

SOCIAL WORK IN WARTIME UKRAINE:

Changing the Professional Landscape



Edited by Tetyana Semigina

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Tallinn
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The edited volume offers a comprehensive and timely analysis of how social work theory, practice, and education in Ukraine are being reshaped by prolonged war. The book examines professionalisation processes, community resilience, responses to internal displacement, psychosocial and gender-sensitive interventions, and innovations in formal and non-formal social work education.

The book targets scholars, university teachers, advanced social work practitioners, and policy-oriented professionals.

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Chapter 1

Social Work Professionalization in Ukraine: Progress, Challenges, and Unfinished Transitions

Tetyana SEMIGINA, Tetiana LIAKH

Abstract

This paper examines the professionalization of social work in Ukraine, a process shaped by historical legacies, social transformations, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war; it aims to analyze the development, challenges, and institutionalization of the profession in the Ukrainian context. Using a reflective and critical approach combining literature review, policy analysis, and contextual observations, the study highlights key advancements, including the establishment of academic programs, occupational standards, and the Social Services Classifier, while also identifying persistent challenges such as gaps in legal and ethical regulation, uneven implementation of standards, low professional recognition, and insufficient intersectoral integration. The findings underscore that Ukrainian social work remains “halfway” to full professionalization, requiring coordinated reforms in education, regulation, continuing professional development, and working conditions to build a resilient, competent, and ethically grounded workforce capable of responding to both routine social needs and crisis situations.

Key words: *social work; professionalization; Ukraine; standards; occupational frameworks; licensing; ethical standards; legislation; social services.*

INTRODUCTION

In Ukraine, social work unfolds against a backdrop of profound social transformations and numerous challenges. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly affected the economic well-being and subjective quality of life of the population (Karamuska et al., 2022; Semigina et al., 2025), public health (An et al., 2025; Fontanarosa et al., 2022; Kokun, 2025), and the demand for social services (Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 2024; Romaniuk et al., 2024). The war has intensified the need for social support and underscored the importance of rethinking social work paradigms while strengthening the competencies of professionals, and increasing the visibility of the profession.

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Despite these challenges, Ukrainian social work demonstrates remarkable resilience and adaptability. Social workers continue to innovate and respond to emerging societal needs, balancing established professional standards with the flexible, context-sensitive approaches required during times of emergencies and crisis.

This chapter explores the significance of studying social work in Ukraine, reflecting on the historical context, institutional development, and contemporary challenges that shape the profession amidst the war. Understanding professionalization sheds light on the ongoing transformation of social work as a profession and its crucial role in addressing the complex

realities of contemporary society, including those exacerbated by war, social change, and evolving community needs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALIZATION

At the heart of social work development lies **professionalization** – the process through which social work emerges as a recognized, competent, and ethically grounded profession. Professionalization involves the creation of a specialized body of knowledge, the establishment of professional standards, and the preparation of practitioners with the necessary skills to address complex social problems (Banks, 2020; Moorhead et al., 2025; Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008). It is through professionalization that social work establishes its legitimacy, maintains high standards, and ensures that its practice aligns with ethical and societal expectations.

Research (Banks, 2020; Lai Wing Hoi & Chan Kam Tong, 2009; Ullrich et al., 2022) demonstrates that professionalization strengthens education, ethics, and practical competencies of social workers. By developing specialized skills and knowledge, practitioners are better equipped to respond effectively to a wide range of social issues, from family dynamics and mental health challenges to poverty and community development. Professionalization ensures that

social work services are both effective and ethically grounded, fostering trust and credibility with clients, communities, and institutions.

A clear professional identity also positions social workers to advocate for marginalized and vulnerable populations. Professionalized social workers can engage more effectively with policymakers, the public, and other stakeholders, promoting social justice and influencing social policy (Bark et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2021; Wiles, 2024). As the field becomes increasingly professionalized, public recognition and trust tend to grow, resulting in greater investment in social services, improved working conditions for social workers, and a stronger overall societal impact.

