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# The Social Service Workforce as Related to Child Protection in Southeast Europe: A Regional Overview



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# The Social Service Workforce as Related to Child Protection in Southeast Europe: A Regional Overview

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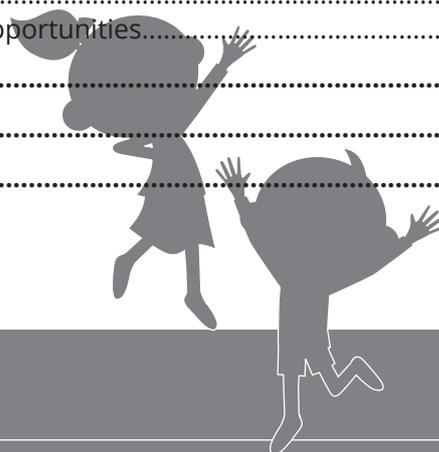
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# INTRODUCTION

The child protection system consists of: laws and policies that protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence; a central government mechanism for child protection which brings together central government departments, different provinces, central and local levels of government and civil society and mechanisms that bring perpetrators to justice. An effective child protection system requires a committed social service workforce with relevant competencies and mandates (Olofsson et al., 2010).

This report provides a summary and regional overview of the social service workforce—with a focus on those engaged in the child protection system—in southeast Europe today. Focusing on eight countries—Albania (Dhembo, 20015), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria (Mihaylov, 2015), Croatia (Rajter, 2015), Kosovo (Fazliu, 2015), Moldova (Rogers, 2015), Romania (Rădulescu, 2015), and Serbia (Zegarac, 2015)—phase 1 of the study consisted of a literature review of relevant documents (e.g., curriculum, research documents, policy documents, practice guidance) related to the education and training of the social service workforce, and those working in child protection in particular. The primary focus of Phase 2 of the study was country-level fieldwork to gather data on the social service workforce in southeast Europe.

This report represents part of a global research movement to map the social service workforce in diverse regions. Mapping within multiple countries helps to capture unique elements specific to certain countries, while also identifying common challenges and trends across regions. There have been previous efforts to better understand the social service workforce as one component of a larger child protection systems mapping (Goldman, Guggenheim, Landers, McCreery, & Tobis, 2010). More recent studies have focused more broadly on the social service workforce, such as one that examined the social service workforce in 14 countries in West and Central Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia) (Canavera, Akesson, & Landis, 2014). Another recent study reviewed the state of the social service workforce in 15 countries in three continents: Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia), Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam), and Europe (Georgia, Moldova) (Global Social Service Workforce, 2015). The following report is the first research that maps the social service workforce in the southeast Europe region, representing the first step among future efforts to strengthen the social service workforce.



# METHODOLOGY

## The Research Questions

The goal of this study was to provide an overview of the social service workforce—with a focus on those engaged in the child protection system—in southeast Europe. More specifically, this study aimed to:

- lay out the legislative and infrastructural framework for social service work in southeast Europe;
- consider the education, training, and professional development opportunities (or lack thereof) for social service workers in the region; and
- explore how these education and training opportunities are aligned or misaligned with the realities of social service practice.

## Study Scope and Target Audience

According to the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (Global Social Service Workforce, 2015, p. 5), the social service system consists of “interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure

the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families”. While acknowledging that there are a wide range of workers engaged in work within the social service system, this report uses the term “social service workers” to generally include a variety of workers—paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental—including social workers, social service workers, social work administrators, social assistants, child protection professionals,<sup>1</sup> child protection workers, front-line workers, paraprofessional social service workers,<sup>2</sup> and other types of workers who staff the social service system.

The research specifically aimed to explore the following questions outlined in Table 1.

1 Though the term child protection professionals may encompass many different types of professionals (e.g., psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, lawyers, etc.), for the purposes of this study, we specifically focused on social service workers.

2 Paraprofessional social service workers are those who do not fit into the strict and formalized educational criteria set out for professional social service workers (i.e., professional social workers). Paraprofessionals may include non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, community-based organization (CBO) workers, community health workers, or volunteers who have not received formal social service training through a regulatory body, but still greatly contribute to the social service workforce through child protection activities.

**Table 1: Research Areas of Inquiry**

<b>Social service worker panorama</b>	
Perceptions & understandings of social service work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the general public, civil society, and beneficiaries perceive of and understand the different types of social service workers?</li> </ul>
Who does what & where	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is responsible for different child protection tasks?</li> <li>What types of jobs and duties are these social service workers responsible for?</li> </ul>
Policy & regulatory frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the official job descriptions for the different social service workers?</li> <li>What are the legal mandates for the different social service workers?</li> <li>What is the licensing process for the different social service workers?</li> <li>What continuing education programs exist for the different social service workers?</li> <li>What standards and monitoring systems are in place—at the national and/or institutional levels—to ensure quality among the different social service workers?</li> </ul>
Child protection systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are child protection and social service systems organized?</li> <li>Where do child protection and social service systems receive their funding?</li> </ul>
<b>Education &amp; human resources management</b>	
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the requirements for one to become a social service worker?</li> <li>What trainings (formal and informal; initial and continuing) are available for the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What institutes (academic, NGO, CBO, etc.) are responsible for delivering training to social service workers?</li> <li>What is a typical career path for the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>How are the different types of social service workers promoted?</li> </ul>
Organizational environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What recruitment and retention policies exist within organizations employing the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What are the working conditions for the different types of social service workers?</li> </ul>
<b>Skills, knowledge, &amp; interests</b>	
Child protection related practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the formal and informal child protection practices of the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What are the skills, knowledge, and learning needs of the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What are the different levels of motivation of the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What kinds of support (e.g., material, social, etc.) are needed for the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>How do the different types of social service workers access knowledge and information?</li> <li>What kinds of opportunities do the different types of social service workers have to influence policy?</li> </ul>
Personal factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What kind of commitment do the different types of social service workers have to the profession?</li> <li>What are the personal characteristics and capacities of the different types of social service workers?</li> <li>What educational background do the different types of social service workers have?</li> </ul>
Organizational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What types of conditions do the different types of social service workers function in?</li> <li>What supervision do the different types of social service workers receive?</li> <li>What opportunities do the different types of social service workers have for professional development?</li> </ul>

We hope that the findings from this study will be used by multiple stakeholders including national governments, professional social service worker associations, NGOs and civil society agencies that rely on the social service workforce to provide child protection

services, and educational institutions who train social service workers. We hope that the findings will ultimately benefit the child protection system and the children, families, and communities who are in direct contact with that system.

## Phase 1: Literature Review

Phase 1 of the research consisted of a literature review of curriculum, research documents, policy documents, and practice guidance related to the social service workforce and/or child protection in each country. The lead researcher provided guidance to the national researchers regarding inclusion criteria and analysis. National researchers were asked to review the documents based on a variety of elements including main findings, recommendations and/or implications for child protection and/or social service workforce strengthening, and strengths and/or gaps of the document. National researchers wrote a preliminary report including analysis in the following four areas: curriculum, research, policy, and practice. The national researchers' analysis of these documents informed the development of the study frame and methodology for Phase 2 of the research.

## Phase 2: Fieldwork and Data Collection

In April 2015, the researchers participated in a two-day workshop to share their findings from the Phase 1 literature review, train in research methodologies that would be used for data collection, and develop a methodological action plan for the field work. National researchers were provided with and trained to use a toolkit for gathering data, which can be found in Appendix B. The toolkit included the following: (1) informed consent form, (2) semi-structured interview guide for academics, managers, and practitioners, (3) case story guide for practitioners, (4) focus group discussion guide for educators and practitioners, and (5) consensus-building exercise instructions. Between May-September 2015, national researchers collected data, conducted analysis, and developed a country-level report on the findings. Table 2 describes the research participants across countries, as well as the approximate numbers of social service workers and those engaged in child protection.

**Table 2: Research Participants and Numbers of Social Service Workers by Country**

Country	# of SSLs (semi-structured interviews)	# of GDs (group discussion)	Case Story	Total # of Research Participants	Approximate # of Social Service Workers in Country	Approximate # of Social Service Workers Engaged in Child Protection
Albania	11	7 (n=47)	4	58	N/A	N/A
Bosnia & Herzegovina	8	3 (n=17)	-	25	866	346
Bulgaria	11	6 (n=42)	2	53	N/A	N/A
Croatia	4	5 (n=29)	-	33	1,024 <sup>1</sup>	N/A <sup>2</sup>
Kosovo	53	7 (n=48)	2	101	400	400 <sup>3</sup>
Moldova	39	8 (n=47)	-	86	1,140-4,000	1,500 <sup>4</sup>
Romania	14	4 (n=21)	4	35	N/A	N/A
Serbia	9	8 (n=51)	3	60	3,118	1,638 <sup>5</sup>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>48 (n=302)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>451</b>		

It is important to note that the availability of information on the number of social service workers and social service workers is inconsistent across countries. This is due to the different types of social service workers (for example, paraprofessionals) or the fact that these statistics are not collected. This gap points to the need for consistent and reliable data on the social service workforce in the region.

### Limitations

Despite acknowledging the broad scope of individuals involved in social service work, the regional data still tended to over-represent the experiences of formal, paid, government social service workers over other types of social service workers. The data also tended to favor the experiences of individual social service workers engaged in direct practice rather than community-based approaches or a broad overview of the social service system as related to child protection. Furthermore, with a focus on social service workers, the research does not include the perspectives of service users, or children and families who are in direct contact with the child protection system. Finally, there are may be important initiatives to strengthen the social service workforce in the region that may not have been captured in this methodology.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, this research therefore represents a first step in mapping the social service workforce in south-east Europe. It is not a complete picture. Despite attempting to create a uniform research process across the eight countries, there still remain gaps in information leading to an unevenness of information contained in the data analysis. As one example, the Moldova research was commissioned separately from the other seven southeast European countries in this regional study; therefore, the scope and methodology of the Moldova research were different, resulting in different outputs that may not have addressed the areas of inquiry set out in the regional research project. Therefore, there is less information regarding the social service workforce in Moldova contained within this report. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this report still represent a strong initial collection of information on the status of the social service workforce in the region. Future research would benefit

from building upon the findings in this study and filling any gaps. Suggested future directions for research will be elaborated upon at the end of the report.

Lastly, the analysis below includes examples from the research that serve to highlight or illustrate a point in the analysis. Therefore, an example from each country is not included in every section.<sup>2</sup> For more detailed findings, please see the national-level reports, referred to in Appendix A.

<sup>1</sup> For example, two such promising initiatives that were not captured in the initial data analysis (but were mentioned in subsequent reviews of the final research report) include the Erasmus Programme through the European Commission and the Haute Ecole Spécialisée project through Universities of Pristina and Tirana.

<sup>2</sup> After the data were collated, analyzed, and outlined in the regional report, country-level researchers were asked to clarify the findings and add any additional examples to better address the area of inquiry. These comments have been integrated into this report.

# FINDINGS

## Overview of the Social Service Workforce

### *Perceptions and understandings of the social service workforce*

Participants noted that the general public and beneficiaries have little understanding of the social service workforce, with an “unrecognizability” of the role of the profession. Across the countries, social service workers were viewed largely as government bureaucrats who serve as gatekeepers to financial assistance for vulnerable groups. Although their role in child protection is not well known to the general public, where they are perceived to be involved in child protection, it is as those who take children away from their families.

Participants acknowledged that the perception of the social service workforce can sometimes be good, especially when the beneficiaries are satisfied with services. For example, in **Croatia**, one participant explained, “[An] especially positive perception comes from the users who are satisfied with social workers.” But examples such as this were rare; for across countries, there was still an overwhelmingly negative perception of social service work. Another participant from Croatia explained:

*People automatically perceive you as a public official who comes to work, drinks coffee for three hours and then goes for a break, and then you do nothing, just wander around. They perceive our fieldwork as our free time and “lollygagging” [spending time idle].*

This negative perception of social service work tended to be viewed through the prism of the social security system. For example, the core poverty reduction mechanism in **Albania**, *ndihma ekonomike* (economic assistance), has contributed to an understanding of social service workers as simply municipal employees who administer financial assistance. In **Kosovo**, the humanitarian aid provided in response to political conflict in the 1990s contributed to the perception of social service work as parallel to the provision of social assistance. Even though the child protection system in **Romania** has existed for more than 25 years, social service workers are still seen as dealing exclusively with financial benefits. According to the data from Romania, the public sees social service work

as more related to financial and material support than the general improvement of living conditions. The same can be said about the perception of social service workers in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. As one participant summarized, “The public ... believe[s] that social work is a profession that deals exclusively with social benefits and charity.”

This perception of social service workers as dealing exclusively with economic assistance eclipses their other roles, and subsequently, their role in child protection may be less known. In fact, like the social service workforce itself, the concept of child protection was not particularly well understood by the general public, civil society, and beneficiaries, according to participants in this study. For countries that do associate social service work with child protection, there was still a negative connotation about what that role is in relation to child protection. For example, in **Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia**, participants noted the common perception that social service workers “take away children”. This perception is especially true among marginalized groups, whose primary interaction with social service work can involve negative child protection interventions, even though these interventions may be legal and necessary.

### *The role of the social service workforce: Legal mandates, job descriptions, licensing, and quality assurance mechanisms*

All countries have a legal and structural mechanisms in place to support social service workers and the provision of services, especially in regards to child protection. Areas that are not covered through these mechanisms tend to be filled by NGOs. Across countries, there were diverse descriptions of jobs and duties that social service workers are responsible for and engaged in within increasingly complex social service systems. The analysis found that, in most countries, both the legal frameworks and the institutions and agency structures for social service workers focus on the delivery of social assistance, a mandate that seems to be the prevailing one in the region. However, social service workers’ roles in child protection are significantly less clear in most countries, which makes identifying relevant training needs, as well as other strategies to strengthen the social service workforce, a challenge.

This section summarizes the relevant legal frameworks for social service provision for countries where this information was available, the institutes of agencies responsible for social service work, and the roles

for both social service workers and those engaged in child protection. Table 3 summarizes these elements. Table 4 summarizes each country's quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms.

