

# Changing THE WAY WE *care*<sup>SM</sup>

## Situational Assessment of Child and Family Protection Personnel Training in the Republic of Moldova



# Situational Analysis of the Care System in the Republic of Moldova

**REPORT 1**  
Analysis of Care Reform in the Republic of Moldova



**REPORT 2**  
Assessment of Child and Family Protection Personnel Training



**REPORT 3**  
Assessment of Social Services For Vulnerable Children and Families



**REPORT 4**  
Analysis of National and International Best Practices in Case Management



**REPORT 5**  
Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices of Reintegrating Children into Families



**REPORT 6**  
Analysis of Research Reports on the Reintegration of Children in Residential Institutions\*  
(available only in Romanian)



**REPORT 7**  
Findings from Child Assessments from 6 Residential Institutions



**REPORT 8**  
Analysis of the Regulatory Framework and Financing Mechanism for the Alternative Care System



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# **ACRONYMS**

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research
ANAS	National Social Assistance Agency
ARSUB	“Alecus Russo” State University, Balti
CCF Moldova	Child, Community, Family Moldova
CPA	Central Public Authority
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CTWWC	Changing the Way We Care
ICSPU	“Ion Creanga” State Pedagogical University
LPA	Local Public Authority
MECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
MHLSP	Ministry of Health, Labour, and Social Protection
MLSPF	Ministry of Labour, Social Protection, and Family
NCCAP	National Center for Child Abuse Prevention
PA	Public Association
P4EC	Partnerships for Every Child
SUM	State University of Moldova
STAS	Territorial Structure of Social Assistance
UAT	Administrative Territorial Unit
ULIM	Free International University of Moldova
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

# GLOSSARY

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**Approved training provider:** a person or organization trained, evaluated, and approved by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Social Protection (MHLSP) as having successfully completed the appropriate training courses who may legally provide training services in the field of social assistance.

**Initial training program:** a set of training courses for acquiring the minimum professional knowledge and competencies needed to work in the field of social assistance.

**Professional competencies:** the ability to apply, transfer, and combine knowledge and skills in various work situations and environments, and to carry out the required activities in accordance with specified quality standards.

**Social services personnel:** individuals working in the field of social assistance, employees of territorial structures of social assistance (STAS), and/or social service providers. Social services professionals fall into four categories: 1) Those with direct competencies in the field of social assistance; 2) Those with average competencies in the field of social assistance; 3) Those with competencies in the field of management and social assistance; and 4) Those with relevant competencies in a field other than social assistance.

**Social assistance personnel training:** a set of approved rules, mechanisms, programs, and tools that ensures the proper development of professional competencies for social assistance personnel.

**Social assistance system:** a set of institutions and measures whereby the state (through central and local public administration authorities) intervenes to prevent, limit, or eliminate the temporary or permanent effects of situations that may lead to marginalization or social exclusion of a person, family, or community.

**Training course:** a series of (theoretical and practical) lessons designed to provide knowledge, skills, and competencies required for the field of activity.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Context

Changing the Way We Care<sup>SM</sup> (CTWWC) is a global initiative launched in October 2018 by a consortium of organizations, including Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Maestral International. CTWWC is working with governments, civil society, and faith-based communities to change how we care for children and families. By strengthening systems, improving policies, investing in the care workforce, and engaging diverse stakeholders, CTWWC is building a movement in which all children can grow up in safe, nurturing family environments.

In the Republic of Moldova, CTWWC aims to end the placement of children in residential care institutions and to ensure that family support systems are strengthened, so children can continue to thrive in families. CTWWC has embarked on a detailed needs analysis of the care reform sector to establish a baseline and plan of action for the coming years. This study is part of a series of seven thematic reports that provide a picture of the situation of vulnerable children and their families, both in the context of deinstitutionalization, and prevention of placement in residential institutions. This research will form a theoretical and practical picture of the child care system in the Republic of Moldova, in particular in the post-COVID-19 context.

## Goal and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation is to strengthen the training program for child and family protection personnel in coordination with recent programmatic, legislative, and methodological developments at national and international levels, and to effectively contribute to improving the quality of services for vulnerable children and families by improving the competencies of professionals in the system. To achieve this purpose, the following objectives have been set:

- Analyze organization and operation of the training program.
- Map existing training programs for specific groups of child and family protection professionals.
- Determine strengths and weaknesses regarding the organization and operation of the training program for specific groups of child and family protection professionals.



