

Extended summary report
**Evolving jobs, skills and
training needs in the
social services sector**
FORTE Project
April 2024



FORTE

Social dialogue for skills, training and
working conditions in social services



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1 Evolving jobs, skills and training needs in the social services sector

The European Commission designated May 2023 to April 2024 as the [European Year of Skills](#), putting skills and training at the heart of the EU policy agenda. The FORTE project, led by [EPSU](#) and the [Social Employers](#), European social partners in the social services sector, and supported by Nexem¹, contributes to this crucial debate by assessing the skills and training needs in social services, linked to evolving needs of service users and new models of care.

This paper is a summary of FORTE project findings, consisting of figures and information from the European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research, outcomes of a project seminar dedicated to the topic and the 2023 CEDEFOP policy brief “Handling change with care – Skills for the EU care sector”.

In recent years, the social care sector has seen a **shift from residential towards more home and community-based care**. This was largely stimulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognises the right of persons with disabilities to live in the community and access a wide range of support services, along with improved access to mainstream health and social services. The Covid 19 pandemic has further accelerated this trend, as residential settings were particularly affected. This paradigm shift calls for new types of services and new approaches in the provision of social care, namely, to ensure person-centredness in service delivery, promote autonomy, and empower persons with disabilities for independent living, among others. This new approach has also influenced social services provided to other vulnerable groups, including services for older people with support needs, or children without adequate parental care.

Another major shift in the social services sector is the **increasing role of technology and digital solutions** in service delivery and their impact on the work and workload in these new models of care. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about additional changes in the organisation of work in the social services sector, for example by further accelerating the use and reliance on digital technologies such as tablets, smartphones, robotics, and online software, to manage and share users’ data and improve communication.

As care models and user needs evolve, so must the skills and training of the workforce. However, there is a lack of knowledge about the specific skills and training needed for staff to provide more person-centred, community-based social services, and many workers are not trained to incorporate digital solutions in their work so as to increase efficiency. In this regard, a 2023 Eurofound report shows that about a fifth of social care workers never use digital devices at work².

Furthermore, across Europe, staff shortages are a pressing issue in the social care sector, with low wages and often poor working conditions making it hard to recruit and retain the necessary workforce. Skills and training can contribute to improving the attractiveness of the sector when linked to professional development and new job profiles.

2 Findings from the FORTE report on evolving jobs, skills and training needs

On 9 May 2023, the official launch of the European Year of Skills, the FORTE project consortium published its report *Evolving jobs, skills and training needs in the social services sector and the role of social partners in managing changes*. The report, produced by the [European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research](#), examines the skills and training needs of care workers in the changing landscape of social services provision. It also pays special attention to the role of social partners and collective bargaining in managing changing job profiles, skills, and training needs, and ensuring better working conditions.

The report takes a multi-stakeholder perspective by gathering data from representatives of service providers (employers) and staff in social services (workers) from eight EU Member States. The data were collected through interviews with organisations representing employers and national trade unions in the sector. To a limited extent, the perspective of service users is also covered through input from European organisations representing persons with disabilities, children, and older people.

The shift towards new social care models varies among the surveyed countries. However, the report reveals a **clear trend towards more home-based and community-based services**. In light of the new models of care and increasing digitalisation, the report highlights the need for the social services workforce to receive training for a range of skills, including project management skills, communication skills, **digital literacy, intercultural skills, interprofessional collaboration skills and group-specific skills**.

According to the findings, home care especially gives rise to new risks for care workers who often provide this type of care alone. In that regard, workers need training on how to deal with adverse social behaviour in addition to human rights-based approaches, detailed knowledge of service users' behaviours and mental health support needs.

In terms of digitalisation, the report highlights various opportunities, such as improving communication and decreasing administrative burden. Skill disparities, reduced face-to-face contact, and potentially increased workload are identified as some of the challenges. There is a need for training on the use of new equipment, digital documentation and software but also of tablets and smartphones and sometimes, robotics. The implementation of technological tools should be approached carefully with a change management approach, with training and consideration for the needs and rights of all people involved.

Overall, the report highlights the need to prioritise the continuous professional development of care workers through **ongoing education and training**, and to implement technology in ways that enhance services. **The findings confirm the importance of social dialogue in assessing the training and skill requirements of care workers and developing technical solutions**. By doing this, social services can provide high-quality services to users while also supporting the professional development and wellbeing of care workers.

3 Key takeaways from the FORTE webinar

The main findings of the report were presented during a [webinar on 25 April 2023](#), which brought together representatives from DG Employment, Cedefop, as well as employers' and employees' representatives, to discuss skills expectations, perspectives and solutions for the social services sector.

A European Commission representative presented the European perspective on skills, outlining key elements of the EU Care Strategy workforce aspects and expectations for the European Year of Skills 2023. Employers' and employees' representatives

from [ActiZ](#) (NL), [Agenzija Sapport](#) (MT) and [CFDT](#) (FR) presented their good practices at national level, highlighting among others, the need for stronger ties between formal and informal care, close collaboration with educational institutions and investment in training to boost the attractiveness of the sector.

Finally, a [Cedefop](#) representative provided some data from the 2023 Skills Forecast on the employment trends and the skills needs in long-term care sector. Insights from Cedefop policy brief "Handling change with care – skills for the EU care sector."

4 Insights from Cedefop policy brief "Handling change with care – skills for the EU care sector"

Cedefop's analysis of online job advertisements in the care sector reveals a significant growth of available job opportunities, paired with scarcity of workers available. The most represented occupations in the advertisements are personal care workers, social workers and social care assistants. Cedefop also underlines the rise of job advertisements regarding ICT staff and managerial, administration and clerical posts.

Cedefop forecasts that in 2035, almost one in four care workers will have a tertiary education, due to an ongoing upgrading of skills requirements and the replacement of older care workers by more skilled younger ones. Personal care workers and nurses require a wide

spectrum of technical skills, ranging from the ability to provide everyday support to using advanced health monitoring technology. Soft skills, such as communication and decision-making, complement these. **Adaptability** is the skill most sought by employers in the care sector, followed by **ability to work in a team and language and communication skills**. Professional carers are also required to be able to provide emotional support or personal care, advice or counselling and use digital devices.

Supporting documents

- European Center [Report "Evolving jobs, skills and training needs in the social services sector and the role of social partners in managing changes"](#), April 2023
- [FORTE webinar presentations](#), April 2023
- [CEDEFOP policy brief "handling change with care – Skills for the EU care sector"](#), September 2023
- [European Commission, European Year of Skills article on FORTE project](#)

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