**Table 3: Legal Frameworks, Agency Structures, and Job Descriptions**

Country	Relevant Legal Frameworks for Social Service Provision	Institutional Structure for Social Service Workers	General Social Service Worker and Child Protection Roles
Albania	<p><b>Constitution of Albania</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>states that "...social justice and social assistance are the foundations of this state."</li> </ul> <p><b>Law No. 163/2014</b> "On Order of social workers in the Republic of Albania"</p> <p><b>Law No. 7703</b> "On social insurance in the Republic of Albania"</p> <p><b>Law No. 7710</b> "On social assistance and care"</p> <p><b>Law No. 10347 (Article 39)</b> "On protection of child's rights"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>requires at least one professional social worker per each established child protection unit (CPU)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developed legislation to regulate the social work profession</li> </ul> <p><b>General Administration of Social Assistance and Services (GASAS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responsible for implementing the social care system</li> </ul> <p><b>State Social Services (SSS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accountable for institutions and staff providing social services at the national level</li> <li>provides economic assistance, standardization of social services, administration and budgeting of social services, institutional improvements, inspections of social services, licensing of non-profit organizations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Service Workers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifies, assesses, and coordinates interventions based on action plan involving the child and the family</li> </ul>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p><b>Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>stipulates that the government shall provide a safe and secure environment for all persons</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Welfare Centers (SWCs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implements legislation on children and family</li> <li>provides services related to adoption, guardianship, economic assistance, etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Service Workers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engages in case management, maintenance of records, and diagnosis</li> </ul>
Bulgaria	<p><b>Social Assistance Act</b></p> <p><b>Child Protection Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to regulate child protection tasks and activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministry of Labor and Social Policy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>approves the official standards/procedures outlining the social service profession</li> </ul> <p><b>State Agency for Child Protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monitors social services for children through a child rights framework</li> </ul> <p><b>Agency for Social Assistance (ASA)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monitors social services for children by controlling regulations and standards</li> </ul> <p><b>Child Protection Departments</b></p>	<p><b>Social Service Workers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives advice and guidance to individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations on social and personal problems</li> <li>helps clients develop skills, gain access to resources and support services needed to deal with social problems</li> </ul>

Country	Relevant Legal Frameworks for Social Service Provision	Institutional Structure for Social Service Workers	General Social Service Worker and Child Protection Roles
Croatia	<p><b>Constitution of Croatia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides the necessary framework for the development of child protection system</li> </ul> <p><b>The Family Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides a framework for child protection workers</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Welfare Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides framework for provision of social services and for work of Social Care Centres</li> <li>defines what type of people are in need of social services</li> </ul> <p><b>The Act on Social Work Activity</b> (Official Gazette 124/2011; 120/2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>defines roles and obligations of social service workers, outlines necessary education for social service workers, defines role of Chamber of Social Workers, and outlines conditions for obtaining and revoking license to perform social service work</li> </ul>	<p><b>Minister for Social Care and Youth</b></p> <p><b>Chamber of Social Workers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organizes licensing of social service workers</li> <li>conducts administrative monitoring of quality of social service providers</li> </ul> <p><b>Centres for Social Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides social welfare services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Service Workers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides help and support to individuals, groups, and communities by realizing their strengths and potentials, and by providing protection and care for the improvement of their quality of life</li> </ul>
Kosovo	<p><b>The Law on Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>serves as the basis for child protection legislation</li> </ul> <p><b>The Law on Social and Family Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>serves as the basis for child protection legislation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responsible for licensing of all social workers</li> </ul> <p><b>Centers for Social Work (CSWs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides help and support to individuals, groups, and communities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Service Workers<sup>5</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides help and support to individuals, groups, and communities by realizing their strength and potential, and to provide protection and care for the improvement of their quality of life</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> In Kosovo, there are no social workers responsible for only child protection; therefore, there is no job description.

Country	Relevant Legal Frameworks for Social Service Provision	Institutional Structure for Social Service Workers	General Social Service Worker and Child Protection Roles
Moldova	<p><b>Law No. 140</b> “On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives community mayors responsibility and authority to respond immediately to risk, to remove children into care, to arrange for guardianship, to support reintegration, and to monitor at-risk children and families</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Social Assistance Service (CSAS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>administration of social benefits, provision of direct family support and child protection services, support to other vulnerable people in the community including people with disabilities, older people, low income households</li> </ul> <p><b>Home Care Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provision of home care services to adults with disabilities and to older people in the community who have no family to support them</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Assistance and Family Protection Departments (SAFPDs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manages the delivery of social benefits and social services to a district and to all vulnerable groups</li> </ul> <p><b>Specialized social service organizations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>including community centers, foster care services, residential care services (temporary and long-term)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Social Assistants (CSAs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides community-level assistance to a range of clients including support with applying for cash benefits, individual case work, and community mobilization</li> </ul> <p><b>Specialized Social Services Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides specialized support to specific client groups in a range of settings and services including for example residential services, day care, child protection and care services, community centers, mobile teams</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Assistant with Specialist Functions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for example, community child protection specialists who are social workers focused on child protection and care in the family and community</li> </ul> <p><b>District Specialist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social worker in the District Social Assistance Service with specialist functions (e.g., child protection, family support, disability, older people)</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Workers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides home help service mainly to older people and adults with disabilities</li> </ul>

Country	Relevant Legal Frameworks for Social Service Provision	Institutional Structure for Social Service Workers	General Social Service Worker and Child Protection Roles
Romania	<p><b>Law 272/2004</b> "On the protection and promotion of children's rights"</p> <p><b>Law 257/2013</b> (amending Law 272/2004) "On the protection and promotion of children's rights"</p> <p><b>Law 292/2011</b> "On social assistance"</p> <p><b>Law 466/2004</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses the statute of social workers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly (MoLFSPE)</b></p> <p><b>General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responsible for child protection activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Work Service (SPAS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>applies social assistance policies and strategies and deliver support services at the community level</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Worker</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an individual with a university-level social work degree</li> </ul> <p><b>Case Managers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>takes on child protection tasks, ensuring the coordination of activities such as evaluation of needs and risks, and the development of an intervention plan</li> </ul>
Serbia	<p><b>The Law on Social Welfare (2011)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishes a system to address the multiple types of social service providers throughout the country</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Policy (MLEVSP)</b></p> <p><b>Centres for Social Welfare (CSWs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>located in every municipality (140 and 31 branches)</li> </ul> <p><b>Regional Centres for Foster Care and Adoption</b></p> <p><b>Residential Institutions for Children and Youth:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>three of the 19 are for children with behavioral problems and five are for children with disabilities</li> </ul> <p><b>Republic Institute for Social Protection (RISP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responsible for accrediting programs, conducting quality control, and providing legitimacy over the accreditation process</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Service Workers<sup>6</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides basic standards of care through case management, residential and foster care, day care, community-based services, and independent living services</li> </ul>

6 In Serbia, there are no defined standards of care for psychosocial and socio-educational services (e.g., counseling, family therapy, family outreach, intensive family preservation services, family conferencing, mediation, etc.), even though these are stated in the law.

The foundations of the **Albania's** social protection system have been established in the Constitution. The initial strategic objectives of Albania's social protection system aims to first prevent any further degradation of the social security in the country, as well as the establishment of an efficient social protection system that will address emerging social problems. New legislation (Law No. 163/2014 on "Order of social workers in the Republic of Albania") was enacted in December 2014. The law aims to regulate the social work profession in the country by including it on a

list of other regulated professions such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and engineering. Furthermore, the law expands the official scope of social work practice to include women, children, mental health, probation services, psychosocial services in schools, and reproductive health (Tahsini, Lopari, Lasku, & Voko, 2013). This law comes at a time when social workers are being given a pivotal role in the new social service system and being charged with the responsibility of integrating case management into the social service system (Tahsini et al., 2013). The general expectation

is that regulation will have a positive impact on the profession, ensuring more efficiency and professionalism in social service delivery. At the very least, research participants noted that the law will add some legitimacy to the profession. One Albanian social work student from the University of Shkodra explained:

*I believe things are working on our side. The law regulating social workers will bring new developments for us. Even if that turns into a “dead” paper in the drawer of someone, the mere fact that the parliament discussed a whole session on TV, live broadcasting on several channels, on social workers role in the society and the importance of it being regulated was all worth [it].*

Law No. 10347 (article 39 on “Protection of child’s rights”) requires at least one professional social worker per each established child protection unit (CPU). However, according to interviews and discussions with social service workers in Albania, this mandatory requirement was met by only two of the 11 CPUs in Tirana. One research participant explained how this has national implications:

*There are provisions and more social workers are being included in the system, however, we remain a minority even within child protection service; look at the CPUs of Tirana... What would you expect the situation to be in other CPUs across the country?*

It is within the NGOs in Albania where those offering social services are either social workers or psychologists. At the national level, the State Social Service (SSS) is accountable for the institutions and staff providing social services at the national level. NGOs are expected to support and fill the gaps left by the relatively weak SSS. An analysis of the SSS found that the SSS struggles to match their staff to relevant job positions and is faced with an unstable workforce due to high turnover rates (Children Today Center, 2013).

Like Albania, the legal source of social protection in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is the Constitution, which contributed to the development of Social Welfare Centres in the mid-1950s (Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013). Though Social Welfare Centers (SWCs) should employ a range of professions to address the myriad needs of beneficiaries, the SWCs often only employ social workers, who become responsible for tasks beyond their scope of training, ranging from education to law

to psychology. Federal regulations require there to be one social worker for every 4,000 people. According to research participants, the capacity of SWCs is insufficient. Outside of the SWCs, child protection services tend to be provided by social workers, lawyers (who focus on children’s rights), psychologists, and educators. However, the SWCs experience an insufficient number of professionally skilled workers, such as speech therapists, psychologists, and pedagogues. The exceptions are the larger SWCs in places such as Sarajevo, Mostar, Trebinje, Doboj, and Banja Luka. Yet these SWCs still do not have the necessary number of staff to support the needs of the large numbers of beneficiaries who seek social services, thereby also not meeting the legal requirements of the SWCs.

*The Act on Social Work Activity* (Official Gazette 124/2011; 120/2012) in **Croatia**, defines the roles and obligations of social service workers. It outlines the necessary education for social service workers, defines the role of the Chamber of Social Workers, and outlines conditions for obtaining and revoking a license to *perform activities in social care*. The regulation of child protection in Croatia is described in the national Constitution and *The Family Act*. Both of these legal measures are designed to address child protection by providing assistance to parents (Korać Graovac, 2008). Article 3 of *The Act on Social Work Activity* states that “the general goal of social work is to provide help and support to individuals, groups, and communities by realizing their strengths and potentials, and by providing protection and care for the improvement of their quality of life.”

In **Kosovo**, the general goal of social work is to provide help and support to individuals, groups, and communities by realizing their strengths and potentials, and by providing protection and care for the improvement of their quality of life. Child protection activities are based on two laws: the *Law on Family* and the *Law on Social and Family Services*. As part of the former Yugoslavia prior to the 1990s, Kosovo established Centers for Social Work (CSWs). After completing their education, social workers tended to work at these centers. Social workers were considered one of the multiple other professionals affiliated with the CSWs (such as lawyers), with social workers engaged mainly in assessing social problems, decision-making, and the provision of professional counseling. However, during Kosovo’s period of armed conflict, social workers were solely tasked with the provision of humanitarian aid and basic health services. This provi-

sion of aid approach still characterizes social work today. Because Kosovo has since faced a large number of social problems, all professional staff of CSWs have been required to manage cases, not just social workers. Regardless of one's professional identification all staff are referred to as "officers for social services" designated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW). Therefore there are only two categories of social service workers in Kosovo: officers for social services (who work at CSWs) and paraprofessional social workers. Most child protection activities take place in CSWs, and trained social service workers are in position to increase the quality of social services offered. However, among the 33 CSWs in Kosovo today, there are only a total of 15 qualified social workers working among those CSWs. New child protection legislation is currently being drafted in Kosovo by social service workers and other stakeholders involved in child protection. After the drafting process is complete, the legislation must pass through the Kosovo Assembly, which will examine the law in light of budgetary constraints. Nevertheless, according to the research participants, the new legislation is not expected to bring any significant changes, as the challenge lies in the implementation of the law into practice.

In **Moldova**, there are three primary types of social service worker: social assistants, community social assistants (CSAs), and home care social workers. There are also a range of other social service workers in Moldova including pedagogues, social assistants, psychologists, and specialists in areas such as child protection, family support, disability, older people, and foster care. Moldova has recently established new community child protection specialists, who are seen as a positive way of strengthening child protection, reintegration and alternative family care services and reducing the workload of CSAs so CSAs can concentrate on primary support to older people and people with disabilities. CSA's main role in child protection is then primary prevention, identification, and referral.

Whereas social workers provide home care services to adults with disabilities and older adults who have no one to care for them, CSAs in **Moldova** are involved in complex frontline child protection work, while also being tasked with administration of social benefits and cash assistance. Moldovan legislation (Law of Social Assistance, No. 547 of 2003) defines a community social assistant (CSA) as "a person with special studies in the field, providing specialized services to indi-

vidual and families who temporarily are in difficulty." CSAs are responsible for determining whether a case should be opened and whether they will manage the case or if the case requires a multi-disciplinary team and referral. CSAs also coordinate the multi-disciplinary team in their community, provide direct support to families in the form of advice and practical support, are involved in removing children into care or support reintegration of children into the community from institutional care. CSAs also have responsibilities for mobilizing support from other community actors to support individual children and families. Some CSAs are involved in assessing potential adopters, guardians, or foster caregivers for children. Law No. 140 ("On the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents") gives community mayors the responsibility and authority to respond immediately to risk, to remove children into care, to arrange for guardianship, to support reintegration, and to monitor at-risk children and families. Social Assistance and Family Protection Departments (SAFPDs) provide a specialist at the community and district levels mandated to provide a longer-term, more permanent, and more strategic response such as representing the child's interest in court proceedings, planning for longer-term placements, conferring or revoking the status of a child without parental care, monitoring the situation across a number of communities. This specialist also works with the Mayor to identify and register children in need of protection, monitoring, prevention and reintegration measures and actions.

Law 466/2004 in **Romania** defines a social worker as an individual with a university-level social work degree. According to the Law 292/2011, public and private agencies are eligible to provide social services if they are accredited for specific activities. The law also stipulates that social workers should be employed within these social service agencies and that there should be one social worker for every 300 cases. The same law stipulates that if the social service agency cannot retain social workers for any reason, then any other employee—even if s/he is not trained in social work—can do the tasks that social workers should do. Therefore, many social service agencies fill the gap in trained social workers with those trained in other professions. According to the MoLFSPE (2013), one-third of community social work agency staff have degrees in social sciences or humanities; the remaining two-thirds have an academic background in

disciplines such as economics or agriculture. This is clearly an example of how a policy can be a barrier to good practice rather than a supportive mechanism. In Romania, case managers typically take on child protection tasks, ensuring the coordination of activities such as evaluation of needs and risks, and the development of an intervention plan. Order 288/2006 regulates that case management activities can be carried out by anyone with a degree in social work, social sciences, or medicine.

**Serbia's** 2011 *Law on Social Welfare* established a system to address the multiple types of social service providers throughout the country. It defines basic standards of social service work, (for case management, residential and foster care, day care community-based services and independent living services), which does not include defined standards for psychosocial and socio-educational services (e.g., counseling, family therapy, family outreach, intensive family preservation services, family conferencing, mediation, etc.), which are stated in the law.

**Table 4: Quality Assurance and Monitoring Mechanisms**

<b>Albania</b>	Working groups are in the process of drafting by-laws and criteria in regards to regulation.
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Monitoring of CSWs is conducted by the director of the SWC, as well as senior workers at the SWC through supervision. Federal and cantonal ministries are also required to monitor the work of the SWCs: the federal inspector monitors the implementation of family and criminal law, while the cantonal ministries monitor social protection. Though monitoring is conducted several times per year, there is no defined methodology for the monitoring mechanism. The child protection system does not have any mechanisms for collecting, classifying, and analyzing statistical data to ensure quality among the social service system.
<b>Bulgaria</b>	There are two institutions responsible for the monitoring of social services for children in Bulgaria: the inspectorate to the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) and the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP).
<b>Croatia</b>	The Chamber of Social Works conducts administrative monitoring including monitoring of adherence to legal procedures, efficiency, rationality and purposefulness of work within social service institutions, purposefulness of internal organization and the competencies of employees, and the professionalism of relationships with clients. Administrative monitoring is conducted by public officials using methodology determined by the Minister for Social Care and Youth.
<b>Kosovo</b>	N/A
<b>Moldova</b>	N/A
<b>Romania</b>	The DGASPC has a criteria for evaluating the professional performance of employees including: level of knowledge and skills; level of involvement in fulfilling duties; difficulty/complexity of tasks performed, compared with similar positions; ability to work with reduced supervision; loyalty to the institution; ability to work in team; and communication skills.  Services related to child protection have minimum quality standards that must be adhered to, though it is unclear how these are monitored and enforced.
<b>Serbia</b>	The Republic Institute for Social Protection (RISP) is responsible for all accredited programs, conducting quality control and providing legitimacy over the accreditation process.