Professionalization extends beyond individual competencies to include organizational and systemic dimensions. Well-established standards, codes of ethics, and formalized education programs enable social work to function coherently as a profession. These structures support accountability, consistency in service delivery, and the capacity to respond adaptively to evolving social challenges (Beddoe, 2013; Lemaitre et al., 2024). In particular, professionalized social work is better equipped to address emerging issues such as migration, mental health crises, climate-related disasters, and the social consequences of armed conflicts.

Moreover, professionalization enhances collaboration with other sectors, including healthcare, education, and law enforcement. Integrated approaches enable social workers to provide holistic support, ensuring that individuals and communities receive comprehensive services (Kangasniemi et al., 2022; Miller, 2019). This intersectoral collaboration also strengthens the societal role of social work, positioning it as a key contributor to public policy and social development.

In summary, professionalization is a central pillar of the effectiveness, credibility, and societal impact of social work. It encompasses education, ethics, competencies, and intersectoral collaboration, providing a foundation for social workers to respond to both routine and extraordinary social challenges.

The Figure 1.1 illustrates the theoretical framework of social work professionalization, highlighting its central role in shaping the profession. At the core, professionalization integrates specialized knowledge, ethical and professional standards, organizational structures, intersectoral collaboration, and a clear professional identity. These elements collectively contribute to positive outcomes, including effective social services, ethical practice, client trust, and societal impact, and serve as a foundation for conducting further analysis.

