanitarian settings. The authors emphasize that the methodological complexity of conducting impact evaluation in such conditions does not reduce the need for evidence. On the contrary, decisions on the use of limited resources and the selection of effective interventions require proper empirical justification. Still, an unstable environment, difficult access to respondents, ethical risks and problems with constructing counterfactual scenarios mean that the evaluation design has to be adapted to the real conditions in which it is carried out (Bakrania et al., 2021).

The OECD guidance is methodologically useful for understanding how outcomes and impact are evaluated. Evaluation should not be reduced to the mechanical application of standardized criteria; relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability should be considered taking into account the purpose of the evaluation, the nature of the intervention, the context and the information needs of stakeholders (*Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, 2021). For complex social programs, it is especially important to look at the causal contribution of an intervention and to consider using a theory of change and contribution analysis when establishing direct attribution is methodologically problematic (*Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, 2021).

Recent international evaluations of the humanitarian response in Ukraine also show the need to combine different sources and methods of evidence. In particular, the evaluation of the UNHCR response in Ukraine was based on a mixed non-experimental design that combined document analysis, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and surveys of staff and partners. Its findings were used both for accountability and for strategic planning of the further response (Featherstone et al., 2024). The inter-agency synthesis of evaluative evidence on the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine also focuses on organizational learning, collective accountability and the use of accumulated evidence for the further improvement of the humanitarian response (Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group, 2025).

Ukrainian research is gradually forming its own scholarly discourse on the evaluation of social and humanitarian programs in wartime.

Liakh and Dibrova (2026) looked at the assessment of problems and needs of the population of de-occupied communities, using a focus group study in the Velykooleksandrivska territorial community of Kherson Oblast. The authors identified a number of limitations of such assessment: the loss or obsolescence of statistical data, uncertainty about the actual population size due to migration processes, a high level of psychosocial traumatization, declining trust in institutions, the complexity of problems and the rapid change of needs. They argue for combining quantitative and qualitative methods, involving local actors and using a trauma-informed approach (Liakh & Dibrova, 2026). An important finding is that needs assessment is not only an analytical exercise: when residents take part in defining problems and priorities, this can help restore communication, trust and social cohesion in the community.

The next level of the problem – the direct organization of M&E of social projects supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) – was investigated by Liakh et al. (2026). The empirical basis was an online focus group with the participation of coordinators of social projects implemented in communities near the frontline. The authors identified security constraints on conducting M&E, the high mobility of aid recipients, the resource constraints of social service agencies, the difficulty of complying with certain donor requirements in a volatile wartime environment, and the insufficient preparedness of some coordinators to conduct monitoring and evaluation. This led the authors to stress the need to develop social workers' professional competences in social project design and M&E (Liakh et al., 2026).

Aladzhalian and Liutyi (2025) narrow the question of evaluation down to one specific technology of humanitarian support – case management. The analysis of the "Cash for Protection" program, which combined a review of case documentation with a survey of aid recipients and case managers, allowed them to assess not only the positive results of the intervention but also its practical limitations. The results demonstrated the importance of systematic needs assessment, individual planning and outcome monitoring for the targeting of assistance, while also revealing problems that cannot be resolved by a short-term intervention (Aladzhalian & Liutyi, 2025). This matters for how evaluation is understood: not as a way to confirm that a program succeeded, but as a way to find out both what it achieved and where its effectiveness ends.

Another aspect of the problem is presented by Lekholetova et al. (2026), who analyze the managerial skills of social workers in the context of management activities. The authors link their development with the quality of performance of professional functions and with results-based management. Among the business skills of a social worker, they consider the ability to make managerial decisions, to design social situations, to ensure cross-sectoral interaction, and to carry out the management, monitoring and evaluation of social projects and programs (Lekholetova et al., 2026). This view helps to see M&E as part of the managerial side of professional activity, and not only the research side.

Overall, the literature shows that researchers have already demonstrated the importance of needs assessment as a prerequisite for programming social and humanitarian interventions; outlined the specific difficulties of M&E in wartime; tested the evaluation of particular humanitarian practices; and established the link between M&E and the managerial functions of a social worker. What remains insufficiently conceptualized, however, is **monitoring and evaluation as an integrated professional competence of a social worker**, together with its structural components and the way it is developed as professional activity changes because of the war. This is the focus of the present study.