## Education and Human Resources Management

### *Requirements to become a social service worker*

Like the aforementioned licensing processes, there is no consistency in the requirements to become a social service worker. This section provides examples of the requirements (if any) for one to become a formal social service worker. For more formalized jobs (e.g., paid and government social service workers) there is typically a university degree required. There was little

to no data on the requirements for one to become a paraprofessional social service worker, and it can be assumed that these requirements vary from organization to organization. For formal social service workers, the data indicate that requirements are inconsistent and not uniformly followed. Table 5 provides information on licensing requirements for social service workers, as well as for training programs, and service organizations.

**Table 5: Licensing Requirements for Social Service Workers**

<b>Albania</b>	Working groups are in the process of drafting by-laws and criteria in regards to licensing.
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	There are no laws regulating the licensing of social service workers.
<b>Bulgaria</b>	To become a social service worker, one must have a university degree in social work or social pedagogy, a prescribed set of "personal characteristics", and comprehensive knowledge of legislation related to social service work.
<b>Croatia</b>	To be licensed as a social worker, one must possess a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, possess Croatian citizenship, have written and oral knowledge of the Croatian language, be a member of the Chamber of Social Workers, and pass a national exam, which one must pass every six years in order to renew their professional license and be able to practice. The Chamber of Social Workers has the right to revoke the licence of a social service worker when the person loses Croatian citizenship, loses professional ability, becomes permanently unable to perform social care activities due to the health reasons, is issued a security measure of ban to perform social work activities, or loses a right to perform social work activities by a discipline measure of the Chamber.
<b>Kosovo</b>	The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) is responsible for the licensing of all social service workers, which is effective for three years. All those working in the CSWs or within NGOs are required to pass the licensing process to officially become an Officer for Social Services. However, the criteria for licensing does not require that the individual specifically hold a degree in social work.
<b>Moldova</b>	There is currently no system in place for licensing social assistants.
<b>Romania</b>	Social workers must graduate from an accredited university program. Other types of social service workers such as paraprofessionals and home caregivers, have the option to attend an initial training session provided by institutions accredited by the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ) or life-long training by institutions accredited by the National Agency of Civil Servants.
<b>Serbia</b>	Social Service Workers obtain their license from the Chamber of Social Welfare, whose requirements include continuing education from an accredited training program, as well as credits gained from participation (e.g., organizing, participating, and/or attending) in a professional conference. According to the <i>Rulebook on Licensing Professionals</i> in Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2012), the conditions for obtaining a license include: (1) obtaining the appropriate diploma, (2) completing internship and passing internship exam, and (3) completing appropriate accredited training program. To renew one's license, social service workers must collect a certain number of points through activities such as continuing education, professional and/or academic conference participation, research, and publishing in academic journals.

For example, to become a social service worker in **Bulgaria**, one must have a university degree in social work or social pedagogy, a set of personal skills and characteristics (e.g., taking responsibility, communicativeness, persuasiveness, tolerance, etc.), and comprehensive knowledge of the legislative and regulatory framework for social services. However, there are no laws or processes regulating the licensing of social service workers according to this criteria.

In **Kosovo**, most social service workers at public institutions have a four-year university degree in a field such as sociology, pedagogy, law, or related disciplines. However, most social service workers in public institutions do not have academic credentials to be official social workers. Similarly, most social service workers employed at local civil society organizations do not have academic credentials.

According to Law No. 466 (“Regarding the social work profession”, 2004) in **Romania**, child protection staff must have a bachelor’s degree in social work. However, most staff working with the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) graduated from non-social work, but related, fields such as psychology or sociology, or from public administration, law, or economics. Furthermore, according to a 2013 study conducted by the MoLFSPE (2013), less than 60% of DGASPC have graduated from university at all. Within SPAS, social work tasks are sometimes undertaken by those without social work degrees (e.g., agriculture, library sciences, accounting, etc.).

### ***Institutes responsible for social service worker training*** *Academic training programs*

In all countries the initial training of social service workers and those engaged in child protection work tends to take place at the university level. University-level social work training has been affected by the implementation of the Bologna Charter developed in the late 1990s, which sought to advance higher education in Europe and further the recognition of qualifications within Europe and internationally through a common pattern of undergraduate (bachelor’s), postgraduate (master’s), and doctoral (PhD) study (Lawrence, 2014). The reform provided an opportunity for the rapid administration of social work education, but it also facilitated the corporatist orientation of education and commercialization of public universities (Lawrence, 2014). Today, most university-level social work education programs subject to the Bologna Charter conform to a recognizable pattern of degrees at the bachelor’s and/or master’s level.

Although most social work education programs include academic training combined with practice placements, there are still differences in program length and the named degree (e.g., diploma, license, bachelor’s, master’s, etc.). This section describes the different academic institutes responsible for delivering training to the social service workforce. Details of the academic training programs can be found in Table 6.

**Table 6: Social Service Worker Academic Programs in Southeast Europe**

Country	Institution	Programs/degrees available	Program Length	
Albania	University of Tirana's Faculty of Social Sciences	BA in Social Work BA in Social Administration	3 years	
		BA in Social Work (part-time)	5 years	
		MSc in Social Work MSc in Communication for Social and Behavioral Change MSc in Social Administration MSc In Social Work with Children and Families MSc in Gender and Development MSc in Social Services in Penal Justice	2 years	
		MA in Analyst of Social Policies MA in Social Work	1 year	
		PhD in Social Work	3-5 years	
		University of Shkoder (Luigi Gurakuqi)	BA in Social Work	3 years
	University of Elbasan (Aleksander Xhuvani)	BA in Social Work		
		BA in Social Work (part-time)	5 years	
		MSc in Social Services	2 years	
		MA Social Work with Children and Families	1 year	
		MA Social Services in Penal Justice	1 year	
	Bosnia & Herzegovina	University of Mostar, Faculty of Philosophy	BA in Social Work	4 years
			MA in Social Work	1 year
		University of Tuzla, Faculty of Philosophy	BA in Social Work	4 years
			MA in Social Politics	1 year
University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Science		BA in Social Work	4 years	
		MA in Social Work	1 year	
	PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies in Social Work	N/A		
Bulgaria	Sofia University (St. Kliment Ohridski)	BA in Social Work	4 years	
		MA in Clinical Social Work	1 year	
		MA in Social Work with Children and Families	1 year	
		MA in Social Institutions Management	1 year	
		BA in Social Pedagogy	4 years	
		MA in Management of Social Work and Pedagogy	1 year	
		MA in Consult, Social Work, and Pedagogy in Family Counseling	1 year	
	New Bulgarian University	BA in Social Work	4 years	
		MA in Clinical Social Work	1 year	
	University of National and World Economy	MA in European Social Policy and Social Work	1 year	

<b>Bulgaria</b>	South-West University	BA in Social Work	4 years
		MA in Social Work	1 year
		MA in Social Mediation	1 year
		MA in Social Support	1 year
		MA in Social Work with Social-Significant Diseases	1 year
		MA in Psychosocial Rehabilitation	1 year
		BA in Social Pedagogy	4 years
		MA in Pedagogical Interaction with Children with Problematic Behavior	1 year
	Plovdiv University	BA + MA in Social Pedagogy	4 years
		BA + MA in Social Activities	4 years
	Trakia University	BA in Social Education	4 years
		MA in Social Activities and Social Education	1 year
	University of Veliko Tarnovo	BA in Social Pedagogy	4 years
		MA in Social Pedagogy	1 year
		MA in Social Work with Children at Risk	1 year
		BA in Social Activities in Long-Term Care	4 years
		MA in Social Activities in Long-Term Care	1 year
		BA in Social Activities	4 years
	Burgas Free University	BA in Social Work and Counselling	4 years
		MA in Social Counselling and Psychology	1 year
	Shumen University	BA in Social Pedagogy	4 years
		MA in Organization and Management of Social and Pedagogical Activities	1 year
		MA in Social Consulting Master Degree Programmes	1 year
		BA in Social Activities	4 years
		MA in Regulation and Control of Social Activities System	1 year
		MA in Art Techniques in Prevention and Correction Activities Master Degree Programme	1 year
University of Ruse	BA in Social Activities	4 years	
	MA in Clinical Social Work	1 year	
<b>Croatia</b>	University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law, Social Work Study Centre	BA in Social Work	4 years
		MA in Social Work and Social Policy	1 year
		University Specialist (Post-Graduate) <sup>7</sup>	2 years
		PhD	3 years

<sup>7</sup> This degree includes courses on psychosocial perspective in social work, social policy, supervision in psychosocial work, family mediation, social work and community development.

<b>Kosovo</b>	University of Prishtina, Department of Social Work	BA in Social Work	3 years
	AAB University	BA in Social Sciences (Child Care and Welfare)	3 years
		MA in Social Policies and Child Welfare	2 years
	Dardania University	BA in Care and Social Welfare	3 years
<b>Moldova</b>	Balti State University	BA Social Assistant	4 years
		MA Social Assistant	1 year
	Chisinau Pedagogical University	BA Social Assistant	4 years
		MA Social Assistant	1 year
	Free International University of Moldova	BA Social Assistant	4 years
		MA Social Expert	1 year
	State University of Moldova	BA Social Assistant	4 years
		MA Social Assistant	1 year
Further education colleges (e.g., Cahul, Soroca, Comrat, Orhei, and Lipcani)	Certified social work and social assistant courses	4 years	
<b>Romania</b>	Bucharest University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work	BA in Social Work	3 years
		MA in Social Work	2 years
	Babeş Bolyai University, Cluj	BA in Social Work	3 years
		MA in Social Work	2 years
	West University of Timisoara	BA in Social Work	3 years
		MA in Social Work	2 years
	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi	BA in Social Work	3 years
		MA in Social Work	2 years
<b>Serbia</b>	University of Belgrade	BA in Social Work	4 years
		MA in Social Work	1 year
		PhD in Social Work	3 years
	Singigunum University	BA in Social Work	4 years

With the support of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Grand Valley University in Michigan, and Bethany Social Services in **Albania**, the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana in Albania was the first school in the country to offer social work degrees starting in 1992. Today, the main source of social work graduates are the three schools of social work established within three main state universities in the country: University of Tirana, University of Elbasan (Aleksander Xhuvani) established in 2004, and University of Shkoder (Luigj Gurakuqi) established in 2005. These three programs have been accredited by

the Public Agency of Accreditation of Higher Education in Albania. University of Tirana and University of Elbasan also offer part-time bachelor's programs. Since 2005, social work academic programs in Albania comply with the Bologna Charter; therefore social work programs in the country shifted from a 4+1 system (four years of undergraduate plus one year of post-graduate) to the new 3+2 system.

The education of social service workers in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is conducted at three institutions of higher education: University of Sarajevo, University

of Mostar, and University of Tuzla. University of Mostar and University of Tuzla both offer master's degrees in social work. University of Sarajevo is the only university offering a doctoral degree in interdisciplinary studies in social work. University of Mostar offers continuing education in social work.

Currently, there are ten universities in **Bulgaria** offering bachelor's and master's degrees related to social work, which provide a basic qualification for social service and child protection work.

The education of social service workers in **Croatia** dates back to 1952 when University of Zagreb offered a two-year program. The program converted to a four-year degree in 1985. Then after the implementation of the Bologna Charter in 2005, the new program included a four-year bachelor's degree and a one-year master's degree. The University also offers specialist postgraduate studies and a doctoral degree. The education of social service workers is currently conducted at the University of Zagreb's Social Work Study Centre at the Faculty of Law. The Social Work Study Centre has two institutes: the Institute for Social Work and the Institute for Social Policy.

Since **Kosovo** is in a process of statebuilding, including the development of social institutions, there is an emphasis on also building the social service workforce through educational activities. University of Prishtina (UP) offers a bachelor's degree in social work through the Faculty of Philosophy. To apply to the program, prospective students must have completed their secondary school education and passed the national *Matura* exam. Upon application, prospective students are required to take an admissions *Edukata Qytetare* ("Citizen Education") exam with questions addressing subjects such as psychology, sociology, psychology, and *Edukata Qytetare*, which includes general knowledge of society law, and politics. Prospective student acceptance is based on one's score in the national *Matura* exam and the admissions exam. Approximately 50 students are enrolled in the bachelor's of social work program at UP each year, with a total of 200 students enrolled in the program across the four years. There has been movement to develop a master's degree in social work at UP, but curricula development and preparation for accreditation have not yet started. The private AAB University in Kosovo offers two popular programs of study related to child protection: a bachelor's in social sciences with a fo-

cus on child care and welfare and a master's in social policy and child welfare. The high application and enrollment rates for these programs at AAB University illustrate the high demand for education in this area. Dardania University also offers a bachelor's degree in care and social welfare. Social work education in Kosovo is still quite new. Because it is new, the quality of the programs is still under scrutiny. Yet its newness also holds an advantage. Because these programs have been recently developed, they are easily customizable to trends in social issues and the demands of the current social service workforce. Furthermore, the small size of the programs cultivates strong relationships among academic staff and students.

**Romania** also follows the Bologna Charter of social work education. Romania has four universities with social work programs: Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara and Iasi. Additionally, Romania has a number of small universities and theological faculties that are providing specializations in social work. Based on university autonomy, academic social work programs in Romania tend to have different training curricula, yet all of them include courses related to child protection.

In **Serbia**, social service workers are formally educated at the Department for Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences. The private Singidunum University recently began offering a 4-year bachelor's program for social workers, with the first cohort graduating in 2016.

#### *Non-degree training programs and continuing education*

This section describes non-degree training programs, such as continuing education and certificates, through such institutes as CBOs and NGOs, and the opportunities that social service workers have for professional development. Details of these training programs can be found in Table 6. Licensing requirements for these training programs are provided in Table 7.

**Table 7: Social Service Worker Non-Degree Training Programs in Southeast Europe**

Country	Institution	Programs/degrees available	Program Length
<b>Albania</b>	University of Tirana's Faculty of Social Sciences (with MSWY, Terre des homes, and other NGOs)	Accredited course in child protection issues	22 full training days, spread throughout one academic year
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	University of Mostar, Faculty of Philosophy	Continuing education social work lectures	N/A
	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	N/A	N/A
<b>Bulgaria</b>	135th General Secondary School	Specialist with secondary education: Social work with children and families at-risk	3 years
<b>Croatia</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Kosovo</b>	International and local NGOs	N/A	N/A
<b>Moldova</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Romania</b>	Centres accredited by the National Authority for Qualifications	Certificate program	120 hours in classroom 240 hours of practice
<b>Serbia</b>	Individual institutions and community-based organizations (overseen by RISP)	119 accredited training programs including: general competence in social welfare (25), support for children and young people (20), support for families (24), support for persons and children with disabilities (28), and support for marginalized groups (9)	6 to 80 hours
	Various psychotherapy associations	Family therapy	4 years (initial two year training for systemic practitioner and two years training and supervised practice for family therapists)
		Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT)	2 + 2 years

In **Albania**, the NGO sector has continued to play an important role in strengthening the capacities of social service workers engaged in child protection work. The most important contribution has been the development of a formalized and accredited in-service training program on child protection. Resulting from collaboration between the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY), University of Tirana's Department of Social Work, and a number of NGOs led by Terre des Hommes (TdH) Albania, this training program aimed to provide child protection workers and child welfare professionals with fundamental knowledge and core skills to ensure minimum service standards for child protective services. The course was applied for the first time in the 2014-2015 academic year for 30 child protection workers.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, there are no licensed training programs of education and training of professional workers in the social welfare centres. NGOs provide different types of trainings for social service workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but research participants noted that these trainings are highly specialized. Research participants in Bosnia and Herzegovina did note the importance of continuing education: "Continuous lifelong learning is an integral part of [a] good profession." And by-laws require that employees spend a certain number of days per year on professional development including coordinated education programs developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, universities, professional associations, and NGOs. Yet, there is no mechanism in place to monitor these requirements. Furthermore, data from Bosnia and Herzegovina indicate that there is a

lack of motivation for social service workers to learn more once they have obtained permanent employment. Most social service organizations do not have the resources to cover the cost and time for continuing education activities for their staff. Social service workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have the financial resources to invest in continuing education and increase their professional competence. If they do have the financial means, social service workers must use their vacation time, as their organizations will not provide time off for professional development. The research found no information regarding trainings specific to child protection.

