

Promoting diversified  
career paths

Social Work  
Studies

**SASSA**

Swiss Specialised Conference on Social Work  
of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences



**Peter Gomm, Chairperson, Conference of Cantonal Social Welfare Directors, Member of the Government Council of the Canton of Solothurn**

*«Social work professionals contribute to the positive evolution of our social security system»*

*The Swiss social security system is well established and has proven successful. The social federal insurance benefits are broadly supported across the political spectrum and social welfare at the cantonal level is now better understood and accepted. Benefits for low-income families, the long-term unemployed and persons who have no prospects of re-entering the job market could certainly still be improved.*

*A political project necessitates a firm foundation to progress. Social work professionals build this foundation and political instances must be able to rely on their contribution. An education at the Bachelor's and Master's degree level in Social Work provides both broad and specialised knowledge of the impacts and the opportunities for designing and assessing social benefits and services. Persons who have availed themselves of this education contribute to the positive evolution of our social security system, often on a small scale but also in a broader, more global manner.*

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# Universities of Applied Sciences in Switzerland

Open  
Connected  
Recognised

## *Opportunities for further education and qualifications*

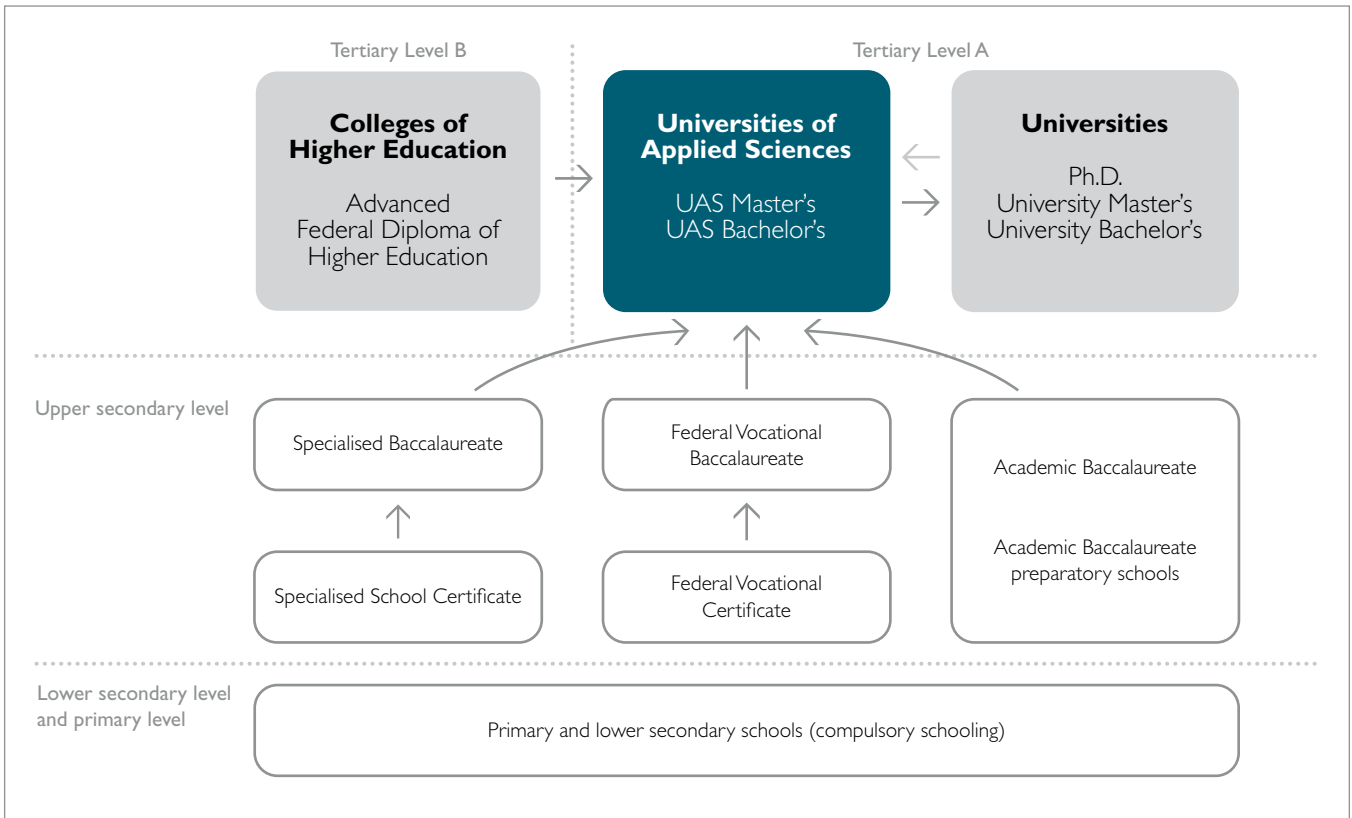
*Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) offer to holders of a vocational qualification, as well as to candidates who can demonstrate an equivalent educational level, a broad range of curricula leading to qualifications that provide pathways to multiple specialisations as well as to advanced studies. The degrees conferred are recognised in Switzerland and abroad as university-level qualifications.*

