

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2022:08

Regulated education programmes for child welfare officers, social workers and social educators

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Trends and challenges in light of a literature review

This report summarises and discusses the findings made by current research and official reports when it comes to the challenges faced by the three education and training programmes for the professions of child welfare officers, social workers and social educators respectively.

These three professions play key roles in the welfare state, and their professional practices help define the quality of the services where they work. Current and expected changes in working life and the welfare services render their competence highly relevant. The number of man-years in the health and care services is increasing rapidly, while both the tasks and the service users require more wide-ranging and complex competencies on the part of these employees. The demand for social educators with training both in health care and social welfare can be expected to increase. The social welfare competence of these three professions is also important for the welfare state to promote equality, for example by preventing social exclusion and including as many as possible in education and employment. Increasing social inequality will continue to be a challenge for the living conditions of children and adolescents, and competencies related to child and social welfare will consequently be needed in the services aimed at children and their families.

The literature reviewed in this report shows that the education and training programmes for child welfare officers, social workers and social educators are facing challenges in terms of their relevance for working life, the position of these professions in relation to other occupations, and the attractiveness of the programmes. These aspects are likely to be interrelated, but nevertheless need to be addressed using different types of measures. Briefly stated, questions have been raised regarding how well these education and training programmes prepare students for the rigours of working life, especially when it comes to providing interdisciplinary and coherent help to users and patients with complex needs. This applies especially to child welfare services. Moreover, there is no clear answer to the question of what role social welfare competence is to play in the welfare services of the future. Broad studies of the health and care services call for wider use of social welfare competence, but recruitment studies show that employers prefer to hire social educators because of the latter's healthcare competence and authorisation as health workers. However, social educators face challenges in asserting their position in interdisciplinary collaboration, where their social wel-

fare competence enjoys less recognition than that of pure healthcare professions. All three education and training programmes have difficulty in attracting male applicants, most likely due to the wage level and working conditions of these professions. Furthermore, the professions also face challenges when it comes to reflecting the diversity of the population among their graduates.

Addressing the future challenges for the welfare state will require redistribution, institutional change and competence. The organisations that represent child welfare officers, social workers and social educators have an important task in highlighting how these professions and their competencies can help meet these challenges. Based on our literature review we would argue in favour of a stronger emphasis on the different ways in which these three professions can help lift people out of exclusion. To succeed in this, the challenges faced by social welfare service users need to be understood as social, rather than as individual problems to be interpreted based on a single (frequently psychological) diagnosis. This will help increase the relevance of these professions' competencies in understanding the people they work with in a social context.