In **Bulgaria**, there is an opportunity to obtain professional education in social work through 160 Centres for Vocational Training throughout the country. For social service workers, skills and knowledge are updated through advanced training carried out by NGOs. Training through these NGOs is specifically developed to provide training and education, but not towards an educational degree. These training programs are not subject to licensing, and there is no data on the number of NGOs or training institutes that provide training. Typical training programs vary in length from one to three days. The research found no information regarding trainings specific to child protection.

In **Croatia**, under Article 8, *The Act on Social Work Activity* states:

*Social workers have a right and obligation to pursue professional development through continuous education and acquisition of skills and knowledge. Continuous education is an individual and organized education in the field of social work, law, social pedagogy, psychology, speech therapy, educational rehabilitation, work therapy, education, consulting, management, social policy and other fields necessary for the efficient performing of tasks in social welfare.*

The Minister for Social Care and Youth is required to issue a yearly plan for professional education of experts in the institutions for social care. To renew one's license, a social service worker must participate in specialist education (e.g., psychotherapy, psychosocial treatment), mentorship and supervision, academic publication, study visits, participation in conferences or workshops, or online trainings. Despite this explicit call for continuing professional education, there is not a specific mechanism by which professionals can engage in these activities.

Some international and local NGOs in **Kosovo** conduct small trainings at the local level, which also tend to be ad hoc and short-term. As one NGO practitioner noted:

*There have been so many ad hoc trainings... we have so many manuals and then other agencies come and develop new manuals five years later.*

NGOs in Kosovo also tend to face chronic problems in raising funds for these training initiatives. Topics covered on these trainings include new laws and policies, social work best practices in other countries, and cooperation with other institutions offering social services and case management.

Social service workers in **Romania** can enroll in trainings accredited through the National Agency of Qualification (NAQ). According to current legislation on adult education (Ordinance No. 129/2000), any public or private training institution can offer training programs to the public, but only those who are authorized are allowed to provide nationally recognized certificates. Employers may also organize continuous education training for their employees, but they cannot offer nationally recognized certificates unless they are legally authorized. To be authorized, a training provider must demonstrate the training programs are conducted by instructors who have appropriate specialization in the field and a specific pedagogical background in adult learning methods. Yet, in 2010 in Romania, only 21.4% of staff employed in Public Social Assistance Services (SPAS) attended some form of continuing education training. Only 13 of 100 SPAS (12.7%) organized continuing education for staff. Approximately 60% of SPAS do not have specified objectives regarding professional development and there is no reference to continuing training in these SPAS' strategic plans. Most local public institutions in Romania allocate no to limited resources for staff training. For example, in 2010 the money allocated on training for child protection workers was approximately 41 leu (9.6 Euros) per employee, with 31 leu (7.3 Euro) actually spent on each employee. A culture of training is missing, and therefore professional development of staff is not seen as an effective approach to improving the child protection system, but rather an expensive non-necessity.

**Serbia's** Republic Institute for Social Protection (2015) lists 119 accredited training programs including: general competence in social welfare (25), support for children and young people (20), support for families

(24), support for persons and children with disabilities (28), and support for marginalized groups (9). A review of these training programs show that there are numerous relevant continuing education programs for social service workers in child protection; there are fewer programs available for paraprofessional social service workers. Topics address both basic knowledge and skills (e.g., case management and supervision), as well as more specific skills for vulnerable young populations (e.g., child victims of abuse and neglect, youth in conflict with the law, children in alternative care). There are a number of training programs for professionals who train and support foster families. There are also several trainings addressing domestic violence, although none of the trainings address children as witnesses of domestic violence. Trainings addressing the participation of children, techniques to interview children, and children affected by trauma and loss are also missing. These trainings tend to be offered only a few times during a project period, so there is little long-term continuity. Furthermore, the trainings are short-term in nature (usually about two to three days), which speaks to the limited financial capacity of both the

social service workers, their employers, and the training institutes themselves. Finally, regardless of how long the training program is (six or 60 hours), they are worth the same number of credits, which discourages social service workers from engaging in longer more demanding trainings.

In addition to these accredited training programs in **Serbia**, social service workers in child protection have the opportunity for professional development through counseling and psychotherapy training programs. These trainings are often organized by certified psychotherapy associations and usually last for several years. The training programs are independently run by different institutions, community-based organizations, and usually take place over the course of several years. Popular trainings for those engaged in child protection include family therapy (initial two year training for systemic practitioner and two years training and supervised practice for family therapists) and rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT). There is no data indicating how many social service workers complete these programs.

**Table 8: Licensing Requirements for Academic and Non-Degree Training Programs**

<b>Albania</b>	N/A
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	There are no laws regulating the licensing of training programs.
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Bulgarian universities are assessed and accredited by the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation, an independent state authority created in 1995. Universities themselves are also responsible for evaluating the results of their educational programs. Centres for Vocational Training are licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Training and Education. Informal education (through NGOs and CBOs) are not subject to accreditation and licensing.
<b>Croatia</b>	N/A
<b>Kosovo</b>	N/A
<b>Moldova</b>	N/A
<b>Romania</b>	Academic programs are accredited through the Ministry of Education. Professional trainings are accredited by NAQ. To be authorized, a training provider must demonstrate that the training program is conducted by a specialist in the topic, with specific pedagogical skills in adult learning methods.
<b>Serbia</b>	The accreditation of certain training programs, such as those addressing treatment programs for youth in residential care, is also relatively new. Established in 2008, this process entails the accreditation and quality control of training programs, registration of accredited programs, and registration of professionals who complete accredited training programs.

### Organizational environment

*Working conditions: Caseloads, remuneration, and infrastructure*

Across the countries, social service workers described facing a challenging work environment with heavy workloads, low remuneration, sub-par infrastructure, fragile motivation of social service workers, all compounded by a lack of political commitment to the profession. For example, in **Albania**, a social service worker in child protection described her work environment:

*We work in extremely difficult conditions. I share office with ndihma ekonomike officer. For at least 10 days of the month, I have no room even to stand in my office as it is overwhelmed by people filing for the assistance.... I don't have a proper work desk, no computer, I use my personal one, and no shelves for the files. Luckily I own a car and the back of my car is turned into my archive. This is not effective and even not professional. When the office is busy I have no other choice but meeting clients outside in hot and cold days. This looks very unprofessional too!*

These elements have contributed to a high rate of turnover of child protection workers in countries such as **Bulgaria**. To address this shortcoming, Bulgaria's Agency for Social Assistance instituted a policy allowing for the recruitment of those with only secondary education and no specialization in social work. Though this approach fills social service workforce positions, which are highly needed within countries such as Bulgaria, this policy does not address the root causes of the high turnover rate. It also creates yet another challenge for the social service workforce. The physical working conditions within the CPDs in Bulgaria are also a challenge for the social service workforce. Social service workers are often working in buildings that are old and deteriorating due to a lack of maintenance, technical equipment is outdated, and, in some cases, cleaning and maintenance is a responsibility of the already overworked staff.

CSAs in **Moldova** have fluctuating caseloads, but on average work with around three to four active child protection or family support cases at any given time. Some are working with only one or two cases, whereas others are working with up to six cases. Additionally, CSAs are responsible for an average of 250 cash assistance beneficiaries at any one time. CSAs in Mol-

dova, who focus on specialized services, have a much lower overall caseload than social workers, which is more aligned with international guidance on caseloads (e.g., from the European Regional Federation of Social Workers). Social workers in home care have a more stable caseload of 8-10 clients whom they visit more frequently and for longer periods of time than CSAs. Nevertheless, the average turnover of CSAs in Moldova was nearly 20% in 2013. This high turnover can be attributed to what research participants described as a particularly difficult job with high levels of responsibility, uneven and high caseloads, low remuneration, and lack of infrastructure (e.g., office space, transportation). When non-CSA participants were asked if they would apply to be a CSA, the response was almost universally negative:

*There is chaos for the [community] social assistant, s/he has to run around all day, is exhausted and tired in the evening, and does not understand what s/he has done all day, because it's a riot, because everyone calls and requests all day long everything: I need this or this.*

*No [I would not apply to be a CSA]. It is stressful and exhausting.*

However, Moldovan CSAs themselves note that their challenges are related less to workload and more to everyday working conditions. Working conditions for CSAs in Moldova are generally considered to be poor, with key problems being transportation and office space:

We must to think about the transport, because their work consists of very much movement, if you will sit all time in the office you will not do anything, it must be thought somehow about how this person can get around.

Creating the working environment – office, photocopier...[community] social assistants have a lot of problems, but the most severe one is that of transport, because it's complicated for them to travel in big localities, they go many kilometres on foot.

Research participants in **Serbia** identified high caseload as a result of poor organizational infrastructure as a main obstacle to effective social service practice. Examples of poor organizational infrastructure from the research participants include inadequate allocation of tasks, frequent changes of case managers in some units, and lack of cooperation and synchronization with other services.

## *Supervision*

Across countries supervision was identified as being an important element of being a social work student and a practicing social service worker. For example, participants in the research conducted in **Romania** emphasized the importance of professional supervision as a way to learn and ensure professional efficiency. Supporting this finding is a 2015 Centrul de Formare Continuă și Evaluarea Competențelor în Asistența Socială (CFCECAS) study that shows that 66.3% of respondents said they need professional supervision in order to be efficient in work, and 52.5% said they would need professional supervision in order to develop skills that help them to work better. In Romania, social service workers—of whom only one-third have a social work background—understand professional supervision as a way to decrease stress and increase motivation to develop effective intervention approaches and strategies and manage their resources efficiently. **Moldova** was the one country that reported positive supervisory processes. Most of the CSAs who participated in the research reported relatively smooth supervision with their direct line managers, professional supervisors, and District Specialists.

However, since supervisors do not have any specific qualifications or licensure process, supervision tends to be weak. For example, in other countries, consistent and adequate supervision was also noted as being a rarity for multiple reasons. For example, in **Bulgaria**, social service workers reported that the supervision they received was irregular and oftentimes ineffective. Social service workers in **Albania** agreed that a major gap in their ongoing education and professional development was the absence of professional supervision

## *Motivation*

Linked to working conditions and supervision is the motivation of social service workers to enter social work, stay in social work, and continue to improve and update their skills. Unfortunately, social service workers across the countries in this study noted a declining sense of motivation, which negatively impacts their capacity and therefore has implications for the application of practice to populations in need, such as children and families.

The research in **Bulgaria** illustrated how low remuneration, lack of recognition for the profession, and insufficient staff resources all contribute to lowered motivational levels among social service workers. The research outlined three classifications of motivation among social service workers that are present throughout the social service system. The first group continues to be internally motivated to work despite the challenges of the profession. These types of social service workers tend to practice direct services within the community, however, they can also be found working in CPDs. The second group of social service workers identified in the Bulgarian research are those who start their careers highly motivated, but under everyday stress they lose their motivation, yet continue to work because of their financial need. Many of these social service workers can be found working within CPDs. The third group includes social service workers who do not have internal motivation when they start their careers as social service workers, and are therefore minimally effective in their jobs. This type of social service worker can be found at every level of the child protection system. This research also indicated that due to low motivation and the resulting high turnover, the requirements for one to become a social service worker within a CPD have been lessened (e.g., there is no requirement for a social service worker in CPDs to have a diploma in social work or a related field), which affects the quality of practice. This example from Bulgaria clearly illustrates how continued motivation for social service workers at all of the different levels is a challenge faced by the profession.

## *Recruitment and retention policies*

Some countries have enacted legislation on the number of social service workers necessary to meet the needs of the population. However, most countries find they are grossly under these minimum requirements for a variety of reasons including high turnover rates of social service workers. With the challenges facing social service workers, it is not surprising that there is a high turnover rate. This section will describe the realities of social service workers' employment in terms of recruitment and retention.

Recruitment of SSS staff in **Albania** is regulated by by-laws within the Labor Code, which control the recruitment process and the continuation and termination of work. Recent SSS data from 2009-2013 found

that 150 specialists were dismissed due to continuous restructuring and shifting of personnel (Children Today Center, 2013).

The number of social workers for the population is inadequate in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and does not meet federal requirements requirements of one social worker for every 4,000 people. This means that social workers in the CSWs are overloaded with cases and find it challenging to adequately deal with the everyday demands of the job. They are often tasked with completing tasks outside their scope of training. The low numbers of social service workers lies in contrast to the high numbers of administrative and support staff (e.g., secretaries, drivers, cleaners, typists, et.) at the CSWs.

Along with the shortage of trained professionals to occupy social welfare jobs, **Romanian** social service workers face an increasing number of working hours that adversely affects job performance. There is also a high rate of turnover among child protection workers in Romania. According to the MoLFSPE (2013), 50% of child protection workers resigned or terminated their employment in 2010; this number rose to 70% in 2011. Underemployment is also a challenge within Romania's DGASPC system. According to data from 2010-2011, only 8 out of 10 social welfare jobs were occupied. Centers that support the reintegration of children in the family are the most severely affected by underemployment with 44.8% of positions occupied (MoLFSPE, 2013). To cover staff shortages, DGASPC incorporates volunteers; however, there is no indication as to the background of these volunteers and/or whether these volunteers participate in a training program specific to child protection. There is currently no data to show if and how one engaging in child protection activities is prepared for the position that they have been assigned to, therefore leaving a gap in our understanding of social service workforce needs.

A significant number of social service workers in **Serbia** are preparing to retire within the next few years. According to the research, the social service workforce is "exhausted" and unwilling to integrate new approaches to practice. At the same time, there are many young professionals who are eager for employment. Nevertheless, only a fraction of these young professionals are trained in social service work, since University of Belgrade was the only university in the country providing this kind of training.

## Skills, Knowledge, and Interests in Child Protection Practice

### *Curriculum and theoretical approach*

Data from this research indicates that social work is taught and practiced differently within the countries in southeast Europe. Nevertheless, there are similarities in some areas of curricula including: social science content (sociology, social policy, psychology); law and social policy specific to national social work; values, ethics, human rights, and social justice; social work theories and skills; life course studies (human growth and development, including health, disability, trauma). This section describes the curricula available to social service workers and identifies the theoretical foundations of these programs.