### Universities of Applied Sciences and the Bologna process

The introduction of Universities of Applied Sciences in the 1990s has had a profound effect on the Swiss educational landscape. The goal was to set up an internationally competitive higher education system. To this end, higher professional education was integrated into the system set up by the Bologna process, and new professional qualifications were adopted that corresponded to those of other European countries. Simultaneously, a new type of baccalaureate was introduced, the «vocational baccalaureate», in order to enable persons who had gone through vocational training in the apprenticeship system to have access to higher education. Exchange programmes such as Erasmus became a further expression of the connections of the Swiss system with European higher education.

### The mandates of Universities of Applied Sciences

Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) offer a wide range of programmes at Bachelor's and Master's levels. They also propose continuing education courses leading to CAS (Certificate of Advanced Studies), DAS (Diploma of Advanced Studies) or MAS (Masters of Advanced Studies). Both core programmes and continuing education courses dispense knowledge and skills that are directly pertinent for each chosen professional field. Research and development, as well as field support and interventions, are the other legal mandates given to UAS. Universities of Applied Sciences thus generate new knowledge, stimulate innovation and design made-to-measure solutions with their field partners. The combination of these different activities guarantees the integration of theoretical as well as practical dimensions within the educational programme.



Simplified chart of pathways to admission to Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) within the global organisation of Swiss vocational and higher education

### An open educational system

Social work is taught at all levels of professional training as well as within institutions of higher education. In line with the principles of lifelong learning, bridges between types of training and educational levels are not only available, but actively promoted. This permeability stimulates the mobility of students as well as of personnel in the field. For instance, persons who have obtained a federal vocational certificate as social care assistants may pursue and obtain

a vocational diploma. This complementary qualification will then enable them to access social work education at UAS level, just as an academic or specialised baccalaureate would have. There, they can enter a Bachelor's degree programme; candidates may then move on to a Master's programme and then to the highest level of education, in university, leading to a PhD in Social Work.



Andrea Lübberstedt, M.A., director of the Department of Social Affairs, canton of St. Gallen

«When one works with and for people, one has to know how and why one does something»

*New types of jobs within the field of social work seem to pop up every day, whilst politicians sometimes seem to think that a bit of 'good sense' should do the trick. As though an education had a negative impact on 'good sense'; as though, instead of sharpening their 'good sense' and leading to the development of an appropriate professional stance, education was harmful! Yet it is precisely the opposite! When one works with and for people, one has to know how and why one does something. Nobody becomes a competent guardian from one day to the next. It is not enough for the social care worker to have her heart in the right place. And in order to run and develop a social consultation service, one needs more than good will and liking to work with people. Social work professionals must have a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills at their disposal, acquired during their education in a University of Applied Sciences. Social work is timeless and yet rapidly changing – just like people, human relations and society are changing too.*

# Studying Social Work

Professionalising  
Close to the field  
Scientifically based

## **Two consecutive study cycles at Bachelor's and Master's level**

*The Social Work degree programme is structured to provide a diversified curriculum including field experience, in a context of very fast-growing research and development. It is comprised of two consecutive study cycles, leading to Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Graduates are prepared to intervene in all professional areas of social work.*

### Complex tasks in a rapidly changing society

Holders of Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Social Work have trained for their profession in a context of rapid changes in the social, political and economic realms. They provide support to a broad range of persons in managing problematic social situations and participate in promoting arrangements conducive to societal cohesion. Their capacities for reflexive action as well as for innovation enable them to make a fundamental contribution to social integration, justice, solidarity and social stability.

