

**REPORT ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO SOCIAL
PROTECTION THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING OF SOCIAL
WORKERS IN GEORGIA**

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I. Executive Summary

The situational analysis of capacities of social workers and local government representatives working on social issues was conducted within the framework of the project "Improving Access to Social Protection through Capacity Building of Social Workers" run by the Council of Europe.

The objective of the situational analysis, within the context of the larger initiative was to create a better understanding of the nature of existing capacities and other factors that influence effective engagement of social workers and local government in the process of poverty reduction and social protection of Georgian population.

The situational analysis consisted of two components:

1. The assessment of SW and local government capacity and needs for improving access to social protection and involvement of social workers in the decision making in terms of promoting their partnership with local government in the process of defining and calculating minimal benefit package.

2. The analyzes of activities aimed on improving the knowledge and skills of social workers held by local and international agencies.

The assessment of capacity revealed that the level of knowledge of basic concepts of social protection in general and the principles of existing social protection system in the country is quite low. In General there is the lack of knowledge of the legislation, existing benefits as well as the understanding of the role and functions of social workers in the overall context of social protection. Although there is common acceptance of the necessity and benefit of partnership between the social workers and local government more systematic efforts have to be applied to engage SW-s in local decision-making and implementation of social policies such as prioritizing social expenditure on the local level. The future strategy has to consider the district/regional level diversity of understanding, attitudes towards, expectations and willingness of cooperation of local constituencies.

The analyzes of activities directed on the improvement of knowledge and skills of social workers revealed, that there is an understanding among the local and international agencies (as well as local NGOs working on the issues), that today there already exists a great demand on the educated social workers and the requirement on this profession will increase in the nearest future. Therefore several steps are already made in this direction by different local and international organizations among which are: the "Open Society Georgia Foundation" (OSGF), "Social Policy Initiative Group" (SPIG), the "Horizonti foundation", Tbilisi Meria and Georgian Social Investment Fund (GSIF).

Based on the findings a program for the workshop/training was defined. Working group consisting of 3 experts started working on the materials for the training. The materials were prepared and printed as a booklet.

The first workshop/training was held in Tbilisi on September 26-27. The invitation on the training and the schedule of events was

distributed to the participants in advance. The training was led by the working group (each topic by the expert working on the issue). At the end of the workshop participants worked in small groups on the issues discussed during the training in order to reveal the effectiveness of training on their practical skills. At the end of the training the participants were offered to answer a questionnaire in order to find out their satisfaction with the workshop, necessity of such trainings in future and the most problematic /interesting topics.

The majority of participants assessed the training as very useful. The degree of involvement of participants in the discussions was appreciated as very high. All participants agreed that such trainings have to be held permanently (periodically). Among the selected issues for the following trainings was employment, job seeking agencies, vocational training for the unemployed, self-employment, perspectives of social protection (in the context of social protection reform project), means testing for the social assistance, integration of disabled persons (emphasis was made on disabled children). The majority of participants emphasized the role of partnership with local government in the process of prioritizing the social expenditure in the local budgetary process.

The training was appreciated as successful not only by the participants but by the trainers also (participants were obviously pleased with the atmosphere and outcomes of the workshop, what was evidenced by repeated requests to continue such meetings in future).

II. Introduction

1 Methodology

For the implementation of the project a working group (WG) was created. The group consisted of team leader and two experts in the social protection.

Two methods were used during the assessment of existing capacities of social workers and their participation in decision-making on the local level:

- Review of existing literature such as: past and ongoing project documents, evaluation & progress reports; articles and guidelines/materials produced by different institutions/development organizations working on social issues in Georgia.
- Key informant survey - a semi-structured interview of experts, social workers, representatives of local government, policy makers and public administrators, representatives of international organizations and donor community directly or indirectly involved in the development social protection in Georgia.

Based on the findings a program for the workshop/training was defined. WG started working on the materials for the training. The process included choice of issues for the training, defining the format of workshops, agreement on the context of materials and their preparation including the printing. Each of the experts was responsible on the different topics of training.

2 Findings

The analyzes of the assessment/findings showed that, there is no consensus on the understanding of the well-known concepts such as social security, social protection, safety net, social insurance and social assistance between the social workers and the local government representatives, causing plurality in interpretations and sometimes misunderstanding. Most of these terms have been directly copied sometimes without even finding the Georgian equivalent (e.g. term "safety net" has been used in different versions in Georgian).