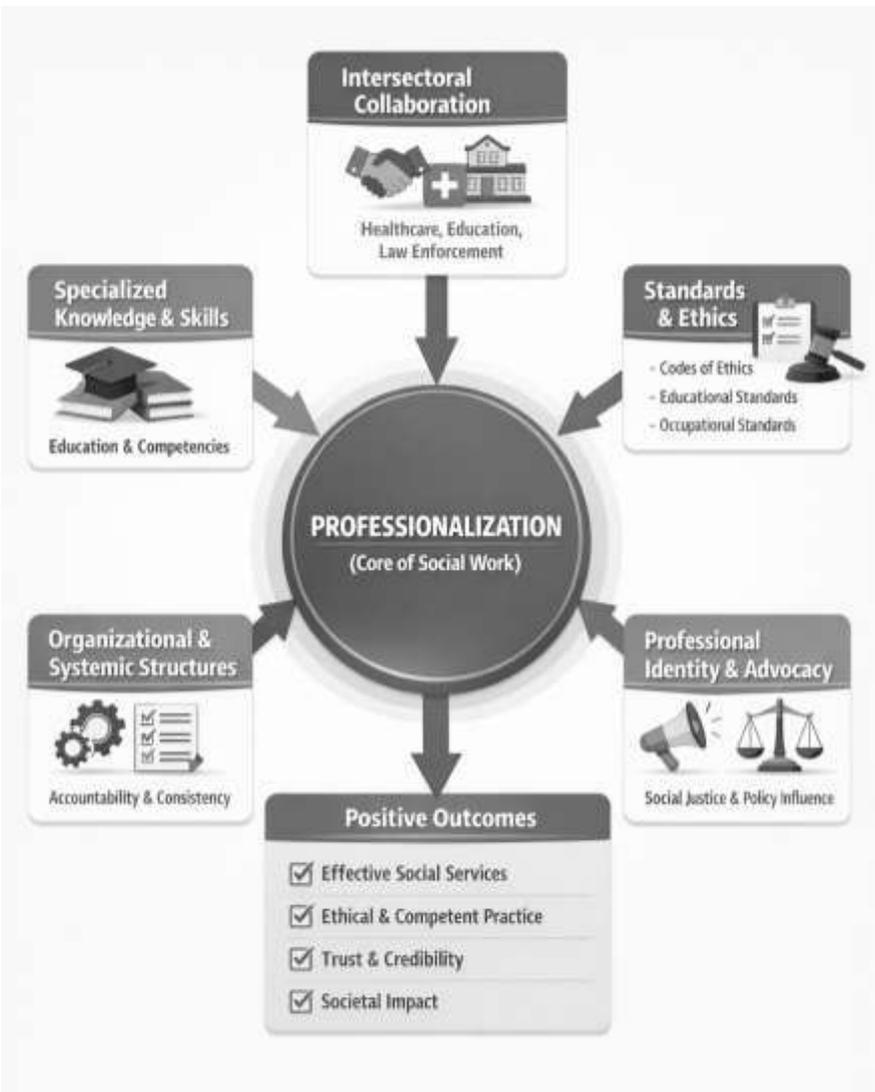


Figure 1.1. Theoretical Framework of Social Work Professionalization

METHODS

This chapter employs a **qualitative, reflective, and critical analytical approach** to examine the professionalization of social work in Ukraine. Rather than reporting primary empirical data, the analysis is grounded in a **systematic synthesis of scholarly literature**, policy documents, and professional discourse, combined with **reflexive insights derived from prolonged professional engagement in the field of social work**.

The literature review encompasses Ukrainian and international academic publications on social work professionalization, welfare state transformation, post-socialist social policy, and professional standards development. Particular attention is paid to sources addressing the institutionalization of social work education, the regulation of professional practice, and the alignment of national developments with European and international frameworks. Policy documents, legislative acts, professional standards, and strategic papers relevant to social services and social work education in Ukraine are also considered as key analytical materials.

In addition to documentary analysis, the chapter draws on **author's long-term professional observations** accumulated through sustained involvement in social work education, research, curriculum development, and policy-related expert

activities in Ukraine. These observations are not treated as anecdotal evidence, but as **contextualized experiential knowledge**, enabling critical interpretation of formal reforms, implementation gaps, and everyday professional realities. This insider perspective supports a nuanced understanding of how professionalization processes are negotiated in practice, particularly under conditions of institutional instability and prolonged crisis.

The analytical strategy is informed by **critical social work and professionalization theories**, which view professional development as a non-linear and contested process shaped by power relations, resource constraints, and socio-political contexts. The chapter adopts a reflexive stance, acknowledging the author's positionality within the field and the potential influence of this positioning on interpretation. Rather than aiming for detached neutrality, the analysis emphasizes **analytical transparency and reflexive rigor**.

By triangulating academic literature, policy analysis, and reflexive professional insight, the chapter identifies key achievements, persistent challenges, and unfinished transitions in the professionalization of social work in Ukraine. This methodological approach allows for a historically informed and context-sensitive interpretation of professional change, offering insights that are relevant both for national reflection and for comparative discussions in international social work scholarship.

ADVANCEMENTS IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALIZATION IN UKRAINE

In Ukraine, the professionalization of social work has been shaped by both historical and contemporary forces. During the Soviet era, social work as we understand it today did not exist as a distinct profession. The focus was primarily on pedagogy—particularly corrective pedagogy—and medical care, rather than on social work per se. Social welfare tasks were largely integrated into broader state welfare and medical systems, with professionals performing activities that would now be considered social work, but without a clear professional identity or specialized training.

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The emergence of social work as a distinct profession in Ukraine began in the 1990s, following the country's independence. There was growing recognition of the need for trained professionals to address complex social issues such as poverty, family dynamics, and the social impacts of economic transition. This period saw the establishment of the first social services and academic programs, marking the beginning of the professionalization process. These developments were part of broader social reforms, as the state acknowledged the necessity of creating a structured system for social services and developing an educated workforce capable of meeting evolving societal needs (Semigina & Myhovich, 2005; Semigina et al., 2005; Semigina & Boyko, 2014).

The development of social services within Ukraine's territorial communities has become a key driver of the professionalization of social work. Legislative reforms and decentralization have expanded opportunities for integrating services and improving access for diverse population groups (Semigina, 2019; Semigina & Yeroshenko, 2024). At the same time, these processes have highlighted the need to enhance professional competencies and implement innovative approaches that respond to complex and emerging social needs, particularly under wartime conditions.