### A scientifically-based, practice-oriented education

Social work education combines theoretical knowledge and practical competencies. It is based on a body of knowledge that the Universities of Applied Sciences continuously enrich through their own research and development activities. Teaching is thus based on the most up-to-date knowledge as well as being consistent with current field practices.

### A generalist, interdisciplinary programme with a two-cycle structure

Social work education, generalist in nature, prepares graduates to employment in all fields of professional intervention such as support for individuals, families or groups experiencing difficult life situations, community development, social projects and evaluations of social interventions. Interdisciplinary in nature, social work education provides future professionals with the tools needed for fruitful collaboration between various areas of social work as well as within contexts of inter-professional social intervention.

The Bachelor's degree curriculum is aimed at providing the fundamental knowledge and competencies necessary for direct professional intervention with individuals, groups and communities.

The consecutive Master's degree cycle offers opportunities for further, in-depth examination of competencies acquired at Bachelor's level and trains professionals who are able to contribute to policy and social intervention development.

A wide range of specialised continuing higher education programmes (CAS, DAS, MAS) complements the generalist study cycles offered at Bachelor's and Master's level.

### Mobility and networking at international level

Thanks to an extensive network of partner institutions of higher education in Switzerland and abroad, social work students have access to a very broad knowledge base. Data and scientific research results from a wide range of sources inform the content of the courses and seminars. Numerous cooperation agreements and exchange programmes promote student and teacher mobility, which is made easier by the modular structure of the curriculum. Bachelor's and Master's degree qualifications are internationally recognised; graduates are thus able to envisage professional careers abroad.

### Highly-trained faculty and staff

Faculty members include academics as well as social work practitioners. Most members of the teaching staff benefit from a dual background, holding a degree from an institution of higher education as well as having several years of experience in the social work field. Many of them take part in research and innovation projects financed by national and international organisms, and provide professional support services to outside organisations in the field of social work. These broad areas of involvement guarantee the continuous updating and development of the contents of the educational programme.

### Requirements for admission

In order to be admitted to the Bachelor's degree course, candidates must, in principle, hold a professional, specialised or academic baccalaureate. Practical experience in a social work field of intervention is also required. In some cases, admission on the basis of an individual dossier is possible.

For admission to the Master's degree course, a Bachelor's degree in Social Work is normally required. Holders of a Bachelor's degree may follow on directly with a Master's degree course, or seek admission to it after a few years of work experience. Holders of other degrees may be admitted on the basis of an entrance examination or of a portfolio. In such cases, practical experience in social work as well as extra course credits may be required.

Previously acquired educational or work experience may be recognised and validated in either study cycle under certain conditions.

In order to facilitate the balance between education, family life and employment, social work education may be followed full-time or part-time, as well as on-the-job training.



Joël Goldstein, director,  
Pro Senectute, Geneva

«Social work professionals are the watch-dogs of social cohesion»

*We are looking for professionals involved in the intergenerational dialogue, who have a broad knowledge of social welfare, who understand the needs of an ageing population and who want to defend its interests. We primarily hire social workers who hold a qualification in social work from a University of Applied Sciences. They need to work closely with other types of professionals.*

*The education provided by the Social Work degree programmes of Universities of Applied Sciences is excellent. The high quality as well as the demanding nature of these courses of study ensure that future social workers have at their disposal the tools and the methodology necessary for project-focused intervention with the most disadvantaged populations.*

*Social work professionals are the watch-dogs of social cohesion and the guardians of solidarity between generations. Their struggle against injustice is never-ending; their task is to propose concrete projects, focused on promoting dynamics of change, within a framework characterised by the respect of democratic processes.*