Most of the respondents have not very clear understanding of the role and functions of social workers and their importance in the overall context of social protection.

The partnership between social workers and local government in solving problems vary from the whole ignorance to the close cooperation.

Local and international institutions are activated for creation of the profession of social worker in the nearest future. Besides some of them have made first attempts for the improvement of skills of existing social workers through their training in different techniques of service delivery. Others make emphasis on the

involvement of the representatives of local community based organizations and NGOs in this process.

The "Open Society Georgia Foundation" (OSGF) has supported education of 5 persons in the universities of US (two-year master courses of SW) in order to create the capacity for developing this profession. Those persons who have already received the degree of master of social worker try now to create a precedent of professional education. At the first stage they will try to introduce a course of lectures on the faculty of psychology. In future attempts will be made to create a separate faculty in the university.

With the attempts of "Horizonti foundation" training in service delivery for elderly and disabled persons was held for the social workers and the representatives of NGOs working on this issues.

"Social Policy Initiative Group" (SPIG) is trying to support this initiative within the framework of Community mobilization Initiative.

Agency for Child Development (created by the initiative of German Agency for Technical Cooperation - GTZ) functioning on the basis of Tbilisi Meria is implementing a pilot project aimed at education of social workers and NGOs working with children.

Georgia Social Investment Fund (GSIF) is working on the community level (with local communities and NGOs), but its main direction is improving social infrastructure, though education of local social actors is also included in their activity.

All these activities will contribute (directly or indirectly) to the increase the capacities of existing social workers as well as to the creation of such profession in future (today it is a position rather than profession).The problem is that their activities are fragmentary and there is no coordination between them as well as in the entire vision of further development strategy. There is no shared database of local and international institutes functioning in Georgia and working on the social issues generally and on the education of social workers particularly. Therefore, the general profile of their activities bears inaccuracies and weaknesses due to the lack of information, coordination, cooperation and the methodology applied.

III. Training of Social Workers

1 Materials

The materials for the training were prepared by the working group. The issues for the workshop were selected based on the findings and according the goals of the project. After discussing the context of the materials with the Ministry and coming to the final decision, working group started the preparation of the materials.

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1. Short summary of existing situation in Georgia - analyzes of poverty, situation on the labor market (including extra legal labor), the phenomena of "poor employment", correspondence of social contributions to the benefits, the share of shadow economics, the role and significance of all social benefits in the consumption of poorest households, the demographic situation and trends in Georgia, the influence of poverty on the education of children.
2. Social protection - this part of the materials included the understanding of basic concepts such as: social security, social protection, social safety nets, social risks, solidarity, social insurance, social assistance.
3. Priorities of social protection system in Georgia - existing situation and the goal of the reform
4. Social work and the function of social workers - brief comments of the goals of social works and the function of social workers.
5. Pension system in Georgia - this part included several issues: analyses of existing situation; the existing legal bases; benefits and beneficiaries; institutional arrangements and financing; pension arrears; perspective of the pension system and recently adopted legislative changes.
6. Social assistance - universal vs. categorical social assistance; methods of targeting, perspectives for Georgia
7. The programs of social support in Georgia - different governmental social assistance programs: eligibility criteria, benefits and beneficiaries.

The materials were printed as a booklet and given to each participant of the workshops (hard copy will be delivered).

2 Trainings/Workshops

Present report summarizes the results of two trainings of Social Workers held in Tbilisi on the September 26-27 and in Telavi held on October 24. The trainings aimed the improvement of knowledge and skills of social workers and the representatives of local governments working on the social issues.

In overall 87 representatives of social bureaus and local government have participated. In Tbilisi number of participants was 53 (6 representatives of local governments- "gamgeoba", 43 social workers and 4 representatives of NGOs working on social issues). In Telavi number of participants was 36 (4 representatives of local governments, 3 local NGO and 29 social workers). The full list of participants is available upon request.

Initial 15 minutes of the meetings were dedicated to the importance of improving access to social protection in Georgia and to the goals of the workshop in this regard. The attention was specially drawn to the need for capacity building of social workers and their partnership with local governments in solving social problems. Further, the meeting participants were briefed on the specific purposes and schedule of the meeting and expectations of the trainers regarding its flow and outcomes.