## Methodology

The methodology was based on a collaborative principle, which encourages cooperation and partnership between evaluation team members. Methods, techniques, and tools for collecting qualitative and quantitative data were applied, including:

- Documentary analysis of the legal and regulatory framework in the field of reference.
- Analysis of statistical data on the number of students and graduates with the specialty of social assistance from four universities (“Alec Russo” State University from Balti [ARSUB]; “Ion Crăangă” State Pedagogical University [ICSPU]; State University of Moldova [SUM]; and Free International University of Moldova [ULIM]).
- Mapping of training programs/courses—a tool for collecting data on developed programs/courses.
- Data collection sheets applied to participating universities—a tool for collecting data on graduates and students with social assistance as their specialty.
- In-depth individual interviews—12 interviews were conducted with the participation of 14 specialists (representatives from the National Social Assistance Agency [ANAS] participating universities, training providers, and experts in the field).

## Key Findings

Evaluation of the training program highlighted the following findings and conclusions:

- There are legal provisions regarding the organization and operation of the training of social assistance personnel (Government Decision No. 38/2019) that lay down the purpose, objectives, principles, and components of the training.
- The training program is at an early phase and as such, the methodology, mechanisms, and procedures for organizing and ensuring the functionality of the system are not yet approved.
- Professional supervision of social services specialists is fragmented in nature and emphasis is mainly on providing methodological support.
- Funds allocated for the training program are insufficient. Most STASs do not allocate resources for personnel training or, if funds are present, they are often redirected to cover other needs.
- There is a standardized procedure, approved by Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family (MLSPF) Order No. 90/201, for the assessment of training needs of personnel of STASs.
- Most training courses for carers (foster carers, parent educators, personal assistants, etc.) are organized with the support of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and after the completion of projects, public social service providers do not ensure the continuity of the training.
- There are few digitized platforms for ongoing training programs in the field of child and family protection.
- Collaboration between key actors (the MHLSP, the ANAS, participating universities, CSOs, etc.) is fragmented and only takes place depending on implemented projects.

- Mapping of training programs/courses revealed that there is a great diversity of child protection programs and courses (66 in total), but most of them are not approved.
- CSOs are a very important pillar in the development of training programs and in conducting training courses for child and family protection personnel, but CSOs do not provide systemic interventions because interventions are only applied in accordance with the objectives of the projects the CSOs themselves implement.
- Most public social service providers do not base personnel training programs on unified curricula, nor are their training programs approved by the MHLSP under the regulatory framework.
- The university social assistance system in the Republic of Moldova has made an essential contribution to the development of the social assistant profession at all levels of training and specialization. The curricula for the specialty of social assistance have been revised and are in line with the changes that have occurred in the field. At the same time, it is noted that universities are not involved in ongoing training of social services specialists.
- Training service providers do not have impact assessment methodologies.

## Recommendations

### Regulatory and methodological framework:

- Further develop (and gain approval by the MHLSP for) the methodology, mechanisms, and procedures regarding the organization and operation of the training program.
- Develop regulatory framework (which should provide for supervision as a mandatory activity) with an emphasis on providing psychological support to social services personnel.
- Allocate necessary funds for efficient organization and operation of the training program.

### Assessment of training needs:

- Expand methodology for assessing the training needs of child and family protection specialists.
- Develop adaptive training platforms.
- Perform systematic mapping of training needs, including digitizing the training needs assessment process.

### Organization of training:

- Ensure continuity of training courses by social service providers.
- Establish and maintain an effective platform for digitization of ongoing training programs in the field of child and family protection.
- Ensure effective collaboration between all actors (the MHLSP, the ANAS, participating universities, CSOs, etc.) in order to create programs and partnerships based solely on results.

### Training programs:

- Expand ongoing training programs based on modules so that specialists can access the appropriate modules, depending on their training needs.
- Organize training courses based on differentiated curricula.
- Ensure the connection between training programs and professional competencies.
- Involve universities in ongoing training of social assistance specialists.
- Develop new training programs based on identified training needs and professional categories.

### Impact assessment of training programs:

- Develop methodology to assess the impact of training programs and courses from a double perspective: 1) Carry out follow-up activities and 2) Assess the impact of training in partnership with the management team of the institution/social service.
- Diversify methodologies and forms of assessment.

### Monitoring of training courses:

- Ensure the MHLSP monitors the functionality of the training program for social assistance personnel.
- Further develop (and gain approval for) methodology for monitoring training quality, which should include monitoring procedures and sample documents used in the process.
- Expand mechanism for monitoring allocated funds.