Findings from a comparative analysis of the curricula of the three social work schools in **Albania** found that all three curricula was based on the first social work education program at the University of Tirana, which uses a generalist approach with a focus on ecological systems theory. Due to limitations in human resources at the Universities of Shkoder and Elbasan, critical theoretical courses such as *Human Behavior and the Social Environment* were not offered. Practitioner participants noted that the curricula tended to be imported from the United States, which they rated as comprehensive and "state of the art". But they also noted that the examples did not reflect the local Albanian context and there were few resources available in the local language. Furthermore, the curricula has not changed over the years to reflect advances in knowledge and changes within the social work profession itself. One graduate student noted:

*When I signed [up] two year ago for one of the master's programs, I was hoping to find answers to dilemmas I had often faced in my practice as [a] social worker in Albania, but I was disappointed to see that not much had changed from my bachelor's days. Still examples referring to the US or the UK and a lot of repetition of the theoretical frameworks and concepts, which are included in every course I've ever attended.*

A review of curricula in **Bulgaria** found diverse theoretical frameworks guiding their programs. The theoretical focus of training tends to depend on the institute that is providing the training. For example, the university programs determine the content, format, and method of education. However, two main theo-

retical approaches were most prevalent throughout the curricula: ecological systems theory and psychodynamic clinical approach. There are also new theoretical approaches being integrated into academic social work curricula including competence-based models. Within NGO-supported trainings, resilience is a popular theoretical approach.

In **Romania**, an examination of the social work curricula at the Bucharest University's Faculty of Sociology and Social Work found a diverse array of courses in social work theory, law and policy, human development, psychology, social psychology, case management, research, and social diagnosis. As part of their qualifications, social work students are required to complete practice placements each semester. A lab on coaching and mentoring implemented in Bucharest University's Faculty of Sociology and Social Work helps social work students relate their own professional and personal development in the practice placement with the social work profession.

The bachelor's degree program at University of Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences in **Serbia** includes elements of political science, sociology, law, economics, and psychology, aiming to provide students with a broad theoretical framework as future social workers. The program includes general practice-based courses with individuals, groups, and the community, as well as specific groups such as children and youth, elderly, and immigrants. The course *Social Work with Children and Youth* specifically addresses issues related to child protection: constructions of childhood, child rights perspective, child abuse and neglect (e.g., definition, theory, evidence-based practice, intervention methods, protocol, and procedures specific to Serbia), children in alternative care (e.g., residential care, foster care, kinship care, guardianship, adoption, care leavers), participation of children, and juvenile justice. Other courses with relevance to child protection include *Psychology of Personality, Mental Health* (with parts dedicated to children's mental health), *Developmental Psychology, Family Law, Social Security Systems, Counselling, Advocacy*, and other courses dealing with family and parenting issues. At the master's level, courses such as *Case Management, Social Work with Families*, and *Gender Studies* also address the needs of children and child protection issues.

### **Policy**

Among the countries represented in this study, social service workers learn about the current policy that exists at the time of their training. However, less training effort is placed on teaching social service workers how to influence policy or to keep themselves updated on policy developments.

For example, child protection legislation (including national and international frameworks) and child rights and protection issues are an integral part of academic training programs in **Albania**. However, no research has been conducted to assess the readiness of social work graduates and the effectiveness of social service workforce members in engaging in and influencing child-related policies in the country. Participants in this study noted that even though they learned about policy and legislation throughout much of their education, knowledge of policy was temporary and they currently struggle with keeping updated on new policies and legislation:

*In our program we had several social policy and legislation courses and learned about different policies and pieces of legislation that concerned children too. I can recall we learned about different conventions on child rights and child protection, different codes, strategies and policies but the information was relevant for that time. Now many things have changed and what I learned by heart at the time serves me nothing for the work I'm doing now.*

From the perspective of educators and managers in Albania, the depth and breadth of child-related policy in training is sufficient for a generalist social service worker, but is insufficient for social service workers who plan to specialize in child protection practice. These latter specialists must follow-up with specific on-the-job training or pursue a graduate degree that provides further education in child-related practices.

Participants in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** consider knowledge of relevant regulations and policy an integral part of the training of social service workers at the educational level, as well as at the practice level. However, they also view the capacity for social service workers to influence laws and create policies as modest. Participants acknowledged that policies and programs should be based on research, but that they do not have enough knowledge about how to actually do this.

The centralized management of institutions related to child protection in **Bulgaria** poses a challenge for social service workers who are interested in influencing policy and legislation. Therefore, there is a relatively low degree of social service worker involvement in the system. As one practitioner participant explained:

*We are the lowest level in the hierarchy and we don't have an impact over the decisions on higher level, because usually the lawmakers are taking models from abroad not from our country.*

In **Croatia**, social service workers in child protection learn about policymaking during their formal education. Most participants find this education adequate and comprehensive:

*We have a lot of knowledge about social policy through many courses, a good foundation. When I see people from other professions, they don't understand that or they learn it from their personal experience and they take a lot of time compared to somebody who is a social worker, who will understand a document when he reads it.*

Conversely though, some participants feel that there is a discrepancy between the formal curricula and practical policy work. Others feel that, like research, policy is outside the scope of social work practice and more aligned with legal professionals. Although social workers who work in child protection in Croatia have a great potential to influence policy making, both because their formal knowledge and because their practical experience, it can be seen that they are reluctant to do so. Some of them attribute this to their workload, and some of them see these efforts as futile. They see their role in the community as important, but they lack the motivation, access, and knowledge to influence important stakeholders involved in policy making.

Like Croatia, social service workers in **Kosovo** learn about policy and legislation through academic coursework at the university level, as well as through trainings offered through government and non-governmental agencies. University of Prishtina offers one course on *Legislation of Social Work*. The other universities, AAB and Dardania, offer similar courses. Despite access to these courses, participants claimed that they were still unsure about how to address social policy and legislation. Generally, social service work-

ers in child protection learn about child protection policies and legislation mainly through workshops offered by government agencies and NGOs. Training activities through these organizations are often conducted in conjunction with local government bodies and local civil society organizations. These trainings aim to help child protection workers to gain a better understanding of laws and policies and to critically understand how they are related to social work and child protection.

In **Romania**, social work students learn about the current policy and legislation that exists at the time of their university study. But, there are no training programs to specifically prepare child protection workers to engage with, influence, implement, or enact policy. For example, in the *National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights for 2014-2020*, as well as the operational plan for implementing the *National Strategy*, there are no measures to support the capacity of child protection workers to implement the *National Strategy* (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Protecției Sociale și Persoanelor Vârștnice, 2014). When participants in this study were asked about the *National Strategy*, many were unaware of it and what their role was in relation to it. Similarly, when Law No. 257 ("On the protection and promotion of children's rights") was passed in 2013, which significantly changed the law related to child protection, there were no mechanisms of knowledge dissemination activities (e.g., lectures, debates, workshops, hotlines, etc.) aimed at relaying this important information to child protection workers. There was a difference in awareness and engagement among child protection workers at the DGASPC and the SPAS. DGASPC workers were aware of the change in the law, and were involved in providing feedback through the DGASPC. But SPAS workers said that they were not notified about the law and were not asked to participate in any kind of feedback process. Even if they were involved in a feedback process, SPAS workers explained that they would not know how to provide feedback since they were never trained to formulate proposals for new laws or transform their experience into legislation.

The bachelor's degree program at University of Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences in **Serbia** includes knowledge about relevant policies, but it remains unclear whether students are provided with training regarding the implementation or enactment of relevant

policies. Outside of the university system, there is a training program entitled *The Roles and Responsibilities of Local Governments in the Implementation of the Law on Social Welfare*, which addresses: the field of social protection, system of services, service standards, and the regulatory system; improving the knowledge of the public procurement system of social services; improvement of knowledge on the role of local governments and service providers, in mutual relations as well as in relations with other social actors. Despite these programs, the capacity and possibility for social service workers to influence and implement policy is modest. Participants—both direct practitioners and participants in macro-level positions—expressed that they do not have sufficient knowledge of policy nor the capacity to advocate for themselves or for service users. In the instances when they attempted to influence legislation or to present data before a policymaking body, participants expressed that their attempts were disregarded or not noticed. Unsuccessful attempts prompted participants to abandon their efforts, because “The system is not arranged as to enable us to demonstrate our knowledge.”

### **Practice**

#### *Description of practicum programs*

The core mechanism of bridging the classroom to practice is through the practicum (also referred to as field internship, field placement, field practice), which is a required part of most social work education programs throughout southeast Europe. The practicum experience gives students the opportunity to practice what they learn in a real practice environment under the supervision of experienced social service workers. Most education programs in this study make efforts to integrate practice into the curricula. Students take practice-based courses throughout their training programs. However, across countries, programs face challenges related to monitoring and evaluating students’ practicum experience and thereby assuring the quality of this important learning opportunity. Furthermore, participants noted that the short duration of practicums is directly related to the quality of the practicum experience.

In **Albania**, the Bologna Charter’s shift to a three-year bachelor’s degree has reduced students’ time spent in practicum in lieu of a classroom focus. Before Bologna, the practicum was spread throughout the third and fourth years of the bachelor’s program. But now,

the practicum is carried out in the last semester of the fourth year. This reduction in practice hours in Albanian social work education is below the standard in other social work programs such as in Sweden, the United Kingdom, or the United States, where practice occupies at least one-third of the social work curricula. However, when compared to other programs in the region and some in the European Union, Albania places a strong emphasis on the practicum. While educators are concerned with the length of the practicum, students in this study expressed concerns about the quality of the practicum experience including difficulties in identifying a practicum, lack of good supervision within the practicum, poor coordination between the university and the social service agency, and a narrow scope of practice within the social service agency. To address these concerns, the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Tirana, in collaboration with the MSWY and UNICEF Albania are currently engaged in a curricula review process that looks at boosting the practice component.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, a graduate social work student is required to complete a one-year practicum (also identified as volunteer work or internship), after which the student is permitted to take the official state exam. However, the quality of this practicum experience is not monitored, and there is no data to indicate what students’ experiences are.

**Bulgaria**, students are required to complete a short practicum, which ranges between 11 and 30% of the time spent on their formal educational training. Due to the short duration of the practicum, students face challenges in learning important skills. Furthermore, like other countries in this study, there is no mechanism in place to assess the quality of the practicum experience for students in Bulgaria.

The bachelor’s and master’s social work programs in **Croatia** includes a practicum component. In fact, prior to working under the Chamber of Social Workers, students are required by law to have a supervised practicum. However, there is no data that indicate what these practicums look like, how many hours are required, and what students’ experiences are. According to the participants, academic programs tend to culminate in a final paper rather than a practicum, which indicates a disconnect between what is required for one to be a social worker and what is

practiced in education programs. Nevertheless, all participants who engaged in a practicum experience emphasized the importance of their practicum experience. Through the practicum, they had an opportunity for hands-on experience with mentors from institutions providing social services to the population:

*A lot of our students during their field practice may not get some theoretical knowledge, but they get the opportunity to learn from experts themselves.*

Generally speaking, lectures are “dry” theory. Where I learned the most is the field practice.

Practicums are also an important component of the education system in **Kosovo**, taking place in the last semester of study. Unlike the experience in other countries in the region (e.g., Albania), the data indicate that there is cooperation between the university and the social service agency facilitating the practicum. Practicums are commonly completed at CSWs and within departments of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, where students tend to focus on practice skills. Local organizations working in the field of child protection also host student practicums, where students tend to focus on research skills. Recently, a group of ten social work students were offered the opportunity to work in the Prishtina CSW’s director’s office to deliver social services, draft new policy documents, and conduct quantitative research on street children. In the eyes of the institutes hosting the practicum, assessments of students in practicums have been generally positive. Likewise, students expressed satisfaction with the practicum opportunity.

The social work curriculum in **Romania** expects students to demonstrate competencies in practice with individuals, families, groups, and organizations, though the data does not indicate how these competencies are evaluated. Practicum programs at the university-level are relatively new within social work education in Romania, so most experienced social service workers in child protection did not participate in a practicum prior to employment. Continuing education programs for social service workers do not include a practice component.

#### *Perspectives on bridging education to practice*

Despite having an opportunity for a practicum, many participants in this study noted that there were still

gaps when connecting the knowledge they learn through formal coursework to actual practice. For example, participants in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** emphasized that the academic training they receive is mainly theoretical with little to no opportunity to practice during study:

*I think these ... faculties ... are not adapted to the practice or the actual needs of the profession. Through training programs and teaching process[es], [they] use traditional learning and assessment based on the knowledge of theory. They don't use deep or problem-based learning or practical assessment. I believe that candidates who pass the training program or finish college are not able to apply theory and practice.*

*I think the main reason is that theory and practice are strongly separated. One thing is to learn in universities, but as soon you come to practical work, state and the situation are completely different. I think that the curricula should introduce more practical learning, more actual cases, many situations in which students will be able to learn “in action” to find the best way and know how to cope and behave in certain situations. So that we are better prepared for the job market that awaits us.*

Social service workers with a bachelor’s degree are modestly trained to work in child protection. As one manager explained:

*People arrive unprepared, ill-equipped to do the job the way they should. I'm really unpleasantly surprised; I'm talking about social workers ... with a master's degree. ... I want to say that what happens at universities and capacities with which [graduates] come here, are indeed worrying.*

Practitioners in Bosnia and Herzegovina also reported that they learned more through on-the-job training than through academic training: “In one year internship you learn more about practical work than in 4 years of study.” This quote underscores the potential for practice to be conducted without being grounded in evidence and therefore, the importance of practical application of knowledge throughout all formats of training programs.

The same sentiment was expressed among participants in **Bulgaria**, who identified a discrepancy between the training provided to the social service

workforce—especially within the university system—and the needs of the social service system. According to one student, “Nobody is teaching you how to work.” In fact, students identified the biggest gap in their knowledge was in the ability of the practicum experience to prepare them for practical work with children. Managers also echoed this:

*Despite the huge theoretical background they can't connect the theory with the practice.*

*The university ... is not adjusted to the dynamics of what is happening outside.*

Child protection workers in **Romania** indicated that when they started their job, they learned by doing. Generally, informal on-the-job training, along with job rotation and job mentoring, is common among social service workers in child protection in Romania. However, on-the-job training is conducted ad hoc as opposed to a structured process with procedures on feedback and improvement. Managers who participated in the study explained that they are responsible for preparing new employees, but they do not have any training on how to conduct this preparation. Some use job mentoring, but it is unclear what this process looks like in practice. Furthermore, participants noted that academic training does not cover specific working procedures in child protection. More specifically, they noted that they do not have enough academic courses to prepare them for child protection practice, and if they do receive this information through coursework, they face challenges in relating the academic knowledge to practice. Therefore, employers are responsible for orienting their new staff to these skills.

Likewise in **Serbia**, some child protection agencies have internal trainings for newly employed staff, which are also conducted on an ad hoc basis, with little determined structure.

### **Research**

The data indicate that research is a key component of training programs throughout southeast Europe, with social work students gaining exposure to both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Yet, there are variations as to how research is taught in training programs, as well as perceptions about the utility of research in the daily practice of social service workers in child protection.

This section explores research from two approaches. First, it explores how current and relevant research is integrated into training programs, emphasizing one's ability to critique and use research in practice. This is clearly not the same as having research skills to conduct one's own research. Therefore, second, this section asks how social service workers are trained to conduct their own research. Whether the emphasis is on the first perspective or the second perspective (or both) depends on the context within which the social service worker is operating.

Perhaps most relevant to social service work with children is program evaluation, which is also relevant depending on the role of the worker within the child protection system and the nature of that system. An emphasis on program evaluation began about one decade ago, when international NGOs and United Nations programs demanded that projects be evaluated for effectiveness. Agencies implementing these programs relied on foreign consultants to conduct these evaluations, thereby bypassing a capacity-building opportunity within many countries in southeast Europe, but also ensuring that the program evaluation was independently evaluated with little bias introduced. Today, program evaluation is still not common practice in training programs for social service workers.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to exploring the above areas, this section also explores common perceptions about the utility of research and the realities of its application in daily social service workers' practice.