After introducing participants and the trainers to each other the workshops started according to their schedule (see attached).

During the discussions the participants were encouraged not only to put questions about the discussed issues, but also to share the problems they have in their everyday activities and the methods of solving the problems.

The most common problems were defined as following:

1. Lack of legislation regulating the responsibilities of local and central government which influences solving the social needs;
2. Unclear accountability of social bureaus (and social workers);
3. Involvement of social workers in decision making at the local level and cooperation with local government
4. Problems with better targeting of social assistance;
5. Unfair system of several in kind benefits of social assistance (energy support social benefits - paying directly to the utility companies while great part of the population has no access to the main sources and has to find alternative ways);
6. Strengthening institutional capacities - technical assistance and training to improve targeting of benefits and coverage of the beneficiaries - strengthening administration, procedures for benefit award and the appeals process; establishing a mechanism for monitoring;
7. developing a mechanism for social work training;
8. introducing standards in social work;

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IV. Conclusions and recommendations

1 General conclusions.

1. The interest that meeting participants have displayed towards each topic under concern, their activity and constructive thinking during the discussions, shows that there is an interest, preparedness and necessity for such trainings.
2. Ability to define problems, priorities and then solve them was referred to 'most important' by the participants.
3. Another issue highlighted by the participants was lack of information about ongoing processes in the field of social protection and those legislative changes which influence them.
4. Assistance is needed in the process of dialogue between representatives of social bureaus and local government. The skills for such dialogue are not sufficient.
4. Most of local government representatives think that 'assistance/interventions' are equally needed on both sides (education of representatives of local governments in).
5. Attitude toward cooperation between social workers and local governments is positive in general. Local governments expect various benefits out of this cooperation, mostly making easy the fulfillment of government's duties, increasing rating of local governments and getting public support. Besides, it was emphasized that partnership with local authorities would facilitate the overcoming of skepticism and mistrust towards local governmental bodies, and on the other hand, would educate and strengthen them.
6. Most of the representatives of local governments expressed the willingness to take first cooperative steps (e.g. initiate negotiations, design monitoring procedures, start thinking on the specific local development needs, etc.).
7. Partnership with local authorities was recognized as very useful by the social workers also. However Both social workers and representatives of local governments recognize their mission as to solve acute problems and don't have more long-term vision how to manage problems/contribute to the quality of life of their constituents in long-run.
8. All participants agreed that the workshop was very useful and such trainings have to be held permanently (periodically).

2 Capacity needs and priority areas

Meeting participants were well aware that only there will, at the current level of their awareness, knowledge, and skills, is not sufficient for improving access to social protection in Georgia. The repeated requests for continuation and intensification of informational and educational efforts evidenced this understanding.

Regarding the needed interventions for improving quality of social support to the population was lack of professionalism of social workers. Assistance in developing their skills and improving knowledge of existing social security system was obvious for all the participants. Among the selected issues for the following trainings was: employment, job seeking agencies, vocational training for the unemployed, self-employment, perspectives of social protection (in the context of social protection reform project), means testing for the social assistance, integration of disabled persons (emphasis was made on disabled children).

The efforts should be made to involve social workers in the process of decision-making on the local level: dialogue with local government, participation in local budgetary processes contributed to social issues.

Special requests were made to inform social workers on the ongoing Social Protection Reform in Georgia.

3 Recommendations

Current level of awareness, knowledge and skills of social workers as well as representatives of local government working on social issues is not sufficient for improving access to social protection. Therefore several recommendations could be given for further improvement of access to social protection:

1. The informational and educational efforts should be continued in order to increase the understanding of the role and importance of social workers in meeting social needs of the population as well as to increase their skills and knowledge
2. More systematic efforts have to be applied to engage SW-s in local decision-making and implementation of social policies such as prioritizing social expenditure on the local level.
3. Information sharing between the different regions on solving the problems and sharing of best praxis is needed.
4. Intensification of informational and educational efforts should be directed towards ongoing process of social protection reform its goals and strategy.
5. Trainings held in two regions of Georgia were successful and could be considered as one of the first steps in the capacity building of social workers.