# The Bachelor's degree in Social Work

Focused on practice  
Versatile  
Interdisciplinary

## **Expertise in all fields of social work**

*Graduates with a Bachelor's degree in Social Work are able to practice in all professional fields of social work – social service, social care and socio-cultural animation/community work. The study course offers a strong generalist training, with focuses on special topics that differ among the Universities of Applied Sciences and depend on students' particular interests and choices.*

### **A wide range of fields of intervention and varied tasks**

The Bachelor's degree course prepares students to professional employment in all fields of social intervention: addiction, refugee assistance, welfare services, prison and probation services, youth and family counselling, community development, after-school programmes, residential care for persons with special needs, professional integration, or social work in schools or in the community. Holders of a Bachelor's degree may work with children, youths, families, adults and the elderly from all walks of life and in all types of life situations.

Holders of a Bachelor's degree work with persons, families and groups using specifically focused interventions. They support clients, help them to manage their financial difficulties, to look for a job or a place to live and to form new social relationships. Moreover, they set up activities that promote integration, strengthen social cohesion and improve quality of life; they also make a contribution to raising public awareness of the situations experienced by disadvantaged populations.



## A broad spectrum of contents

The Bachelor's degree curriculum enables students to acquire the core theoretical and practical bases of social work. The methods and tools of social work are taught; in particular, communication and interviewing techniques, intervention methodology with individuals, groups and communities, administrative and case-file keeping techniques, as well as project management. Students become familiarised with the organisation and the institutions charged with social protection. They acquire knowledge of social problems and the policy responses that pertain to them, including the various branches of social security. Moreover, they gain competencies in the field of communication and develop an appropriate professional stance.

The contribution of all disciplines of reference is central to social work education. They include in particular law, economics, ethics, pedagogy and education, psychology, philosophy, political science and sociology.

The curriculum's structure is modular. It is comprised of basic and complementary compulsory modules, the latter enabling students to select courses fitting their desired profile. Students can later choose among in-depth thematic classes and specialisations. Each module is validated by an examination.

## Theory/practice integration

The Bachelor's degree in Social Work is a professional qualification that provides graduates with a direct access to employment in the field. The curriculum combines education in an institution of higher education and training in the fields of practice. The sandwich-course structure enables students to integrate theoretical knowledge and practical competencies, and promotes a reflexive attitude. Field practice corresponds to approximately a third of the duration of the course. It takes place in recognised social work organisations, under the guidance of experienced specialists and tutors from the University of Applied Sciences.

## Diversified educational modalities

Teaching and training methods are diversified and meet all current standards set for modern institutions of higher education. Knowledge and competencies are acquired in a variety of ways and in a broad range of settings; classes alternate with personal studies, seminars, individual coaching, group projects and supervision. Case analysis and participation in actual projects stimulate active learning and reflexivity. Working together in small groups prepares students for collaboration within a team and is crucial for the development of social competencies. Great emphasis is also placed upon individual work (reading, essays, preparation for exams, etc.), as individual study is seen as a format that promotes the students' ability to integrate new knowledge in an autonomous manner.

## The main points in brief

- **Degree:** Bachelor of Science/ of Arts in Social Work\*. 180 ECTS credits.
- **Course organisation:** full-time, on-the-job, or part-time.
- **Duration of studies:** 6 to 12 semesters.
- **Recognition of prior higher education and equivalencies:** prior educational and/or professional work experience may be taken into account.
- **Formal admission requirements:** Baccalaureate (vocational, specialised or academic), or admission on the basis of an individual dossier.
- **Costs:** fees per semester, and other expenses.
- **Field practice:** approximately one third of course time.
- **Access to further qualifications:** consecutive Master's degree in Social Work, further education certificates and diplomas (CAS, DAS et MAS), university-based Master's degrees (some specific requirements may apply).

