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SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND THE PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT IN EUROPE AND EURASIA

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

It has been well-documented that during the Soviet era, social problems were either unrecognized or minimized in the Europe and Eurasia (E&E) region. As social sector reforms have taken root, so has an increased awareness that a well-trained social work workforce is key to the creation of an effective system of social services. Social work as a profession is relatively new to the region thus impacting the path and outcomes of these reforms. USAID Missions with an interest in social services programming in child welfare, disabilities, trafficking in persons (TIP) and domestic violence, and social assistance [social benefits and cash transfers] have identified an active and viable social work profession as critical to the success of such programming.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This report, prepared for the Social Transition Team in the USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E & E), is an outgrowth of personal interviews from the field, as well as a review of documents and literature exploring social work education and the social work practice environment in twenty-one countries of the former Soviet Bloc. The purpose of this study is to inform stakeholders about the current status of social work in the region, describe the practice environment, identify gaps between what is expected of social workers and the reality, provide examples of best practices, and make recommendations for furthering the development of social work in the region. The target countries for this study are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS: THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

According to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the social work profession “promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.” As such, social workers are a key component of modern social service provision. Among other things, they provide counseling, assist individuals in accessing social services and other benefits, lobby for the disenfranchised, and engage in actions designed to influence social policies. Building the social work profession is a complex undertaking that involves creating legislation and education programs, developing and strengthening curricula, helping to nurture professional associations for social workers, developing licensing and practice standards, and raising awareness about the need for social workers, among other things. This paper is an exploration of each of these issues and an analysis and synthesis of data, much of which is anecdotal.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTICE

Utilizing principles and practices of family and community-based social work practice, this report highlights best practice models in the region, identifies common themes based on the four-pillar framework below, and makes recommendations for continued development and cross-border collaboration. The four-pillar framework for analysis and reporting, developed from previous USAID-funded studies on community-based services in the region (Davis, 2005; 2006), includes the following elements.

Table 1: Four Pillar Framework

<p>Pillar 1 – Policy and Legal Framework Policies and laws that reflect internationally recognized standards for the profession of social work and legal/policy mandates for social work practice that reflect good practice for community care models and laws related to social work associations.</p>	<p>Pillar 2 – Structure of Services and Practice Environment Programs and services in which social workers practice, qualifications, relationships with other social workers, role of social work associations, job functions, salaries, status, relationships with clients, other professionals, and the public authorities.</p>
<p>Pillar 3 – Education and Training Acquisition of knowledge, values and skills for social workers providing direct services and those managing and supervising services. This includes professional education and training, curriculum development activities, and conferences and workshops delivered by a range of providers.</p>	<p>Pillar 4 – Outcomes and Performance Measures Outcomes for social work interventions, systems for monitoring social work inputs, cost-benefits analyses, development of evidence-based practices, research on the professionalization of social work such as salaries, standards, opinions and attitudes, client satisfaction, client outcomes, and evaluations of programs and services.</p>

COUNTRY SUMMARIES

The report provides a description of the development of social work as it evolved in each of the E & E countries selected for this study, in alphabetical order. This Executive Summary is a brief presentation of the development of social work education and critical issues in social work as it unfolded in the region, citing unique characteristics of the profession’s development in individual countries.

Social work, perceived as an “unsuitable activity for petite-bourgeois” and “unnecessary” by the communist regime (Zavirsek, 2008, p. 743), was viewed differently by the socialist leaders of the **Former Yugoslav Republics**. As early as the 1950’s, social work was recognized as important for combating social problems. The Centers for Social Work (CSW) were created in most urban municipalities in the early 1960’s. **Croatia**, believed to be the first to have university education in social work, started a 2-year program in 1952 and a 4-year program in 1972. In 2000, post-graduate studies were initiated. There is a well-defined profession of social work within the Centers for Social Work and the NGO community, with an established research and training institute and a social work journal in Croatian. In **Macedonia**, a 2-year program began in 1957 and in 1984, the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy was established at the University in Skopje. Today, they offer BA (4-year) and MA (2-year) degrees. The University is a member of the International Federation of Social Workers and International Network of Schools of Social Work. **Serbia** and **Montenegro’s** 2-year program began in 1958. Today, **Serbia** offers BA and MA degrees. In 2007, the University of Belgrade advanced social work research with the establishment of the Institute for Multidisciplinary Research. The largest Center for Social

Work in the city of Belgrade employs 190 social workers and has its own website. In **Montenegro**, social work education is well-established with close ties between the Universities of Montenegro and Belgrade. The Centers for Social Work are integrating mediation services as part of a UNICEF restorative justice initiative. In **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, a university education program started in 1958 at the University of Sarajevo and today there are BA and MA-level degree programs in three universities. Capacity-building in the Centers for Social Work provides specialized training for expanding outreach and community-based care for children deprived of parental care and families at risk. The Centers for Social Work are considered the primary employer of social workers, and hope to improve outreach and community care models.