The first Law on social services was introduced in 2003, establishing a general legal framework for service provision. A significant revision came in 2019, with the adoption of a new Law on social services, which included a modernized classification of social **services** (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019). The Law defines social services as interventions aimed at preventing, overcoming, **or** mitigating difficult life circumstances experienced by individuals and families. Importantly, the Law lists 18 basic services that are to be provided **in** all territorial communities, including home and day care, supported living, social adaptation, crisis intervention, counseling, in-kind assistance, physical support for persons with disabilities, sign language interpretation, and services for children in family-like conditions. In reality, however, many communities provide only a portion of these services, typically around 10-13, with certain specialized services, such as supported living, sign language

interpretation, and inclusive education support, frequently unavailable (Palatna & Semigina, 2024). This discrepancy highlights a persistent gap between legislative intent and service reality, undermining equity and access.

The **Social Services Classifier**, also introduced in 2019, was designed to operationalize this legal framework by standardizing service names, descriptions, target groups, and expected durations. The Classifier clarifies roles, promotes consistency in practice across territorial communities, and facilitates planning, monitoring, and evaluation. It also strengthens coordination between governmental and non-governmental providers and links service delivery to education and competency development (Semigina et al., 2024).

Recent additions, such as services for war veterans and counseling on housing adaptation, illustrate its responsiveness to emerging needs. Yet, as with the Law itself, its practical impact is constrained: many services remain unavailable at the local level, and the Classifier primarily functions as a technical tool, offering little guidance on the professional skills or judgment required to deliver high-quality services.

Occupational standards are intended to fill this gap by defining job functions, competencies, and qualification requirements. By 2024, more than 20 standards had been developed across the social sector, with six standards – such as “Social Worker,” “Social Work Specialist,” “Home Social

Assistance Specialist,” and “Psychologist in a Social Protection Institution” (NQA, 2025), providing a foundational competency framework. These standards, however, are general, often outdated, and largely fail to address contemporary challenges such as gender sensitivity, trauma-informed practice, psycho-emotional resilience, inclusivity, child protection and war-related interventions, digital skills, community-based approaches.

Critically, while the standards demand professional qualifications and competencies from service providers, only a small share of employees, around 15% according to an assessment of the workforce in four regions, have formal social work education (Maestral, 2025). This stark mismatch between required competencies and the actual workforce severely limits professionalization and the quality of services.

Efforts are underway to strengthen accountability and service quality through the development of a state monitoring system and expansion of the Social Service Providers Registry. These mechanisms, together with the Classifier and occupational standards, have the potential to enhance professional accountability, clarify roles, and support competency-based practice. Simultaneously, the establishment of occupational standards and the Social Services Classifier reflects a methodical approach to organizing and regulating social services, offering clear guidelines for service delivery and promoting consistency in quality.

However, persistent gaps in workforce qualifications, territorial disparities in service availability, and limited integration between legal, technical, and educational frameworks continue to constrain the development of a recognized, resilient, and fully professional social work sector in Ukraine.

In sum, the evolution of social services law, the Social Services Classifier, and occupational standards provides the institutional foundation for professionalization, but the effectiveness of these frameworks depends on bridging the gap between formal requirements and actual practice.

Social work education in Ukraine is also undergoing a gradual but meaningful transformation, as both higher education institutions and vocational training providers expand and revise their programmes to better prepare professionals for work in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing social context. These developments include curriculum updates that place greater emphasis on practice-oriented learning, responses to social vulnerability, and competencies relevant to crisis and post-crisis settings.

By 2025, the formal educational system in Ukraine is structurally aligned with the pan-European model of vocational and higher education, reflecting broader processes of European integration and providing a shared framework for qualifications and professional training (see **Figure 1.2**).