### *Overview of research in training programs*

In **Albania** at University of Tirana's bachelor's social work program, research methods are taught in three semesters during the first and second years: *Introduction to Statistics, Quantitative Research Methods, and Qualitative Research Methods*. However, the other two universities only require one course, *Introduction to Research Methods*. Perhaps most important is giving students the opportunity to apply their research skills through course assignments. However, due to lack of support for field-based data collection, little infrastructure to conduct statistical analysis in computer

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that in countries where there is a diversity of social service workers and few guiding frameworks for standards—such as in southeast Europe—the encouragement of individual research to base the development of practice may be prejudicial.

labs, and limited access to secondary data sources, social work students tend to graduate with minimal research skills. As one social worker from Tirana explained:

*We can't complain when it comes to research. It has been a core component of our curricula; however, I can't say I'm confident enough as we did not have much chance to practice. At the time, and I think the situation has not changed, there were no computer labs and no programs of data analysis. All in all there was an assignment that most of us were not that good at.*

Therefore, social service workers feel they are generally ill-equipped with basic knowledge of research methods and therefore are unable to conduct evaluations of child protection issues and programs.

In **Bulgaria**, in six of the ten universities where social work is taught, there are many specialized research courses ranging from methods (e.g., social inquiry, interviews, observation) to statistical analysis. The introduction of program evaluation methods is relatively new, and so there is little to no training on this within academic institutes nor non-degree training programs. It is more common practice for child protection agencies to hire an external consulting agency to conduct a program evaluation, as there tends to be no social service workers who are trained in these methods.

During academic training in **Croatia**, students in social work programs are required to take courses to develop their research competencies. Courses cover basic research methodology concepts, research design, qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods and scientific writing. However, it is unclear as to whether this type of research knowledge is relevant to the realities of Croatian social service workers' practice.

Nationally, **Kosovo** has taken limited action to strengthen research capacity. Budgets for research remains too limited to create competitiveness and innovation. Furthermore, there are very few academics qualified on research methodologies, and therefore, there are not enough courses offered and when it is taught, research is mainly taught theoretically. Practical methodological skills are rarely taught and practiced. Nevertheless, this system is slowly improving.

At University of Prishtina, bachelor's students enroll in *Basics of Statistics and Quantitative Research* in their second semester; in their third semester, they take *Qualitative Methods*. Throughout the program, students are engaged in research paper assignments. At the end of the program, students are required to write a thesis, which is often based on empirical research. Research is taught at other universities as well. For example, at AAB University, the master's program includes courses on quantitative and qualitative research. Students tend to view research as an important part of their education. Student participants indicate that they realize that research enables them to better understand social problems. Furthermore, many students felt that engaging in research made them more competent social workers. In Kosovo, NGOs working in child protection also tend to offer short-term research-focused trainings. These trainings include presenting and discussing the findings of research conducted by the NGO itself. Training on research methodologies or training on how research can be used to influence policymaking is not included. NGOs also are engaged in carrying out research and sharing the results with stakeholders, including social service workers in child protection, though there is no data to indicate how effective this process is.

Training in research is only integrated into educational programs at the university level in **Romania**. Students are also required to complete a small research project near the end of their coursework in order to graduate from the program. According to the research participants, it is highly important for students to learn how to collect and analyze relevant data in order to match social services with community needs. There is no data indicating how research methods are integrated into non-degree training programs.

Research methods are a part of the **Serbian** curricula at the bachelor's, master's, and PhD levels, with the latter two programs providing more space in the curricula to deeply explore research methods. In University of Belgrade's master's program, courses include *Research Methods in Social Work and Social Policy* and *Management of Social Work*, with the latter focusing on program evaluation. Other academic programs in Serbia include various research methods courses, however none specifically focus on program evaluation. Professionals with skills in program evaluation largely work with NGOs, but it is unclear whether NGOs organize trainings on conducting a program

evaluation. Overall, the research in Serbia indicated that research knowledge among social service workers is insufficient.

#### *Perceptions of research and the realities of practice*

Most participants in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** noted the importance of learning research methods for evaluating practice through, for example, eliciting feedback from beneficiaries. Yet, most also agreed that students do not receive necessary research training:

*I think that research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in general, is conducted rarely and far less than necessary. One of the reasons for [the] non-implementation of ... research is certainly the insufficient knowledge of research methods and research in general.*

Other participants note that they were taught scant and sometimes outdated information on the latest research methodologies related to child protection. For participants who state that they obtained theoretical knowledge about research methodologies, they expressed uncertainty about how to implement research in practice. Furthermore, student participants report that they are not sufficiently informed about research results, and when they do use research findings in coursework, the data tends to be outdated and irrelevant to the local context. The same is true for practitioners engaged in child protection work. Practitioners reported that they do not have enough time to keep up-to-date with current research.

When asked to evaluate their research competencies and to assess the need and opportunity to apply these research competencies in practice, participants in **Croatia** expressed satisfaction in their skills:

*I think they cover the basis, [such as] the understanding of the research process, and we have a lot of methods on our disposal.*

*We get qualitative and quantitative methods, action research methodology, evaluation studies...a palette of tools for research.*

However, other participants found their training in research methods lacked depth and a positive approach:

*We should have more courses. It is not realistic to put everything in one course.*

Some participants spoke about the value of research in their child protection work:

*If there is enough motivation you can find the time and we have a big opportunity because we have a lot of data.*

However, there were an equal number of participants who expressed a general aversion towards research. Motivation to engage in research was low among these participants in Croatia, which can be attributed to their feelings that research is unnecessary, irrelevant, and outside the scope of their work:

*I would rather do something else, something that helps people*

*For us, it is really not that important. I don't think that this is a part of work we should do. I must confess that when young people come to work in my center, I don't even ask them about it.*

The general distaste towards research can also be attributed to the social service workers' environment, which promotes heavy workloads and includes a lack of infrastructure both at educational institutes and within workplaces:

*Our workload is large, and when ... research comes, they feel sick.*

*Motivation is zero, they don't have adequate space, they don't have computers, and they cannot turn on SPSS*

Finally, social service workers' negative experience as research subjects themselves contributes to their aversion to research. Some participants noted that they feel exploited as participants in research, because they never receive any feedback about the results of their participation in research projects.

There are differences in perceptions of research among the different types of social service workers engaged in child protection work in **Kosovo**. Social service workers employed with NGOs often participate in the implementation of research and are aware of the importance of research to their work.

On the other hand, social service workers at the CSWs express that they are too busy with direct management of cases and have no time for additional activities such as research. Furthermore, unlike workers at NGOs, they do not view research as being important to their everyday work. They are confident that their case management skills enable them to understand problems and make correct decisions, without the need for additional research. Despite this disregard for research, a positive development comes from the CSW in Prishtina where there are efforts to develop a research team consisting of social work students, social work officers, and NGO members to train on research methodologies and to conduct research on pressing social issues.

The expectation is that upon graduation from university, social service workers in **Romania** are equipped with the skills to conduct their own research on child protection issues, but this does not match the reality. All participants said that they did not know how to do research or conduct an evaluation of the impact of their services. More than that, they claimed that they did not know how to connect research with the development of proper services in child protection. There are no continuing education programs that address research, so social service workers have no way to develop their research knowledge and skills nor learn how to conduct a program evaluation related to child protection. Yet, the main obstacle in delivering child protection services and interventions in Romania remains a dearth of data. Child protection services are not regularly evaluated and local and regional needs are unknown.

Students in **Serbia** explained that they received theoretical knowledge about research, but they were still unsure about how to implement it into practice. Particularly critical were the master's students, who viewed knowledge of research as a means to complete their final assignment, rather than a skill that they will use in the future. In several instances, students implied that their view of research depended on their instructor's emphasis on the utility of research. Research participants in **Serbia** had divided views about the relevance of research in child protection practice. Student participants and educators with less than 15 years of experience described the importance of integrating research into practice and evaluating one's own practice. Others advocated for a limited approach to research: "Knowledge should not

be of all, but is enough that [a] few people from one institution deal with that." Despite these differences, all participants claimed that the research capacity of social service workers is insufficient.

## Skills, knowledge, and learning

### *Existing skills and knowledge*

Research participants highlighted a range of diverse skills and knowledge that they learned through training programs and that they now use as practicing social service workers within child protection. Through the consensus-building exercise, participants identified the key gaps in their skills and knowledge. This section details these strengths that are already present among the social service workforce and suggests areas to focus future trainings.

Core skills and competencies for social work practice in **Albania** are taught in academic social work programs and include: interviewing skills (e.g., active listening, empathy, etc.), basic counseling skills, case assessment, evaluation and management skills, specific skills related to practice with children, etc. Participants emphasized the importance of connecting classroom learning to practice. For example, in Albania, instructors use role playing exercises to give students an opportunity to apply what they have learned in a quasi-practice setting.

Participants in **Croatia** were asked to speak about the competencies they gained through their education, they spoke of the general knowledge they gained in the training programs, followed by an emphasis on more specific areas of interest:

*We first get some general knowledge so that we can choose what we would like to do.*

*To learn how to get around in the system and to know how we should work, but only generally. Later it is on each of us.*

Participants explained that the purpose of their formal education is to provide enough theoretical knowledge and information on social work to enable them to determine the direction of their future career in social work. When describing their education in child protection, the participants identified courses in which they learned both a theoretical view of child

protection, as well as practical skills for direct social work with children and families. Such courses include topics on intergenerational transfer of violence, children with developmental difficulties, juvenile delinquency, community social work, family social policy, social work with families, child abuse and neglect, and social psychology. When asked about the competencies that they learned during their formal education, both students and practitioners spoke first about values. They described their education as giving them a sense of empathy and tolerance towards others:

*I remember our first year, when they told us that this is not a profession, it is a calling.*

*I think that the purpose of these four years is to accept these values as your own personal values and to take them as a part of yourself.*

*I think that I personally learned how to approach people, not to judge them and I see that these are things I apply not only in my work but also in my everyday relationship with my partner, with parents, people around me.*

However, some participants felt that a focus on these values was disconnected from the sometimes harsh realities of practicing social work:

*They teach them to love this work...that, in a way, gives them admiration for this work, but they don't prepare them for the reality, that we are transformed into bureaucrats.*

Participants also noted that their education did not prepare them with the applied skills to work with a variety of populations, reflecting a disconnect between the training's concepts of social work practice and the reality of practice with diverse populations:

*A lot of techniques taught here are applicable only with preschool and early school children.*

*I think that many techniques taught here would provoke aggression if applied to teenagers and older [people].*

Participants in Croatia view their formal university education as a source of both concrete knowledge that includes practical skills of working with people, as well as a source of values and attitudes that contribute to a sense of professional integrity.

CSAs in **Moldova** identified their greatest strength as providing social benefits, material aid, and winter support. Other SAs in Moldova identified assessment of cases, highlighting the needs of children, and working with children as the skills they are most confident in. The CSAs described some of the training courses that they have participated in on specific topics such as tuberculosis, human trafficking, and application of a particular law. The CSAs also identified the courses that they found to most useful in their everyday practice including case management, cooperation in a multi-disciplinary team, and assessment of children's needs. Direct specialists noted taking similar trainings to those of the CSAs in addition to courses on foster care (professional parent assistant) services and family support.

#### *Identified training gaps*

This research aimed to better understand the potential areas that social service workers identified as being important for further training. Through a consensus-building exercise during focus group discussion, participants identified key gaps in their skills and knowledge, which may inform the development of future training programs. Table 8 shows the final lists developed by research participants in each country. Most countries focused on the general training gaps among social service workers; however, Bosnia and Herzegovina divided training gaps into initial training for students and ongoing education through continuing studies, while Bulgaria divided training gaps into direct practice and working conditions.

**Table 9: Identified Training Gaps by Country**

<b>Albania</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social work skills in general and specifically working with children</li> <li>knowledge of child protection policy and legal framework</li> <li>research methods (skills on designing and conducting research)</li> <li>methods of evaluation</li> <li>organization and managerial skills</li> <li>social work supervision and mechanisms against professional burnout</li> <li>skills to work in team and multi-disciplinary groups</li> <li>use of technology in delivering child protection services</li> <li>advocacy</li> <li>conflict resolution and negotiation skills</li> </ul>	
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<b>Initial Training of Students</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social and communication skills</li> <li>skills to work with children</li> <li>organizational skills</li> <li>problem-solving skills</li> <li>altruism</li> </ul>	<b>Continuing Education of Practitioners</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expertise/competence (e.g., law, etc.)</li> <li>commitment (e.g., empathy, humanism, agility, dedication to work, etc.)</li> <li>social and political activity in the community</li> </ul>
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Direct Practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>techniques for working with aggressive clients</li> <li>therapeutic activities</li> <li>work with families</li> <li>resolving conflicts</li> <li>skills for working with children with developmental disabilities or behavioral problems</li> <li>risk prevention</li> <li>viewing the child as a child and not a case</li> </ul>	<b>Work Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ethical behavior</li> <li>communication between institutions</li> <li>certification of social workers and social work</li> <li>best practices and exchange of experience between institutions working with minority populations</li> <li>continuous training linked to the level of experience of the social workers</li> <li>interactive, self-reflective group in social work trainings</li> <li>unified standards in training and assessment</li> <li>universal training program for all social service workers through all training institutions</li> </ul>
<b>Croatia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communication skills (e.g., active listening, conflict management, general counselling skills, critical thinking)</li> <li>legal regulations and community work</li> <li>personal development skills (e.g., self-care, opportunities for continuing education, supervision, personal responsibility in decision-making, general organizational skills)</li> </ul>	
<b>Moldova</b>	<b>Community Social Assistants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>case management</li> <li>child protection</li> <li>assessment, monitoring, and decision-making</li> </ul>	<b>Other Social Assistants</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>report writing and documentation</li> </ul>
<b>Romania</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>intervention and assessment methods</li> <li>communication techniques</li> <li>intervention alternatives</li> <li>intervention strategies</li> <li>community services development</li> <li>prevention services development</li> <li>how to develop opportunities for social problem prevention</li> <li>interpersonal skills</li> <li>leadership skills</li> <li>establishing objectives and benchmarks</li> <li>persuasion and influence in social work</li> <li>self-management</li> <li>teamwork</li> </ul>	
<b>Serbia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communication with beneficiaries who are challenging to work with (e.g., violators, victims of violence, parents of at-risk children), as well as written and documenting skills</li> <li>direct practice with children (e.g., best interests of the child, child participation, children's identity, communication skills with different kinds of children, vulnerable groups)</li> <li>strategic skills (e.g., decision-making, intervention planning, practice evaluation, the case management cycle)</li> </ul>	

In addition to the above identified training needs, participants also commented on how future trainings should be delivered including an emphasis on trainings that meet their actual needs, practice-based trainings, and topics that go in-depth. The responsibility of training programs meeting social service workers actual needs was underscored in this quote from an experienced social worker in **Albania**:

*We've received endless trainings, but what has been missing is a good planning to match the offer with the needs. I really hope with to change in the future. I don't need for each training to start from scratch, definition and forms of violence. I have other needs, but no one has asked me before tailoring the program. The education plan should meet my career development.*

This participant's comment also reflects the diversity of individuals within the social service workforce in terms of knowledge and experience. The challenge lies in developing training programs that meet the needs of a diverse group of social service workers, whether they have basic knowledge of a topic or not.