In **Kosovo**, one of the poorest countries in the region, development of social work has been slower than in neighboring countries. The BA degree, offered at the University of Kosovska Mitrovica, the Serbian District of Albania, started in 2004, and at the University of Pristina, beginning in 2006. Building the capacity of the Centers for Social Work around issues of ethnic conflict and integration are on the social protection agenda.

In the **Balkans**, social work schools were opened in the early 1990s with social work practice initiated in social protection programs in public services and NGOs, with an emphasis on deinstitutionalization. **Romania** and **Bulgaria** opened social work schools in 1990 at the BA level, and MA programs started around 1992. In **Romania**, there has been a rapid development of social work, in part, as a response to the intense pressure to deinstitutionalize the 100,000 children separated from their families. Today, Romania is the only country with a social work law that is independent of the social protection legislation. The law also specifies requirements for a license that defines levels and qualifications for practice. Social work advocates believe that areas for future development are field education and practice specializations. In **Bulgaria**, the Law for Social Support defines the qualifications for social work, and there is a rich NGO practice environment. Social work professionals see a need for outcome research to better inform practitioners. **Albania's** social work education program started in 1992. Social work is considered to be well-integrated into public child protection and social services units. Interdisciplinary models of social work are utilized in gender violence programs. Current needs are strengthening field education and human rights content in the curriculum.

In **Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine**, the "social work specialist" degree, a 5-year program, was introduced in the early 90's as the professional degree. In general, the term "social worker" connotes a lower level of education and status. Today, they offer study at the BA (4 years), specialist (+1 year), and MA (+2 years) levels in social work and social pedagogue. Low status, low pay, and limited capacity of the existing professional associations are concerns. In **Russia**, social work and social pedagogue degrees are offered at over 120 universities. Social workers can study at the doctoral level in a related discipline such as social policy, but not in social work. Social work job functions were first defined in the Law on Basic Social Services in 1995. In **Ukraine**, degrees are offered at approximately 50 universities and colleges, graduating about 1350 students annually. The practice of social work was established as part of the Centers for Social Services for Youth in 1992. In **Belarus**, the Law on Social Work and Social Services gives social work the status of a profession. A major concern is the rural to urban migration and a need to clearly define social work practice standards.

Moldova initiated social work education at the BA level in 1997 and the MA started at the State University in Chisinau in 2007. A recent study on social work in Moldova suggests a need to move away from the "charity ideology" to an emphasis on social justice and empowerment.

The Caucasus more recently developed professional social work with the roots of social work being established in **Armenia** in response to the devastating 1988 earthquake. In **Armenia**, social work

practice is well integrated into model public and private programs. Professional education exists at the BA (1996) and MA (2000) levels. The social protection legislation includes a Social Work Law (2005) and Code of Ethics (2008) that establishes the requirements for qualified “social work specialist.” A study on the social work law suggests practice standards and a strong professional association should be pre-requisites to licensure. In **Georgia**, social work education started in 2004 at the BA level and the MA level in 2008. Research on social work jobs has identified a need to better define social work in the legislation. Social work instructors at the university have developed a curriculum reflecting Western teaching models. Certification requirements for social work practitioners specify a year’s experience and passing an exam. A licensing law is scheduled to be implemented in 2009. In **Azerbaijan**, social work education exists at the MA (2005) and BA (2008) levels and efforts are underway to educate the Ministry of Welfare about the benefits of professional social workers in social protection programs.

The countries of **Central Asia** are just now developing social work as a professional field of practice. **Kyrgyzstan**, closely modeled after Russia’s programs, provided the “social work specialist” degree (5-year) as early as 1994. They now offer the MA (2006) and BA (2008) at four universities. The Law on Social Services defines qualifications and practice standards that apply to public social services social workers. In **Kazakhstan**, social work functions are outlined in the social protection legislation and there is a public commitment to work to recognize social work, which has only recently begun as a field of study. In **Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan**, the need for social work is acknowledged, and social protection is at the beginning of reforms. NGOs providing training and practice models in social work are developing.