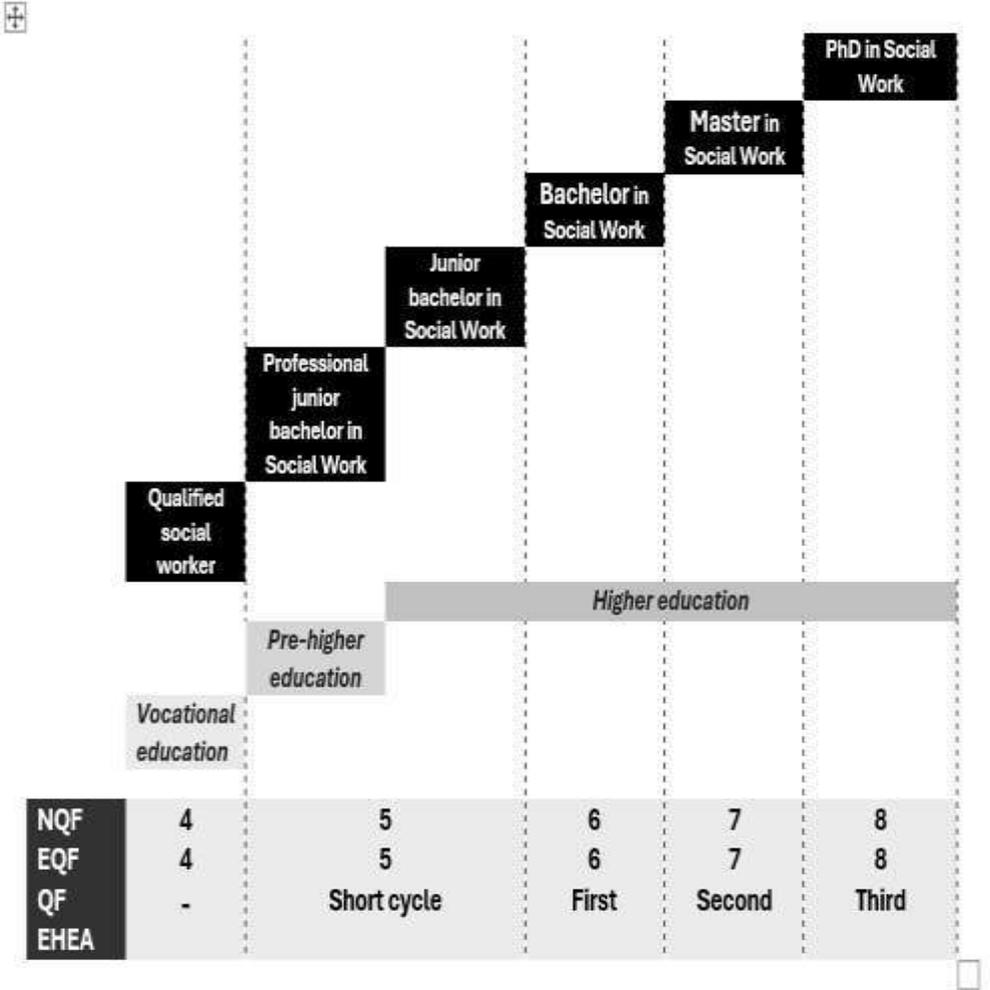


Figure 1.2. Levels of Social Work Education in Ukraine in 2025 (comparison of the National Qualification Framework/NQF, the European Qualifications Framework/EQF and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area/QF EHEA)

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, by November 2024, more than 400 educational programmes preparing social workers were available across 127 higher education institutions (in 2018 there were 65 HEIs teaching social workers). **Table 1.1** presents the distribution of these institutions by level of study.

Table 1.1. Distribution of Higher Education Institutions Offering Social Work Programmes

<i>Level of higher education</i>	<i>Number of HEIs with Social Work Programmes</i>
<i>Junior Specialist</i> (is now outdated)	4
<i>Junior Bachelor</i>	1
<i>Professional Junior Bachelor</i>	42
<i>Bachelor</i>	82
<i>Master</i>	57
<i>PhD (Doctor of Philosophy)</i>	18

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In addition, as of November 2024, 43 vocational education institutions (VET schools) offered educational programmes in social work, preparing skilled workers in the specialty 5133, “Social Worker” (Semigina, 2024).

While these figures reflect a substantial effort to develop a trained social work workforce, the variability in programme quality, coupled with the lack of structured frameworks for

practical training and professional development, has resulted in inconsistencies across the field.

By early 2025, Ukraine had made notable strides in social work professionalization, implementing **educational standards across three levels of higher education** – bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs.