\* for detailed information on the different Schools of Social Work, see pages 14–15



Annamaria Bronner,  
Foundation Madonna di Re, Bellinzona

«Social care workers provide care and support with the objective of promoting integration»

Our Foundation offers disabled persons residential and social care, work and occupational opportunities. UAS-trained social care workers provide care and support with the goal of promoting integration. They have learnt to design projects, to manage crisis situations and to deal with conflicts within multidisciplinary networks. UAS graduates know how to be empathetic in painful situations, as well as how to base their intervention on resilience, while offering a high quality social environment. They are aware of their own limits, as well as of those of others. Their work requires highly specific theoretical and practical knowledge. An ethical approach is indispensable, as well as the ability to encourage others and to make situations less daunting for them. These competencies are acquired and practiced during the Bachelor's degree in Social Work. The Master's programme then offers an opportunity for deepening one's knowledge and becoming specialised.

# The Master's degree in Social Work

In-depth  
Focused on research  
Conceptual



**André Woodtli, Head of Office of Youth and Careers Guidance, Department of Education of the Canton of Zurich**

«The complex nature of social issues calls for transdisciplinary solutions»

*The complex nature of social issues – of life, in fact – calls for transdisciplinary solutions. This is why, in the child welfare and youth services of the canton of Zurich, different professions work closely together. Psychologists and professionals from the health field and from social work support each other in the field. These specialists must not only be highly motivated and show the necessary professional knowledge and competence, but also be willing to involve themselves in interactive cooperation with professionals from other disciplines. In this way, both basic professional and further education serve not only to learn one's trade but also to provide a framework for constantly questioning one's practice, for exchanging with others and for remaining open to different approaches.*

# Fostering innovation through research results

Master's degree studies in Social Work enable students to deepen their previously acquired theoretical and methodological knowledge. The course offers opportunities to develop analytical competencies and fosters innovation and research. Holders of a Master's degree in Social Work are capable of evaluating and developing programmes and organisations. The Master's degree provides professional perspectives in the areas of project management and team leadership.

## Increasing demands

Societies are becoming increasingly complex; this growing complexity results in heightened expectations in terms of the competencies and qualifications required of social work professionals. New forms of inequality and new types of social problems may be mentioned here. Simultaneously, changes in the ways in which socio-political issues and public budgets are handled have a direct impact on social work interventions. Managing these changes, as well as their impacts in structural, organisational, technical and methodological terms, requires professionals with a sound theoretical background and good experience of the fields of practice of social work. These individuals can, and must contribute to the development of social work. Within this context, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration become increasingly important.

## Conception, evaluation and innovation

The main objective of the Master's curriculum is to promote the capacity of students to mobilise theoretical and empirical knowledge to deal with social issues and concrete problems. Holders of a Master's degree are able to elaborate new solutions for the field through practice-oriented research projects such as needs assessments and evaluations. The Master's programme gives them instruments to design and implement innovative approaches appropriate for specific situations and needs, taking into account the prevailing social, economic, political and legal conditions. The Master's curriculum highlights the development of new concepts and means of intervention as well as their implementation. To this end, a knowledge of a variety of social research methods is crucial.

## Individualised, in-depth courses

Compulsory core modules are complemented by in-depth, specific courses on social problems, social policy, innovation in social work, social intervention organisation, professional development and research and evaluation methods. Considerable emphasis is placed on case studies, on seminar and on individual work. These educational formats require students to assimilate and use new knowledge in an autonomous manner. The study of methods and of research results is the common thread running through the curriculum, the main challenge being to gain an understanding of how to

integrate research results into practice development in the most effective manner possible.

## An extensive network of expertise

The Master's programme benefits from existing collaborations between different UAS; this enables it to rely on their respective specialty fields in order to develop teaching contents based on the most up-to-date concepts and data available in Switzerland and abroad. During the course of their studies, students are able to establish a broad-based network of professional contacts.

## Admission to doctoral studies

A Master's degree in Social Work gives access to doctoral studies. This third cycle is offered by UAS Faculties of Social Work in collaboration with universities in Switzerland and abroad. Admission is, in general, subject to various specific conditions.

## The main points in brief

- **Degree:** Master of Science/of Arts in Social Work. 90 ECTS credits.\*
- **Course organisation:** full-time or part-time.
- **Duration of studies:** 3 to 6 semesters.
- **Formal admission requirements:** Bachelor's degree.
- **Costs:** fees per semester, and other expenses.
- **Access to further qualifications:** further education certificates and diplomas (CAS, DAS et MAS); Ph.D., some specific requirements may apply.