Presentation of the main material. Monitoring and evaluation perform interrelated but not identical functions. Monitoring provides systematic tracking of the progress of program implementation, the use of resources, the coverage of target groups, the implementation of planned activities and the achievement of defined indicators. Evaluation involves a deeper analytical judgment regarding the relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of an intervention. These criteria, however, should not be applied mechanically: their use should depend on the purpose of the evaluation, the characteristics of the program and the context of its implementation (*Applying Evaluation Crite-*

ria Thoughtfully, 2021). These approaches apply equally to social services, which in wartime are frequently delivered precisely within social and humanitarian programs.

What matters for social work is not just having a system of indicators, but how the data obtained are fed back into professional practice. Monitoring that ends with the transfer of indicators to an external donor or manager primarily performs an accountability function. Monitoring whose results are used to rethink needs, revise the intervention logic, change working methods and reallocate resources acquires the function of professional and organizational learning.

The Ukrainian experience shows this difference clearly. Lazarus et al. (2026) found that during the war, the staff of organizations used internal monitoring to track clients' emerging needs, oversee service delivery and adapt their activities. However, requirements to reach rigidly set external indicators did not always fit the changed program reality. This points to the need to shift the emphasis from monitoring for the sake of reporting to monitoring for the sake of program improvement and decision-making.

In wartime, this second function becomes critical. A program may be well designed at the outset, but within a few months its initial assumptions may lose their relevance due to the evacuation or return of the population, changes in the intensity of hostilities, the destruction of infrastructure, the emergence of new aid providers or changes in access to social services.

For this reason, M&E in wartime is best seen as part of adaptive management of a social program: a continuous cycle of obtaining data, interpreting them professionally, making decisions, adjusting the intervention and further observing its results.

For professional training, this means that a social worker should not only be able to work with a system of indicators but also understand why data are being collected, which professional and managerial decisions they can support, which phenomena remain invisible to the established indicators, and under what circumstances the monitoring system itself needs to be revised.

The collection of high-quality data is a basic prerequisite for M&E; yet in wartime this is one of the most vulnerable parts of the process.

The first challenge is related to the dynamic nature of target groups. Internally displaced persons may change their place of residence several times, return to their communities or evacuate again. In de-occupied communities, the actual size and structure of the population may differ significantly from administrative data. The study by Liakh and Dibrova (Liakh & Dibrova, 2026) demonstrated that the loss of administrative information during the occupation, migration, the gradual return of residents and other demographic changes directly complicate needs assessment. Using several sources of information, updating data regularly and combining quantitative and qualitative methods therefore become more important.

The high mobility of aid recipients creates difficulties not only for the initial needs assessment but also for monitoring the outcomes of a social program. The study of M&E of IDP support projects in communities near the frontline confirmed the difficulty of re-contacting program participants and tracking outcomes in a situation where people continue to move in response to the security situation (Liakh et al., 2026).

The second challenge concerns the accessibility of different population groups. Remote data collection partially reduces security risks but may lead to the under-representation of older people, persons with low digital literacy, people without stable connectivity, and residents of territories with damaged infrastructure. As a result, a technically correct study may contain systematic bias and insufficiently reflect the experience of the most vulnerable groups (*Challenges of doing M&E in fragile, conflict-affected and violent settings*, 2024).

The third challenge is the stability of baseline data and the comparability of measurements. In a relatively stable environment, a baseline measurement can serve as a reference point for a long time. During the war, a person's life situation may change so substantially between two measurements that a simple comparison of "before" and "after" indicators loses part of its explanatory power. The evaluator has to consider not only the change in an indicator but also what happened to the context between the two measurements.

The fourth challenge is related to the quality and completeness of data. In a wartime

environment, the absence of information may itself be systemic: the groups that are hardest to reach for research are often the ones living in the most dangerous or vulnerable conditions. Missing, fragmentary or unevenly represented data should not be hidden; these limitations should be recorded and taken into account when interpreting the results.

The fifth challenge is ethical in nature. Collecting data on losses, violence, experiences of occupation, displacement or other traumatic events may cause additional emotional strain. That is why needs assessment in de-occupied communities requires a trauma-informed approach, the involvement of local specialists, transparency of research procedures and consideration of the level of trust among the population (Liakh & Dibrova, 2026).

Professional competence in M&E, then, includes the ability to answer not only the question "What data do we need?" but also the question "To what extent is it possible, appropriate and ethical to collect these data right now and in this particular way?". The information needs of a program cannot outweigh the safety, dignity and interests of the person.

No less complex is the interpretation of the data obtained. In the practice of social programs, the concepts of outcome and impact are often used without sufficient differentiation, although methodologically they denote different levels of change.