These developments represent a substantial step forward in the professionalization of social work and the creation of a structured framework for social services in Ukraine. The introduction of standardized educational programs ensures that the workforce is adequately prepared to meet the demands of the profession.

An important yet underdeveloped dimension of social work professionalization in Ukraine concerns the **formation of a specialized body of professional knowledge**. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the theoretical foundations of social work education in Ukraine were largely constructed through the integration of psychological, pedagogical, and sociological approaches. While these frameworks were reflected in early Ukrainian textbooks and curricula, they were only partially adapted to national legislation and socio-cultural contexts, as they were predominantly borrowed from international models and translated English-language sources. This pattern was strongly influenced by donor-driven projects that played a

significant role in shaping social work education and discourse during the early stages of professionalization.

The reliance on adjacent disciplinary theories contributed to a persistent gap between theory and practice. Social work practice in Ukraine remained heavily influenced by paternalistic traditions, emphasizing control and care rather than rights-based, empowerment-oriented, and resource-focused interventions.

Moreover, while higher education programs and doctoral studies have expanded since the 1990s, the production of social work knowledge remains fragmented and uneven. Research in social work is often weakly institutionalized, underfunded, and insufficiently integrated into practice and policy-making. As a result, professional knowledge is frequently imported, adapted ad hoc, or replaced by administrative and medical frameworks, limiting the development of context-sensitive, practice-based social work knowledge.

The wartime context has further exposed these gaps, simultaneously increasing the demand for evidence-informed interventions and constraining opportunities for systematic knowledge production.

CHALLENGES IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALIZATION IN UKRAINE

Based on previous research (Baidarova & Mykhailovska, 2021; Chuiko et al., 2024; Laboratoriia zakonodavchykh initsiatyv, 2024; Semigina et al., 2024), it is evident that despite notable advancements, significant challenges persist in the professionalization of social work and in establishing a cohesive framework for social services in Ukraine. While the adoption of educational standards represents an important step forward, there remains a need for continuous improvements in the quality and accessibility of training programs. Ensuring that the workforce is not only adequately trained but also capable of addressing emerging social issues remains a pressing concern.

The development of occupational standards and the Social Services Classifier is an important achievement; however, concerns persist regarding the effective implementation of these standards across all regions and service areas. In addition, although state standards for service delivery have been introduced, the monitoring and enforcement of these standards remain inconsistent, undermining the quality and uniformity of services.

A central challenge lies in the lack of alignment and coherence between education standards, occupational standards, and social services standards. These standards have been

developed by different institutions, each with its own interpretation of social work and social services, resulting in inconsistencies that impede a unified approach to professionalization and service delivery (Pozhydaieva & Semigina, 2017). Furthermore, greater integration of social services with other sectors, such as healthcare and education, is necessary to provide comprehensive support to individuals and communities and to ensure effective rehabilitation programmes for populations affected by war.

Ukraine currently **lacks a universally recognized ethical code for social work**, as well as an authoritative national association empowered to oversee professional regulation. Although several professional associations exist, none have official regulatory status. Since the early 1990s, a number of organizations have emerged claiming or potentially qualifying as national associations of social workers. These organizations can be summarized chronologically as follows:

- *Ukrainian Association of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers (1992)*. This association was project-oriented and served as the initiator of an ethical code. It had limited individual membership and eventually became largely inactive. It was a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) from 1994 to 1999 under the “one country – one association” principle.
- *League of Social Workers of Ukraine (1999)* is focused on project implementation and participation in the

development of standards and national professional association projects. It had approximately 500 members but was not affiliated with the IFSW.

- *National Association of Social Workers of Ukraine (2022)*. Established with IFSW support, this association implements local IFSW projects. It does not yet have a fully established membership base but uses the *Global Declaration of Ethical Principles for Social Work* as its national ethical framework.