The participants in **Croatia** criticized lecture-based trainings where they are not given the opportunity to apply their knowledge. Another criticism is that trainings present superficial knowledge.

Participants in **Serbia** suggested potential methods for training. A large number of participants had not considered training via a webinar format via the internet. Participants explained that they would consider the option depending on the following criteria: instructor, interest in topic, applicability of topic to practice, potential for future advancement, duration, and cost. For participants, it was important if the training was recognized by Serbia's Chamber of Social Workers, so attendees could obtain points for license renewal. About half of the participants (especially those under the age of 40) indicated that they would allocate a moderate sum of money (50-100 Euros) for training that they considered to be useful and interesting. The other half of the participants felt that their already low rate of remuneration would make paying for a training unfeasible and that their workplace should provide these trainings for free.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides insight into the complex realities facing social service workers in child protection. In doing so, it indicates areas to improve and support the social service workforce. Even though this study focuses on social service workers rather than service users, strengthening the social service system will ultimately benefit the child protection system and the beneficiaries (e.g., children, families, communities)

who are in direct contact with the system. The following is a list of recommendations divided into different levels including: government institutions, academic institutions, professional associations, and NGO and civil society. However, as Table 9 indicates, these recommendations may involve multiple levels of engagement at different levels in order to be effectively implemented.

**Table 10: Recommendations and Roles of Different Institutions**

Recommendation	Government Institutions	Academic Institutions	Professional Associations	NGO and Civil Society
Develop national frameworks	■			
Conduct systematic curricula review of university academic programs		■		
Carry out further research on the social service workforce in the region		■		
Develop an advocacy strategy			■	
Make current research, policy, and practice accessible			■	
Facilitate exchange among social service workers			■	
Improve working conditions				■
Support supervisory relationships				■
Coordinate relevant and in-depth training opportunities				■

Key:	■ = primary role	■ = support role	■ = tertiary role
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### Government Institutions

#### ***Develop national frameworks***

Despite the existence of legislation relating to the social service workforce in many countries, this research indicates that few steps have been taken to systematically strengthen the social service workforce in the countries in the region. One exception is the development of accredited training programs in countries such as Serbia, which indicates movement towards professionalization through national frameworks. Nevertheless, social service workers still generally operate under vague remits, and there is little

movement to solidify these. Even when frameworks are in place, their enforcement is less pronounced.

New mechanisms should aim to develop relevant accreditation, licensing, and quality assurance systems. Furthermore, frameworks could outline mandatory basic competencies for child protection workers, thereby defining and strengthening the scope of official social service worker activities. Implementation of such mechanisms would ensure that the social service workforce is adequately educated on relevant topics and supported to carry out critical child protection tasks. It is critical that these mechanisms

include an understanding and acknowledgement of the official responsibilities and duties of multiple social service workers, not just those educated formally through the university system. Such frameworks should reflect the context of the system and the identified needs of social service workers within this system. Most importantly, all of these mechanisms would have to be embodied in legislation.

We should also continue to discuss whether social service workers should be given a higher status commensurate with public officials in the community such as police, teachers, and doctors. As the participants in Moldova indicated, there is no consensus as to whether this professionalization would help address challenges facing the workforce such as high turnover.

## Academic Institutions

### **Conduct review of university academic programs**

Formal university education in social work should be evaluated and modified to ensure that it is context-specific to each country and relevant to the training needs of students, especially those who will be engaging in child protection work. Any evaluation should engage with international standards such as the *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession* (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), which suggests nine sets of standards including:

1. the academic program's core purpose or mission statement;
2. program objectives and outcomes; program curricula including fieldwork;
3. core curricula;
4. professional staff;
5. social work students, structure, administration, governance and resources;
6. cultural diversity;
7. and social work values and ethics.

An evaluation of any academic program should also ensure that it adequately prepares students to effectively work with service users through effective practice based on evidence-based approaches that are relevant to the context.

Within an academic review, the practicum process should also be appropriately assessed and revised to include the following:

- criteria for type or practicum institute;
- type of work the student will engage in to meet their training needs;
- duration of practicum in conjunction with coursework;
- supervision of student in the practicum setting; and
- monitoring and evaluation of student skills.

Data on practicums across training programs in the region could inform more specific recommendations to improve the practicum process and also potentially lead to the development of international practicum exchanges.

### **Carry out further research on the social service workforce in the region**

Several research limitations were noted at the beginning of this report. For example, the data tended to focus on formal, paid government social workers with less attention paid towards paraprofessional and non-governmental social workers. Individuals social workers engaged in direct practice were also overemphasized, eclipsing community-based approaches as well as larger macro-level understandings of the social service system. Finally, there are several promising initiatives that were not captured in this study, including the Erasmus Programme and the Swiss Haute Ecole Spécialisée project at the Universities of Tirana and Pristina.

This initial research represents a first step in mapping the social service workforce in southeast Europe. Therefore future research would benefit from improving upon this research and filling some of the gaps presented here. As a preliminary list, future research projects may want consider the following:

- to oversample or make an explicit focus on unpaid and/or paraprofessional social service workers who represent an important element of the social service system, ensuring that their voices and experiences are included in research on the social service workforce;
- to include a focus on not just direct practice, but also community-based approaches to social service work, especially as related to child protection;
- to evaluate the larger, macro-level social service system, while examining important linkages (or gaps) with other sectors such as health, justice, and education;

- to map and evaluate promising formal and informal initiatives that aim to strengthen the social service workforce in southeast Europe;
- to collect longitudinal data on graduates of social work programs to assess their training, early years on the job, job experiences, and continuing education, among other variables; and
- to understand how social service workers function with other disciplines, such as health and education.

## Professional Associations

### ***Develop an advocacy strategy***

The data clearly indicate that social service work is not well recognized in the region. There is a weak understanding of the role and scope of social service work practice among the general public, civil society, and beneficiaries. How can we challenge the narrow delineations of social service workers as merely administering financial benefits or, for those working in child protection, “taking away children”?

A key action step would be to develop an advocacy strategy to mobilize political leaders (and others in positions of power) to invest more in the social service workforce. One suggestion would be to analyze the budgetary allocations for certain social issues (e.g., child protection, child poverty) and estimate the financial cost of these social issues on the national economy. An argument could be made that investing in preventative approaches such as the training and support of social service workers to address these issues may help to lower the overall cost of child welfare to the government through, for example, prevention of family disintegration through family strengthening programs.

In developing an advocacy strategy, it will be important to draw upon relevant international standards that promote the development of the social service workforce and the child protection system, such as the *Framework for Strengthening the Social Service Workforce* (Bess, López, & Tomaszewski, 2011), the MEASURE Evaluation indicators (MEASURE Evaluation, n.d.), and the *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession* (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), which can also be used as leverage to lobby for more resources.

Once the “value” of the social service workforce has been established, advocacy efforts could focus on improving the infrastructure the social service workers operate within including functional working conditions, mandatory (and effective) supervision, adequate remuneration, etc. General advocacy highlighting the significance of the social service workforce could lead to increased recognition of the role of the social service workforce and may improve social service workers’ motivation and practice. Advocacy for the social service workforce would not only benefit social service workers and the child protection system, but also service users including children, families, and communities through the provision of high quality social service practice.

### ***Make current research, policy, and practice accessible***

The region has a wealth of knowledge and experience related to research and policy. However, research and policy in constant flux, and busy social service workers find it difficult to keep up with new and relevant developments. As noted in the Croatia research, laws and regulations change often, preventing successful implementation of interventions and reducing trust in the system.

Professional associations could help to culture a system by which relevant research, policy, and practice is shared with busy child protection workers in an accessible format. Knowledge mobilization mechanisms such as simple summaries of current research, policy, and practice findings based on current trends and best practice could be shared with social service workers via the mode of their choice (e.g., mail, email, text message, Facebook). The *Child Protection Hub for South East Europe* serves as an important platform for mobilizing and sharing knowledge among social service workers in the region, making current findings accessible for regional social service workers.<sup>□</sup> The “journal watch” model (Gough, Lajoie, Shlonsky, & Trocmé, 2009) could be adapted to share important and culturally-relevant research, policy, and practice. The Child Protection Hub could also help to translate relevant scholarship that might be of mutual interest between regional countries.

### **Facilitate exchange among social service workers**

There is a clear need for better cooperation and communication among actors in child protection, and professional organizations could help to facilitate this

exchange. Social service work educators and practitioners should intensify their exchange of knowledge and skills through common research projects, designing of curricula and lecturing, and social work practice placement activities. As the Serbia report suggests, exchange among social service workers is also another way for older generations of social service workers to pass along their knowledge to a junior workers. Some NGOs in Romania provide opportunities for participation in staff exchange programs. Staff exchange increases both personal and professional development, stimulates creative ideas, enhances relationships, and strengthens professional knowledge and practice. This exchange could start as a national endeavor, with support from national-level and regional professional associations, as well as The Child Protection Hub for South East Europe who could easily dedicate a section of their website to host an exchange among social service workers in the region. Eventually, this endeavor could expand to international exchange with global organizations such as International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance.,

## **NGO and Civil Society**

### ***Improve working conditions***

Social service workers clearly face multiple challenges not just from practice, but also from the infrastructure within which they operate. The research indicated that social service workers face a challenging work environment as a result of heavy workloads, low remuneration, sub-par infrastructure, fragile motivation of social service workers, all compounded by a lack of public and political commitment to the profession.

Even if legal frameworks and mechanisms are in place, social service workers still operate within a system that lacks practical physical resources. Social service workers, including child protection workers, must be equipped with the necessary physical infrastructure, as well as incentivized and motivated at their workplaces with decent salary and other non-financial incentives for professional development. Improving the practical everyday arrangements that social service workers operate within will not only improve practice, but improve overall morale.

### ***Support supervisory relationships***

Ample and effective supervision is also key to an improved and positive workplace. Even though most participants noted the importance of supervision, supervision in practice was a major gap across the countries. Social work professional supervision must be emphasized within social work practice, not only during students' practicum experience, but throughout one's social service work career. There are multiple benefits to creating an environment where supervision is a key component, as social service workers begin to view themselves as role models and supportive peers. The Child Protection Hub could assist with the improvement of supervision by providing resources to enhance the supervisory relationship.

### ***Coordinate relevant and in-depth training opportunities***

The existing accredited training programs in, for example, Serbia, represent a strength and opportunity within the social service workforce system representing a significant resource for students and professionals alike. Countries in the region would benefit from identifying relevant trainings and organizing them in a central accessible database by which social service workers can search for and enroll in. This would create a mechanism by which to avoid repetition, as well as to ensure that the trainings reach a wide variety of social service workers. This database would serve as a data point by which to determine gaps in social service worker education.

Participants across countries noted that trainings tend to be irrelevant to their everyday practice and are carried out in a way that does not allow for in-depth knowledge and practice. Among the countries in the region, there is a clear need for improved and continuing trainings that are relevant and cover the topic in depth. Based on the findings from this study, potential topics for trainings include:

- avoiding burnout, dealing with stress and vicarious trauma, well-being, and self-care;
- children's rights and participation
- skills to work with vulnerable groups of children (e.g., sexual violence, domestic violence, at-risk children)
- family preservation and reunification skills and practice
- culturally competent social work practice with children and families

- organizational skills (e.g., time management)
- legal skills (e.g., new laws, policymaking competencies, influencing policymakers and government institutions, putting policy into practice)
- communication skills (e.g., with different populations, with colleagues in different institutes)
- training supervisors so they can recognize, appreciate, and reward staff performance
- program evaluation
- social action and community organizing

The above list provides some examples of potential training needs. However, it is important that any training needs be based on the context where the training will take place, as well as the background, experience, and responsibilities of the social service workers who will participate in the training.

Trainings should avoid a narrow focus, and rather reflect the wide variety of skills social service workers have, their different levels of work experience (including trainings specifically for new workers and for experienced managers), and the diverse populations they engage with. Most importantly, trainings should ensure that the knowledge is culturally relevant and culturally grounded, avoiding the undercurrent of professional imperialism that can affect education programs.

Learning preferences should be considered when designing and delivering trainings. Trainings need not be the traditional format (e.g., in-person in a classroom). In fact, according to the participants in this study, experiential learning, working groups, and case studies are among the most appreciated learning tools that students and practitioners of social work would like to be engaged in. Trainings should be continually evaluated for relevance and effectiveness. It would also be important to learn whether different training options impacted social service workers motivation levels.

Considering the financial limitations among students and social service workers, costs for training should be kept low or free to provide social service workers equal opportunity to participate. Furthermore, workplaces should be encouraged to give social service workers time off to attend trainings or host the trainings themselves.

It is important to note that the research indicated practical, face-to-face trainings were more beneficial

to social workers than online courses. However, online training options, which may be more accessible to social service workers throughout the region, should also be considered to address gaps in social service worker's training. The Child Protection Hub could also be a mechanism by which to host webinars, online trainings, and tutorials. These trainings could be accredited by national bodies so as to contribute the social service workers' continuing education requirements and overall professional development.

The suggested topics elicited through the consensus-building exercises at the country-level is a start to understanding the identified needs of the social service workforce. But a more thorough and rigorous assessment of social service workforce training needs at the country-level (and among the urban and rural contexts) is warranted.



## CONCLUSIONS

This report represents a first, yet promising, step towards mapping the social service workforce in the southeast Europe region. The research highlights the diversity and complexity of contexts—including challenges and opportunities—social service workers operate within. In order to better support the social service workforce in the region, multiple actors including government, academic institutions, professional organizations, and NGO civil society institutions should be engaged in a range of activities: to create relevant and supportive legislation, to develop and strengthen educational programs, to improve working condi-

tions, to create connections amongst those involved in the social service workforce at multiple levels, and to raise awareness about social service work. Hopefully, the ideas contained within the report will spark further discussion, momentum, and most importantly, action, to strengthening the social service workforce in the region. In strengthening the social service workforce, we strengthen the child protection system, which ultimately benefits children, families, and communities.



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## APPENDIX B: TOOLS FOR FIELD-LEVEL DATA COLLECTION

### Tool 1: Introduction and Informed Consent

#### Introduction and Study Purpose

My name is [name]. I am working on behalf of the Child Protection Hub ([www.childhub.org](http://www.childhub.org)), a multi-partner regional initiative to support child protection professionals across Southeast Europe. I am part of a team who is mapping social service workforce needs in eight countries in southeast Europe: Albania, Bosnia in Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, and Serbia. The study is supported by the EU, the Oak Foundation, and the Austrian Development Cooperation. The research will provide us with valuable information regarding a general overview of professional, paraprofessional, and community-level child protection practice in the region, as well as the social service workforce skills, knowledge and interests in order to strengthen the child protection workforce and improve the overall child protection mechanisms.

#### Material Benefits

The study findings will directly inform the Child Protection Hub overall strategy to support the strengthening of child protection systems in the region. There are no direct material benefits to individuals participating in the research.

#### Types of Questions

I will ask you questions about child protection practice in [country], specifically addressing how those practicing child protection are initially trained and how they continue to learn while practicing.

#### Skipping Questions or Ending Participation

You can decide not to participate in the interview, or you can tell me that you prefer not to answer a specific question, and I will skip the question. There is no need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If you like, you can end the interview at any time and this will not affect your relationship with the Child Protection Hub or the project funders.

#### Confidentiality

All of your answers will be kept private and confidential, and the only people who will have access to this information are the researchers for the study. When we write up the results of the study, we will not connect your name to anything that you said.