The fact that an activity has been conducted, a service provided or a certain number of people reached indicates primarily the outputs of a program but does not yet prove a change in the life situation of its recipients. Improved access to services, the reduction of a particular risk, the strengthening of a family's capacity to solve problems independently or increased social integration characterize outcomes of a different level. The question of impact concerns more significant, long-term and systemic effects and the causal link between the intervention and the recorded changes (*Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, 2021).

In the wartime context, the problem of causality becomes more acute. A person may simultaneously receive a social payment from the state, humanitarian cash assistance, psychological support from a civil society organization, community social services and volunteer assistance. Meanwhile, they may find a job, relocate, return home or, conversely, lose their housing again due to hostilities. A positive change found after the program ends cannot automatically be treated as its direct consequence. The distinction between **attribution** and **contribution** becomes methodologically important. Attribution means establishing a causal link between a specific intervention and a change, while the analysis of contribution looks at the role of a program within the totality of factors that shaped the result. For complex interventions and settings, it makes sense to analyze the pathways of attribution or contribution and, where necessary, to use contribution analysis (*Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*, 2021).

This matters a great deal for social work. A professional evaluator is not someone who tries to "prove the success" of a program at any cost, but someone who can establish which conclusions are genuinely supported by the data obtained and which go beyond their evidentiary strength.

The study by Aladzhalian and Liutyi (Aladzhalian & Liutyi, 2025) is a good example. By combining an analysis of case documentation with the views of aid recipients and case managers, the authors were able to identify not only the positive results of the program but also the limitations of a short-term intervention. It shows something important about professional evaluation: its task is not to confirm success decided in advance, but to learn what worked, for whom, under what conditions, and what remained beyond the program's capabilities.

Taken together, this suggests that M&E should be seen not as a set of separate technical operations but as an integrated component of the professional competence of a social worker.

The M&E competence of a social worker is defined here as the integrated ability of a specialist to methodologically substantiate, plan and conduct monitoring and evaluation of social programs and interventions; to identify information needs and formulate evaluation questions; to develop indicators; to select adequate quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis; to critically assess the quality of data; to determine the outcomes, contribution and impact of social programs; to interpret the evidence obtained taking into

account its methodological limitations; and to use M&E results for professional and managerial decision-making in compliance with the ethical principles of social work.

This understanding goes well beyond knowing individual research methods or techniques for developing indicators.

We distinguish several components of M&E competence. The first is the *analytical-methodological component*, which involves the ability to conceptualize a social problem, construct the intervention logic, formulate evaluation questions, define indicators and select an appropriate evaluation design.

The research-instrumental component encompasses the ability to use quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, to work with various sources of information, to ensure data quality, and to apply triangulation and digital tools for collecting and processing information.

The evaluative-interpretive component is related to understanding the differences between the process, outputs, outcomes and impact of a program, and to the ability to analyze intended and unintended effects, to distinguish between attribution and contribution, and to determine the limits of the reliability of conclusions.

The managerial component involves translating M&E results into decisions: adjusting the intervention, revising priorities, reallocating resources, scaling up effective practices or discontinuing those that do not bring about the expected changes. This component corresponds directly to the understanding of a social worker's managerial skills as a prerequisite for results-based management (Lekholetova et al., 2026).

The ethical component includes adherence to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, data security, "do no harm", respect for dignity and the person's right to refuse to participate in research.

Finally, in wartime the *context-adaptive component* becomes especially important: it is the ability to change the M&E design in accordance with the security situation, the availability of respondents, and the quality and completeness of data; to work under conditions of uncertainty; to use alternative sources of information; and to clearly record methodological limitations. Empirical studies of M&E practices in Ukraine show that this kind of flexibility is needed (Lazarus et al., 2026; Liakh et al., 2026).

M&E competence is interdisciplinary by nature and brings together the research, analytical, project, managerial and ethical components of a social worker's professional activity. War adds one more element: the ability to act professionally under conditions of uncertainty and a rapidly changing context.

If M&E is part of professional competence, the obvious next question is how higher education can develop it purposefully.

At Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, training under the educational and professional program "Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Programs" at the second (master's) level of higher education has been provided since 2019 (Educational and Professional Programme…, 2026), that is, before the full-scale war. This rules out the simple causal claim that the need for specialized M&E training appeared only because of the war. What the war did change substantially was the context, scale and content of the competences required of the program's graduates.

This transformation is reflected in the 2026 update of the educational and professional program (EPP). The revision was prompted, in particular, by war-related changes in the work of organizations acting as social service providers and as providers of social and humanitarian programs, and by requests from employers, students, graduates and the professional community.