\* for detailed information on the different Schools of Social Work, see pages 14–15.

# Career perspectives

Diversified  
Dynamic  
Demanding



Anne-Solange Nzuengue, social worker,  
Social Centre for the Integration of  
Refugees (CSIR), Lausanne

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*«I started working as an administrative assistant. Today, I contribute to the integration of refugees»*

*I first started working at CSIR as an administrative assistant. The kind of human contacts I observed between social workers and beneficiaries made me want to go into social work. Today, I dispense financial assistance and provide professional social support to persons who have obtained either refugee or temporary admission status, in order to promote their integration.*

*I have just completed my social work education in the on-the job course at the University of Applied Sciences. It required a high level of organisation and a significant personal involvement. The training enabled me to develop a reflexive posture, on the basis of a sound theoretical background. Social work education provides us with means to express ourselves in professional terms. I particularly appreciated the contribution of my supervisor. She made it possible for me to look beyond individual cases and to envisage issues from a collective standpoint. The training greatly helped me to progress and to learn to help people starting from wherever they may stand, without pretending to be able to change everything.*

# A wide range of specialisation and career opportunities

UAS graduates in social work are employed in a very wide range of organisations, domains and types of positions, mainly in the fields of social intervention, education and health care. Other professionals can rely on these specialists, who have at their disposal a range of knowledge and practical experiences that are well-grounded, diversified, and adapted to the requirements of a rapidly changing society. A broad range of further education opportunities enables them to become specialised and fosters exchanges and networking with other professionals.

## Increasingly demanding tasks

Social Work degrees from Universities of Applied Sciences are a gateway to dynamic careers. Holders of Bachelor's degrees work directly with individuals, families, groups and communities. With further qualifications, they are able to run projects, conduct evaluations, supervise field placements and offer individual or group supervision.

The Master's degree course provides new knowledge and skills. Holders of a Master's degree can take on extra responsibilities within projects and conduct complex tasks that require broad as well as highly specific knowledge. Beyond strong professional expertise, they have acquired analytical and conceptual competencies that enable them to cope with complex issues and to carry out management responsibilities.

## Professional mobility

Opportunities for social work professionals exist in a number of fields: financial assistance, child and adult protection authorities, social consultation centres in towns, hospitals or businesses, occupation and integration programmes,

residential care units for children, youth and adults with special needs, community social work, juvenile courts, youth and leisure centres, community centres, centres for asylum seekers or migrants, etc.

Thanks to the horizontal permeability between domains of practice, knowledge and know-how acquired in one field of intervention are transferable to other areas and other positions. Further education programmes provide opportunities for acquiring qualifications and skills specific to particular tasks.

Demands placed by society on social work evolve, change and become more wide-ranging over time. As a result, unemployment rarely affects the professions of the field of social work.

## Academic careers

Teaching, further education, research and mandates for interventions in the field offer many professional perspectives within the context of higher education. Some students in the Master's degree programme are hired as research assistants. Holders of a Master's degree or a Ph.D. may find employment in teaching or research, as professors or as research collaborators.



Rahel Wuest,  
professional guardian, Lucerne

«When I was 16, the profession of social worker did not mean anything to me»

At 16, the idea of training in the social field first crossed my mind. I was in South Africa as an exchange student and I found myself confronted by numerous social problems. The profession of social worker did not mean anything to me. After my baccalaureate, when I decided to go in for a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, I felt a bit sorry that it was a UAS rather than a university programme. Looking back, however, I see that the UAS training was perfect for me. I really enjoyed working in small groups on different themes and being able to ask questions and bring in my opinions in debates. The consecutive Master's studies then enabled me to deepen my knowledge, especially in the area of professional ethics. While I was studying for my Master's, I worked as a tutor, then as an evaluator in a residential care setting for youths. For almost two years now, I have worked as a professional guardian in an adult protection service. As a member of the ethics committee of AvenirSocial, I continue to be actively involved in ethical issues; this adds a dimension to my daily work that I greatly appreciate.