#### Contact

If you have any questions about the research, or if problems arise, you may contact: *[please insert the contact name and details (telephone, email) of each country associate]*

Are you willing to participate in this study? **Yes / No**

If **no**, explain why: \_\_\_\_\_

If **yes**, the interviewer should sign below and continue with the interview.

*I confirm that I have given all the above information to the participant, and s/he has agreed to participate.*

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tool 2: Demographic Questions for All Participants**

Please ask all participants to answer the following demographic questions. For surveys, you can include this sheet as a cover sheet. For semi-structured interviews, you can ask these questions as a part of the interview. For focus group discussions, it might save time if you have a sheet for each individual to complete at the beginning of the discussion.

Question	Answer
What is your gender?	
What is your age?	
Please describe your educational background.	
Approximately, how many years have you been working with children and families?	

**Tool 3: Semi-Structured Interview Guide with Academics and Managers****Informed Consent**

Review informed consent form (pages 5-6), then proceed with the interview.

**Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am very interested to hear your opinion about the social service workforce and how it relates to child protection in [country].

**Demographics**

Review demographics questions (page 7), then proceed.

**General**

What does the general public think about social work in [country]? What does civil society think about social work in [country]? What do beneficiaries think about social work in [country]?

Tell me about *your* understanding of child protection in [country].

Who does child protection in [country]?

- What are the official names and roles of the different kinds of child protection practitioners (e.g., social service workers, social workers, paraprofessionals, community workers, etc.)?
- In what kinds of agencies do they work (e.g., NGO, government agencies, etc.)?
- What areas/regions of [country] do they work (i.e. are some areas served better than others)?
- How many are trained each year? If possible, please provide numbers for how many are trained each year for the past five years.

**Curriculum**

How are individuals who work in child protection trained (formally and non-formally)?

- What kind of training do they receive before starting their professional work (e.g., diploma program, academic training such as a BSW/MSW, CBO/NGO training, etc.)? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?
- What kind of in-service and/or continuing education do they receive after they have completed their initial training? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?

**Research**

Do you think basic knowledge of research methods (e.g., baseline studies, program evaluation) is important for child protection practitioners in [country]?

- If yes, do you think that individuals working in child protection are equipped with basic knowledge of research methods in order to conduct their own research on child protection issues and programs? Please explain.

Is research—such as research studies and other research publications on current child protection is-

sues—integrated into initial and/or in-service/continuing education training programs?

- If yes, please explain how.
- If no, please explain why not.

### **Policy**

How do individuals working in child protection learn about child protection policies and legislation?

What types of policies/legislation are included in training programs?

Do training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare these individuals to engage with and/or influence policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

Do training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare these individuals to implement and/or enact policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

### **Practice**

What types of skills and core practice competencies for child protection practice are identified in existing training curricula and programs?

Is child protection practice through internships or practicums integrated into training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, please describe where these activities take place (e.g., within [country]'s borders) and how these activities are structured.

Explain how the current training programs are or are not relevant and/or applicable to the daily work of individuals working in child protection in [country].

Once they complete their training, how do individuals engaged in child protection keep their skills updated?

### **Conclusion**

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?

Do you have any questions for me?

## **Tool 4: Semi-Structured Interview Guide with Practitioners**

### **Informed Consent**

*Review informed consent form (pages 5-6), then proceed with the interview.*

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am very interested to hear your opinion about the social service workforce and how it relates to child protection in [country].

### **Demographics**

*Review demographics questions (page 7), then proceed.*

### **General**

What does the general public think about social work in [country]? What does civil society think about social work in [country]? What do beneficiaries think about social work in [country]?

Tell me about *your* understanding of child protection in [country].

Who does child protection in [country]?

- What are the official names and roles of the different kinds of child protection practitioners (e.g., social service workers, social workers, paraprofessionals, community workers, etc.)?
- In what kinds of agencies do they work (e.g., NGO, government agencies, etc.)?
- What areas/regions of [country] do they work (i.e. are some areas served better than others)?

## Curriculum

How were you trained (formally and non-formally) in child protection?

- What kind of training did they receive before starting your professional work (e.g., diploma program, academic training such as a BSW/MSW, CBO/NGO training, etc.)? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?
- What kind of in-service and/or continuing education do you participate in? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?

## Research

Do you think basic knowledge of research methods (e.g., baseline studies, program evaluation) is important for child protection practitioners in [country]?

- If yes, do you feel equipped with basic knowledge of research methods in order to conduct their own research on child protection issues and programs? Please explain.

Was research—such as research studies and other research publications on current child protection issues—integrated into any of your training?

- If yes, please explain how.
- If no, please explain why not.

## Policy

Were child protection policies and legislation included in your training?

- If yes, please describe how you learned about these child protection policies and legislation.

What types of policies/legislation were included in your training programs?

Do you feel that your training—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepared you to engage with and/or influence policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

Did your training—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare you to implement and/or enact policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

## Practice

What types of skills and core practice competencies for child protection practice did you learn in your training—both prior to starting professional work and/or through in-service/continuing education?

Was child protection practice through internships or practicums integrated into your training program—both prior to starting professional work and/or through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, please describe where these activities took place (e.g., within [country]'s borders) and how these activities were structured.

Explain how your training was or was not relevant and/or applicable to your daily work in child protection in [country].

Have you or do you intend to update your skills through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, please explain how you will do this.
- If no, why not?

## Conclusion

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?

Do you have any questions for me?

## **Tool 5: Case Story Interview Guide with Practitioners**

### **Case Story**

Without naming any names, please describe step-by-step a recent child protection case that you managed.

*At this point, the researcher should co-create (with the practitioner) a step-by-step outline of the case management process.*

*For each step of the case management process, ask the following questions:*

- Who decided that this would be the action taken? Were there other options available? If so, why was this specific option chosen?
- Do you remember any part of your training—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—that prepared you to make this decision?
- Do you think that the child and/or family was satisfied or dissatisfied with the action taken at this point? If so, how do you know?

*Ensure that the practitioner includes the following details:*

- *How the practitioner came into contact with the child and/or family;*
- *The people or services to whom the practitioner referred the child and/or family;*
- *Where the child is today and whether or not the respondent is still in contact.*

*When the practitioner has finished the story, repeat the story back to him/her to ensure that you have not missed any details and that you have captured all of the steps.*

### **Closing Questions**

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

## **Tool 6: Focus Group Discussion Guide with Educators**

### **Informed Consent**

*Review informed consent form (pages 5-6).*

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am very interested to hear your opinion about the social service workforce and how it relates to child protection in [country].

### **Demographics**

*Review demographics questions (page 7).*

### **General**

What is the general public's perception of social work in [country]? What do beneficiaries think about social work in [country]?

Tell me about your understanding of child protection in [country].

Who does child protection in [country]?

- What are the official names and roles of the different kinds of child protection practitioners (e.g., social service workers, social workers, paraprofessionals, community workers, etc.)?
- In what kinds of agencies do they work (e.g., NGO, government agencies, etc.)?
- What areas/regions of [country] do they work (i.e. are some areas served better than others)?
- How many are trained each year? If possible, please provide numbers for how many are trained each year for the past five years.

### **Curriculum**

How are individuals who work in child protection trained (formally and non-formally)?

- What kind of training do they receive before starting their professional work (e.g., diploma program, academic training such as a BSW/MSW, CBO/NGO training, etc.)? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, pro-

gram and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?

- What kind of in-service and/or continuing education do they receive after they have completed their initial training? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?

What is your role in the training process?

### Research

Do you think basic knowledge of research methods (e.g., baseline studies, program evaluation) is important for child protection practitioners in [country]?

- If yes, do you think that individuals working in child protection are equipped with basic knowledge of research methods in order to conduct their own research on child protection issues and programs? Please explain.

Is research—such as research studies and other research publications on current child protection issues—integrated into initial and/or in-service/continuing education training programs?

- If yes, please explain how.
- If no, please explain why not.

### Policy

How do individuals working in child protection learn about child protection policies and legislation?

What types of policies/legislation are included in training programs?

Do training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare these individuals to engage with and/or influence policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

Do training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare these individuals to implement and/or enact policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

### Practice

*Conduct Consensus Building Exercise* (see page 27)

What types of skills and core practice competencies for child protection practice are identified in existing training curricula and programs?

Is child protection practice through internships or practicums integrated into training programs—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, please describe where these activities take place (e.g., within [country]'s borders) and how these activities are structured.

Explain how the current training programs are or are not relevant and/or applicable to the daily work of individuals working in child protection in [country].

Once they complete their training, how do individuals engaged in child protection keep their skills updated?

### IT Skills

Do you have access to the internet at work and/or home?

- If yes, do you use a desk computer/laptop or a smartphone/tablet? How often and for what purposes do you use the internet?

Do you think online components should be incorporated into social workers' trainings and continuing education?

- If yes, what kind of technologies should be incorporated into social workers' trainings and continuing education? How would you go about selecting and recommending such online learning opportunities?
- If no, what needs to be changed so that online components are incorporated into social workers' trainings and continuing education?

Do you use online technologies for training?

- If yes, what kind of technologies do you use? What motivates you to use online technologies for training? What challenges do you face?
- If no, why not? What would you need to be able to do so?

### **Conclusion**

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?

Do you have any questions for me?

## **Tool 7: Focus Group Discussion Guide with Practitioners**

### **Informed Consent**

*Review informed consent form (pages 5-6).*

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am very interested to hear your opinion about the social service workforce and how it relates to child protection in [country].

### **Demographics**

*Review demographics questions (page 7).*

### **General**

What is the general public's perception of social work in [country]? What do beneficiaries think about social work in [country]?

Tell me about your understanding of child protection in [country].

Who does child protection in [country]?

- What are the official names and roles of the different kinds of child protection practitioners (e.g., social service workers, social workers, paraprofessionals, community workers, etc.)?
- In what kinds of agencies do they work (e.g., NGO, government agencies, etc.)?

What areas/regions do they work (i.e. are some areas served better than others)?

What other actors do you collaborate with in your daily practice? How do you think that this impacts your work?

### **Curriculum**

How were you trained (formally and non-formally) in child protection?

- What kind of training did they receive before starting your professional work (e.g., diploma program, academic training such as a BSW/MSW, CBO/NGO training, etc.)? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?
- What kind of in-service and/or continuing education do you participate in? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?

### **Research**

Do you think basic knowledge of research methods (e.g., baseline studies, program evaluation) is important for child protection practitioners in [country]?

- If yes, do you think that individuals working in child protection are equipped with basic knowledge of research methods in order to conduct their own research on child protection issues and programs? Please explain.

Is research—such as research studies and other research publications on current child protection issues—integrated into initial and/or in-service/continuing education training programs?

### **Policy**

Were child protection policies/legislation included in your training?

- If yes, please describe how you learned about these child protection policies/legislation.

What types of policies/legislation were included in your training programs?

Do you feel that your training—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepared you to engage with and/or influence policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

Did your training—both prior to starting professional work and through in-service/continuing education—prepare you to implement and/or enact policy/legislation?

- If yes, please describe an example of this.

### **Practice**

*Conduct Consensus Building Exercise (see page 27)*

What types of skills and core practice competencies for child protection practice did you learn in your training—both prior to starting professional work and/or through in-service/continuing education?

Was child protection practice through internships or practicums integrated into your training program—both prior to starting professional work and/or through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, please describe where these activities took place (e.g., within [country]'s borders) and how these activities were structured.

Explain how your training was or was not relevant and/or applicable to your daily work in child protection.

Please describe what kind of supervision you receive in your current position.

- Do you think that this supervision is enough for you to be an effective worker?

Once you completed your training, have you or do you intend to update your skills through in-service/continuing education?

- If yes, how will do this?
- If no, why not?

### **IT Skills**

Do you have access to the internet at work and/or home?

- If yes, do you use a desk computer/laptop or a smartphone/tablet? How often and for what purposes do you use the internet?

Do you use online technologies for training?

- If yes, what motivates you to do so? What challenges do you face?
- If no, why not? What would you need to be able to use online technologies for training?

If you wanted to engage with online learning opportunities, what criteria would you use to go about choosing?

- Would you prefer a structured online training where you can interact with instructors and/or be included in scheduled online webinars OR a self-paced online training that you follow on your own when you have the time?

Would you be willing to pay a small fee for online training?

- If yes, how much?

### **Conclusion**

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?

Do you have any questions for me?

## **Tool 8: Focus Group Discussion Guide with Students**

### **Informed Consent**

*Review informed consent form (pages 5-6).*

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am very interested to hear your opinion about the social service workforce and how it relates to child protection in [country].

## Demographics

Review demographics questions (page 7).

### General

What is the general public's perception of social work in [country]? What do beneficiaries think about social work in [country]?

Tell me about your understanding of child protection in [country].

Please describe your motivation for studying social work in [country].

How do you pay for your studies?

What job would you like to have upon completion of your studies?

### Curriculum

How are you trained (formally and non-formally) in child protection?

- What kind of training do you currently receive (e.g., diploma program, academic training such as a BSW/MSW, CBO/NGO training, etc.)? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs?
- Do you know of any in-service and/or continuing education programs that you can participate in after you have completed your initial training? Please describe these programs (e.g., who provides the training, program and degrees available, length, etc.). What are the strengths and challenges of these training programs? Do you think you will participate in these programs once you complete your current training? Do you see any barriers to you accessing these training programs in the future?

### Research

Is research—such as research studies and other research publications on current child protection issues—integrated your current training program?

- If yes, please give an example.

Do you feel equipped with basic knowledge of research methods (e.g., baseline studies, program evaluation) in order to conduct your own research on child protection issues and programs once you are a practitioner?

- If yes, please give an example.
- If no, please discuss why not.

### Policy

Are child protection policies and legislation included in your training?

- If yes, please describe how you learned about these child protection policies and legislation. What types of policies/legislation are included in your training programs?

Do you feel as if your training is preparing you to engage with and/or influence policy/legislation?

- If yes, please discuss.

Do you feel as if your training is preparing you to implement and/or enact policy/legislation?

- If yes, please discuss.

### Practice

*Conduct Consensus Building Exercise* (see page 27)

What types of skills and core practice competencies for child protection practice are included in your training program?

Is child protection practice through internships or practicums integrated into your training program? If so, do these activities take place within [country's] borders or outside [country's] borders? Do you plan on participating in these internships or practicums?

Do you believe that your current training program is relevant and/or applicable to the daily work of individuals working in child protection in [country].

### IT Skills

Do you have access to the internet at work and/or home?

- If yes, do you use a desk computer/laptop or a smartphone/tablet? How often and for what purposes do you use the internet?

Does your study program include online components or do you use online technologies for your studies?

- If yes, what kind of technologies do you use? What motivates you to use online technologies for your studies? What challenges do you face?
- If no, why not? What would you need to be able to do so?

If you wanted to engage with online learning opportunities, how would you go about choosing?

- What criteria are important to you?
- Would you prefer a structured online training where you can interact with instructors and/or be included in scheduled online webinars OR a self-paced online training that you follow on your own when you have the time?

Would you be willing to pay a small fee for online training?

- If yes, how much?
- If no, why not?

### Conclusion

Is there anything to would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?

Do you have any questions for me?

### Tool 9: Consensus Building Exercise

Ask participants to list potential answers to the following question: What are the skills, knowledge, and learning needs of the social service workforce in [country]?

Using these answers, guide the group in eliciting, refining, reviewing, and confirming the answers into piles. Make sure that you repeat the refining process of sorting and negotiating until there is consensus among the group members.

Use the following form to record your answers.

#### Key Skill, Knowledge, and Learning Needs Identified:

Free list:

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Rank Order:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_