THE FOUR PILLARS

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- *Social Work Legislation*: Except for Romania which has a separate social work law, the legal framework that defines the practice of social work is part of social protection and social assistance legislation. Both Armenia and Romania include a Code of Ethics as part of the social work legislation.
- *Regulation of Practice (Licensure)*: Many countries assume licensure is a way to legitimize the profession, although the link between practice standards and quality of services is stronger than the link between licensure and quality. To date, Romania is the only country with a social work licensing law, with legislation proposed for Georgia in 2009.
- *Laws on Public Protection*: Although social work licensure is perceived as a way to legitimize the profession, in reality, it is a mechanism for protecting the public against exploitation and malpractice. Most countries include protections against malpractice (confidentiality, right to information and involvement in decision-making) in the social protection legislation.

STRUCTURE OF SERVICES AND PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

- *Definition of Social Work and Social Work Practice*: The meaning of “social worker,” and related terms such as social work specialist, social services, and social assistance, as defined by legislation and practice, is confused and varies from country to country.
- *Job Functions*: Most social workers are employed in public social services in jobs that emphasize the administration of social assistance benefits over psychosocial services.
- *Salaries and Low Professional Status*: One of the most consistent and pervasive issues that emerged in the course of drafting this report was low salaries for social workers and difficult working conditions (large caseloads, excessive paper work, and limited resources for clients).

- *High Status as a “Helper.”* In spite of the negatives of salary and professional status, there is status and value in “being a helper.”
- *Social Work as a Career:* There are few opportunities to advance, or to make a career in social work, as there are few management and supervisory positions.
- *Role of Independent, Private Practice:* Independent social work practice is perceived as prestigious, legitimates the profession, and frees one from the bureaucracy of public assistance programs. Only Romania provides a legal framework for private practice in social work.
- *External Labor Migration:* For the countries in which social work is more developed, and the borders more lax, trained and experienced social workers are migrating for higher paying social work jobs.
- *Internal Labor Migration and Access to Services:* The rural to urban internal migration contributes to uneven distribution of a qualified social work workforce.
- *Risk Management and Safety of Social Workers:* In cases where social workers' personal safety is at risk, there are limited risk management procedures in place.
- *Transfer of Knowledge and Specialization:* There are model cross-discipline and cross-border programs developed for victims of trafficking that have direct application to all growing fields of practice.
- *The Social Worker as Manager and Supervisor:* There is an overwhelming recognition that social work supervision contributes to quality of services, yet supervision, as practiced in the region, is primarily administrative. Models in Romania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia and St. Petersburg, Russia need increased visibility.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- *University Education:* Social work education is alive and well across the Region. The Former Yugoslav Republics have established training programs since the 1950s with Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and the Ukraine establishing programs in the early 1990s. Central Asia and the Caucasus are just establishing both the BA and MA programs. Field education in the majority of countries has not been established as formalized internships.
- *Social Work Literature:* There is a wealth of social work literature being published in English language journals and books by scholars and practitioners in the region, with more limited resources published in local languages.
- *Training and Continuing Education:* Opportunities for training and continuing education are limited for social workers due to resource and geographic constraints.
- *Professional Associations:* Professional associations and unions exist but are not well-established as a “voice of the profession of social work” with limited capacity to “service the membership.”

OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- *Social Work Practice Standards:* The link between social work practice standards and quality of service is understood. Replication of models for development and dissemination of standards that reflect the local reality are needed.
- *Outcomes in Deinstitutionalization:* Rates of deinstitutionalization decreased in districts with qualified social workers, according to statistics in Georgia.
- *Performance Measures (Indicators) and Client Outcomes:* Outcome measures, often defined as project outcomes or changes in placement, need to be redefined as measures of client well-being, using information technology for monitoring social work interventions and outcomes.