# Schools of Social Work



**Berner Fachhochschule**  
**Fachbereich Soziale Arbeit**  
[www.soziale-arbeit.bfh.ch](http://www.soziale-arbeit.bfh.ch)



**Bachelor of Science BFH in Sozialer Arbeit**  
**Master of Science BFH in Sozialer Arbeit**  
 Cooperation between the Bern, Lucerne, St-Gall and Zurich UAS in Social Work



**FHS St.Gallen**  
**Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften**  
**Fachbereich Soziale Arbeit**  
[www.fhsg.ch](http://www.fhsg.ch)



**Bachelor of Science FHO in Sozialer Arbeit**  
**Master of Science FHO in Sozialer Arbeit**  
 Cooperation between the Bern, Lucerne, St-Gall and Zurich UAS in Social Work

**Haute Ecole Spécialisée de Suisse occidentale**  
**Domaine Travail Social**  
[www.hes-so.ch/travail-social](http://www.hes-so.ch/travail-social)

**Hes·so**

Haute Ecole Spécialisée  
 de Suisse occidentale  
 Fachhochschule Westschweiz  
 University of Applied Sciences and Arts  
 Western Switzerland



HETS-GE, Genf



HETS-EESP, Lausanne



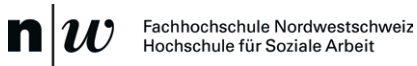
HETS-FR, Freiburg



HETS-VS, Siders

**Bachelor of Arts HES-SO en Travail social (HETS-GE, Genf/HETS-EESP, Lausanne/HETS-FR, Freiburg/HETS-VS, Siders)**  
**Bachelor of Arts HES-SO in Sozialer Arbeit (HETS-VS, Siders)**

**Master of Arts HES-SO en Travail social**  
 Cooperation between the University of Applied Sciences, Western Switzerland (HES-SO) and the SUPSI (Ticino UAS)



**Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz FHNW**  
**Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit**  
[www.fhnw.ch/sozialarbeit](http://www.fhnw.ch/sozialarbeit)



Olten site



Muttenz site

**Bachelor of Arts FHNW in Sozialer Arbeit**  
**Master of Arts FHNW in Sozialer Arbeit**  
Cooperation with the Protestant University of Applied Sciences, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Basel University



**Fachhochschule Südschweiz**  
**SUPSI**  
**Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana SUPSI**  
**Dipartimento economia aziendale, sanità e sociale**  
[www.supsi.ch/deass](http://www.supsi.ch/deass)



Manno site

**Bachelor of Science SUPSI in Lavoro sociale**  
**Master of Arts HES-SO en Travail social**  
Cooperation between the University of Applied Sciences, Western Switzerland (HES-SO) and the SUPSI (Ticino UAS)

Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts



Soziale Arbeit  
FH Zentralschweiz

**Hochschule Luzern – Soziale Arbeit**  
[www.hslu.ch/sozialarbeit](http://www.hslu.ch/sozialarbeit)



**Bachelor of Science Hochschule Luzern/FHZ in Sozialer Arbeit**  
**Master of Science Hochschule Luzern/FHZ in Social Work**  
Cooperation between the Bern, Lucerne, St-Gall and Zurich UAS in Social Work



**Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften**  
**Departement Soziale Arbeit**  
[www.zhaw.ch/sozialarbeit](http://www.zhaw.ch/sozialarbeit)



**Bachelor of Science ZFH in Sozialer Arbeit**  
**Master of Science ZFH in Sozialer Arbeit**  
Cooperation between the Bern, Lucerne, St-Gall and Zurich UAS in Social Work



SASSA

#### **SASSA**

Fachkonferenz Soziale Arbeit der FH Schweiz  
Conférence spécialisée des hautes écoles suisses de travail social  
Conferenza svizzera delle scuole universitarie professionali di lavoro sociale  
Swiss Specialised Conference on Social Work of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences

SASSA supports the professionalisation of social work through its contribution to the development of social work education at Universities of Applied Sciences level, as well as to research in social work. In this way, it promotes social work within the Swiss educational field as well as with public authorities.

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