In addition to professional associations, the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sports of Ukraine formally approved the *Ethical Code of Social Work Specialists of Ukraine*. While this represented a step toward formalizing professional ethics, the code has several limitations:

1. Misalignment with the professional context: the code was issued by the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sports, whereas the majority of social workers are employed under the Ministry of Social Policy.
2. Limited legitimacy among practitioners: social workers employed in other ministries or within NGOs may not perceive the code as relevant or binding, and it is generally not used in practice by non-governmental organizations.
3. Limited legal authority: the code, while normative, is not linked to licensing or certification, and violations of

its principles do not trigger formal professional sanctions.

As of 2025, the *Ethical Code of Social Work Specialists of Ukraine* is outdated. It reflects international norms relevant at the time of its adoption in 2005 but does not incorporate contemporary developments in global ethical standards, new approaches to human rights, principles of inclusion, or the modern challenges facing social work, including work in contexts of war, prolonged crises, and complex social vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, there is no standardized system for licensing social service institutions or for licensing, certification, or registration of social workers. These structural gaps highlight critical challenges in regulating and professionalizing the sector. Low salaries and the absence of a competitive labor market (Karpenko & Schved, 2025; Semigina & Stoliaryk, 2022) further hinder the growth and recognition of the profession.

Legislation still allows the provision of social services by non-professionals. Several service standards and regulations, which primarily encompass competencies such as providing social support and psychosocial assistance, do not require formal social work education. Services can also be delivered informally, with family members providing care and receiving compensation, which raises concerns about quality and consistency.

Finally, in times of war, the challenges to professionalization are even more pronounced. Social workers face urgent demands for crisis response, requiring competencies and methods that the current workforce may not be fully equipped to provide. Approaches such as strengths-based development (Stolyaryk & Semigina, 2022) are proven to enhance individual and community resources, but the limited professionalization of the field reduces the capacity to implement such approaches effectively and to uphold core professional values (Baidarova & Mykhailovska, 2021) in practice.

DISCUSSION

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Professionalization is not merely a technical or institutional process; it embodies a **normative, societal, and ethical commitment**. A fully professionalized field of social work provides a foundation for competent practice, shared ethical standards, and collective professional identity, enabling practitioners to advocate effectively for marginalized populations while delivering services that respect human dignity and fundamental rights.

International scholarship demonstrates that strong professional identity, robust knowledge production, and institutional recognition enhance public trust in social services and contribute to social cohesion and community resilience,

particularly in contexts of crisis and uncertainty (Duan et al., 2021; Weiss-Gal & Welbourne, 2008; Wiles, 2024). From this perspective, professionalization functions not only as an instrument for improving service quality, but also as a mechanism for sustaining democratic values, accountability, and social solidarity.

The history of social work professionalization in Ukraine is complex, marked by both significant achievements and recurring crises, which have been described as an «interrupted flight» (Semigina, 2007). Obstacles in this process are often linked to inadequate legal regulation, insufficient resources, and uneven development of social services at the local level.

Ukraine's experience exemplifies both the opportunities and challenges inherent in the path toward social work professionalization. It underscores that professionalization is not a linear process but an evolving one, shaped by social, political, and historical contexts. The absence of a unified national association, gaps in ethical regulation, and the lack of licensing systems reveal that the professionalization process remains incomplete. These challenges hinder the full development of social work as a recognized profession and limit its broader societal impact. Most importantly, Ukraine's experience highlights that professionalization is not merely a policy goal—it is essential for ensuring the well-being, as well as and rights of individuals and communities in a changing world.

Moreover, the gaps between legal mandates, classification, occupational standards, and the actual workforce highlight the need for a well-prepared, competent social work workforce capable of meeting both current and emerging social needs. Addressing these gaps requires not only systemic monitoring and competency frameworks but also the development of professional education that equips social workers with the knowledge, skills, and ethical grounding needed for practice in complex war-affected contexts.

Addressing the current “halfway” status of social work professionalization in Ukraine requires a combination of systemic reforms and strategic initiatives, informed by both international examples (Huseynli, 2022; Lai Wing Hoi & Chan Kam Tong, 2009; Ullrich et al., 2022; Veta & McLaughlin, 2022) and lessons from Ukrainian practice:

1. ***Establish a Unified Ethical Code and Regulatory Authority.*** Drawing on successful international models, Ukraine should create a universally accepted ethical code for social work and establish a national regulatory body with the authority to monitor and enforce professional standards. This would provide a foundation for consistent practice, ethical decision-making, and accountability across the profession.
2. ***Implement a National Licensing and Certification System.*** A standardized licensing system for social

service institutions and social workers would ensure that only qualified professionals deliver services. Such a system would enhance public trust and improve the overall quality of social work practice.