The aim of the program is to train specialists capable of solving complex tasks and problems in the field of social work, conducting research and innovation under conditions of uncertain requirements and circumstances, and methodologically substantiating, organizing and conducting the monitoring and evaluation of social programs and social services.

Of particular relevance to this study is that the 2026 edition of the EPP introduced a special professional competence – the ability to implement, monitor and evaluate social projects and programs in crisis and post-conflict settings – along with a matching program learning outcome on professional activity in crisis and post-conflict settings.

M&E competence is developed not through one isolated educational component, but through

a set of interrelated components of training. Students master the study of current social problems, quantitative and qualitative research methods in social work, expert assessment of the quality of social services, the management of social projects and programs, and the monitoring and evaluation of social projects and programs with a practicum. In the updated edition of the program, a separate educational component, *"Monitoring and Evaluation in Crisis and Post-Conflict Settings"*, has been introduced (Educational and Professional Programme…, 2026).

An important characteristic of the program is the practical orientation of professional training, so that M&E competence is developed not only by learning methodological principles but also by working with real social problems, programs and data.

One example is involving students in the evaluation of current humanitarian assistance practices. The study of the effectiveness of case management for aid recipients of humanitarian programs shows how evaluative logic can be applied to a real social intervention: from the analysis of needs and case documentation to the collection of data from aid recipients and specialists, the interpretation of results and the formulation of recommendations (Aladzhalian & Liutyi, 2025).

In short, the EPP aims to train not just a specialist who knows individual M&E methods, but a professional who can combine *social work – research – evaluation – managerial decision*. This kind of integration is what the changing professional activity of social workers in wartime requires.

Further development of professional training in this area could focus on deepening conflict-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to M&E; working with incomplete, fragmentary and dynamic data; remote and hybrid methods of data collection; data security and ethics; evaluating contribution and impact amid multiple interventions; and using evaluation results for the adaptive management of social programs.

Conclusions. The full-scale war in Ukraine has not only increased the scale of social problems and needs of the population but has also changed the requirements for the quality of professional decisions in the social sphere. The considerable number of social and humanitarian programs, limited resources, the volatility of the context and the need for rapid response make it necessary to shift from recording the volume of assistance and social services provided to systematically analyzing their relevance, outcomes, contribution and impact.

Yet the war itself makes it much harder to build the evidence base this requires. Population mobility, restricted access to certain territories and groups, the loss or rapid obsolescence of administrative data, difficulties in re-contacting program participants, security and ethical risks, and constant changes in external conditions affect the quality of data collection and interpretation. Traditional M&E algorithms have to be adapted to this context.

Impact evaluation requires particular methodological caution. In wartime, changes in the situation of a person, family or community are shaped by the action of many simultaneous interventions and external factors. Professional competence thus includes being able to tell outputs from outcomes and impact, and attribution from contribution, and to state clearly how far the evidence supports the conclusions.

On this basis, we define the M&E competence of a social worker as the integrated ability to methodologically substantiate, plan and conduct monitoring and evaluation of social programs; to identify information needs and indicators; to apply adequate methods of data collection and analysis; to evaluate the outcomes, contribution and impact of social interventions; to critically interpret evidence and its limitations; and to use M&E results for professional and managerial decision-making in compliance with the ethical principles of social work.

We identified six components of this competence: analytical-methodological, research-instrumental, evaluative-interpretive, managerial, ethical and context-adaptive. The last one is especially important in wartime, because it involves the ability to act professionally in a situation of uncertainty, incomplete data and rapid environmental change.

The experience of implementing the EPP "Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Programs" at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University shows that such competence can be developed systematically at the second (master's) level of higher education. The program existed

before the full-scale invasion, but wartime experience led to a deeper revision of its content: in the 2026 edition, the orientation towards professional activity in crisis and post-conflict settings was strengthened, and the corresponding competences and educational components were introduced (Educational and Professional Programme…, 2026).

The influence of the war on the professional training of social workers is therefore not limited to new target groups or new assistance technologies. It involves a deeper change in the professional role: a contemporary social worker should be not only a provider of assistance but also a specialist capable of obtaining, critically reflecting on and using evidence as to whether this assistance actually brings about the necessary social changes.

As Ukraine moves towards post-war recovery, this competence will only become more important. Large-scale programs for the reintegration of veterans, for the support of the families of military personnel, internally displaced persons, and children and adults affected by the war, and for the restoration of social services, social cohesion and community resilience will require a professional response to fundamental questions: what works, for whom it works, under what conditions, with what resources the result is achieved, and what the real contribution of a specific program is to the recovery of the individual, the community and society.

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