THE WAY FORWARD

This report provides recommendations derived from the findings and observations of the study, and incorporates lessons learned from the development of social work practice in other countries, especially in the United States. While the context for these events may be different, the challenges and the road forward are well-traveled by others with a shared commitment to social work. First, a model social work law would provide important guidance for social work advocates, educators, and practitioners in the region. Even without legal guidelines, the profession must establish a common ethical code and common standards of professional practice in order to give legitimacy, protect the public and raise the status of the social work profession. These standards can serve as building blocks to a shared language and a clear understanding about what social work practice should be and also what the desired outcomes should be. Social work advocates and professionals can then establish and articulate the close linkages between the value of social work and quality of service delivery. Establishing these early steps will build political will to do a more comprehensive labor market analysis and address issues of safety and licensure for social workers. These cannot be separated. Addressing these issues from a developmental perspective would then lead to initiatives to raise public awareness and the public image of the profession, basic necessities for the recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section builds on the tremendous progress made in legitimizing social work as a profession in the region. Social work's service mission, the heart and soul of the profession, presents a dilemma in the push for increased salaries and status. Changing the language from "social work promotion" to "public protection" provides a more consistent message to the public and political decision-makers. Integrating top-down (standards and accountability) and bottom-up approaches (public education, research and client empowerment) can further move social work along the trajectory from occupation to profession to career. A summary of the recommendations, not in priority order, are:

POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- *Develop and promulgate a clearly articulated scope of social work practice* using legal consultation from experts in social work law.
- *Focus on the development of ethical codes and standards for professional practice and mechanisms for accountability* before pushing for licensure. This can strengthen the "voice" of social work for negotiating the political process.

STRUCTURE OF SERVICES AND THE PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

- *Design and implement a social work workforce study* to collect objective data on those indicators assumed to measure a legitimate profession: educational qualifications, titles and job functions, salaries, cost-benefit, perceived liabilities and assets of practicing social work, safety and security concerns. Reliance on anecdotal data is less useful in the political process.
- *Test out interdisciplinary models* that address challenges of service provision in remote, rural areas, such as linking services with public libraries, health clinics, community centers, and schools, utilizing paraprofessionals.

HUMAN CAPACITY: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- *Utilize the competencies in social work outlined in the Bologna Process* as a base for education and field practice (see <http://www.eassw.org/html/bologna/Bologna%20as%20a%20frame%20for%20CBL%20and%20supervision.pdf>)

- *Advocate for buy-in to the value of social work supervision as consumer protection issue among public and private employers, and the social protection labor market, in general.*
- *Strengthen field education and practice courses through curriculum development that links knowledge and skill competencies that are learned in practice classes and applied in field work.*
- *Build the capacity of social work associations to service members, advocate, and educate employers, the public and clients.*

PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND OUTCOMES

- *Develop social work research as a field of practice through the development of Ph. D. programs in social work. The scientific testing and reporting of applied theories and skills through research studies can serve to build an evidence-based literature and further the development of the profession.*
- *Build functional information management systems to track data on services and measure outcomes. There are opportunities for collaboration between the E&E region and Western countries as this is a shared need.*

GLOSSARY OF SOCIAL WORK TERMS¹

Best practices: Engaging in practice activities that are based on research and intended to increase successful outcomes.

Client outcomes: Qualitative and quantitative measurements aimed at determining if client goals have been met.

Code of Ethics: Explicit statement of values, principles, and rules of profession, regulating the conduct of its members.

Competencies: A set of professional obligations to the client, community, society, and the profession acquired through the combination of certification, licensure, continuing education, and supervision.

Evidence-based practice: The use of the best scientific knowledge derived from outcome studies as the basis for guiding professional interventions and effective treatments.

Field education or practicum: A required part of a formal social work education program consisting of practice in a community setting under a field supervisor (also called practice teacher).

Indicators: Quantitative measures about demographic, environmental, and social conditions that are used in establishing comprehensive and balanced planning.

Professional education/continuing education: training taken by social workers and other professionals who have already completed the formal education required to enter their field.

Restorative justice: A theory of justice that emphasizes the repairing of harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior. It is accomplished by victim-offender mediation, victim assistance, restitution and community service.

Social assistance: The provision of benefits financed from a nation's general revenue and subject to the recipient's need and means.

Social justice: An ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protections, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits.

Social work practice: Professional application of social work values, principles, and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain concrete services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health services; and participating in legislative processes.

Supervision: An administrative and educational process used to help social workers further develop and refine their skills, enhance staff morale, and provide quality assurance to the clients.

¹ Definitions are adapted from Barker, R. L. (2003). *Social Work Dictionary*. (5th Ed.). Washington, DC: NASW Press. And Johnson, L. C. & Yanca, S. J. (2007). *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach* (9th Ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