3. *Promote Knowledge Production and Integration.* Ukraine should strengthen the development of a specialized, practice-informed body of social work knowledge by supporting research initiatives, facilitating collaboration between academia and practitioners, and systematically integrating evidence into education and policy. This would help close the gap between theory and practice, ensure contextually relevant interventions, and consolidate professional expertise.
4. *Develop Comprehensive Continuing Education and Supervision.* International experience highlights the importance of lifelong professional development. Ukraine should introduce structured frameworks for ongoing education and supervision, allowing social workers to specialize and remain informed about evolving issues, including trauma care, mental health, and crisis intervention.
5. *Strengthen Intersectoral Collaboration.* Social work thrives when integrated into broader systems, particularly with healthcare, education, and law enforcement. Ukraine can build stronger

interdisciplinary partnerships to address complex social problems more effectively, fostering a cohesive and holistic approach to service delivery.

6. *Improve Working Conditions and Professional Recognition.* Drawing on international best practices, Ukraine should focus on increasing salaries, improving working conditions, and fostering greater societal recognition of social work. Creating competitive labor market opportunities will help retain professionals and enhance the impact of social work services on vulnerable populations.

The **Figure 1.3** synthesizes the key structural and institutional challenges shaping the incomplete professionalization of social work in Ukraine, as discussed in this chapter. It visually highlights the interconnections between regulatory gaps, fragmented standards, and external pressures—particularly war—while pointing to priority directions for systemic reform.

Taken together, the suggested steps provide a roadmap for advancing professionalization in Ukraine. They highlight the need for coordinated policy, education, and practice reforms to transform social work from a partially institutionalized occupation into a fully recognized, ethically grounded, and resilient profession capable of responding to both everyday and crisis-driven social challenges.



Figure 1.3. Key Challenges and Reform Pathways in the Professionalization of Social Work in Ukraine

CONCLUSIONS

The professionalization of social work in Ukraine reflects a complex and evolving process, shaped by historical legacies, social transformations, and the extraordinary challenges of ongoing conflict. Over the past three decades, significant progress has been made through the establishment of formal academic programs, occupational standards, and the Social Services Classifier, creating a foundation for a trained and ethically grounded workforce. At the same time, the profession remains “halfway” to full institutionalization, hindered by gaps in legal and ethical regulation, inconsistent implementation of standards, low salaries, limited professional recognition, and insufficient integration with other sectors. The wartime context has intensified these challenges, exposing systemic weaknesses while underscoring the urgent need for a resilient and adaptable social work profession.

Drawing on both Ukrainian experiences and international best practices, advancing professionalization requires a multifaceted approach: establishing a unified ethical code and regulatory authority, implementing standardized licensing and certification systems, strengthening continuing education and supervision, promoting intersectoral collaboration, and improving working conditions and professional recognition. These measures can help build a cohesive, competent, and credible workforce capable of responding effectively to both everyday social needs and crises. Ultimately, Ukraine’s

experience highlights that professionalization is not merely a technical or policy goal—it is essential for safeguarding the well-being, dignity, and rights of individuals and communities, offering lessons relevant for other transitional and post-socialist contexts seeking to strengthen social work practice.

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offers a comprehensive and reflexive exploration of how social work theory, practice, and education are being reshaped under conditions of prolonged war.

KEY THEMES

- **Social work professionalization under conditions of war**
- **Post-socialist welfare transformation and Europeanisation processes**
- **Targeted social support responses for internally displaced persons and war veterans**
- **Gendered dimensions of crisis, care, and resilience**
- **Community-based and feminist approaches to social work practice**
- **Ethics, advocacy, and practitioner well-being in prolonged emergencies**