# INTRODUCTION

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## Context

CTWWC is a global initiative launched in October 2018 by a consortium of organizations, including CRS and Maestral International. CTWWC is working with governments, civil society, and faith-based communities to change how we care for children and families. By strengthening systems, improving policies, investing in the care workforce, and engaging diverse stakeholders, CTWWC is building a movement in which all children can grow up in safe, nurturing family environments.

In the Republic of Moldova, CTWWC aims to end the placement of children in residential care institutions and to ensure that family support systems are strengthened, so children can continue to thrive in families. CTWWC has embarked on a detailed needs analysis of the care reform sector to establish a baseline and plan of action for the coming years. This study is part of a series of seven thematic reports that provide a picture of the situation of vulnerable children and their families, both in the context of deinstitutionalization, and prevention of placement in residential institutions. This research will form a theoretical and practical picture of the child care system in the Republic of Moldova, in particular in the post-COVID-19 context.

CTWWC activities are based on a collaborative approach, which includes a common agenda, mutual support, joint monitoring systems, and ongoing communication. A working group was set up within CTWWC, coordinated by Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association, Child, Community, Family Moldova (CCF Moldova), and Partnerships for Every Child (P4EC), in order to assess initial and ongoing training programs for child and family protection personnel in the Republic of Moldova. From December 2020 to June 2021, the group analyzed the legal and regulatory framework in the field, developed the evaluation methodology, collected data onsite (individual interviews, data collection sheets), mapped the training programs, and prepared this report.

The quality of social services depends directly on the level of training and competencies of the personnel. The proper training of personnel for the child and family protection system is of the utmost importance at this time. In this context, it is important that the ongoing training of human resources is seen not as an expense, but as an investment which will bring a huge benefit—quality education and quality social services. European training policies, as well as the existing regulatory framework at the national level, require that personnel from all social services be trained within the professional development system.<sup>1</sup>

Ensuring the quality of the social assistance training program is a highly complex issue, and the correlation between the program and the rules of the relevant regulatory documents is imperative.<sup>2</sup> Recently, in the Republic of Moldova, actions have been taken to develop a training system for social assistance personnel, and in 2016, the National Social Assistance Agency (ANAS) was created. Among other tasks, ANAS collects information regarding training needs (updating the program as necessary); analyzes curricula and course support materials; hires instructors; and keeps records of personnel and program evaluations to strengthen the overall program and the competencies of its personnel.

## **Objectives, Methodology, and Limitations of the Evaluation**

The purpose of the evaluation is strengthen the training program for child and family protection personnel in coordination with recent programmatic, legislative, and methodological developments at national and international levels, and to effectively contribute to improving the quality of services for vulnerable children and families by improving the competencies of professionals in the system.

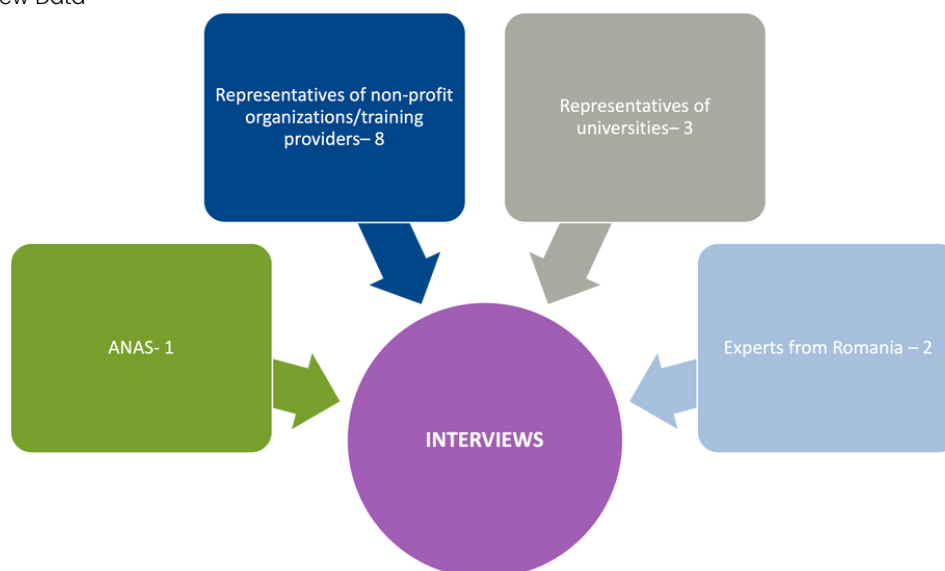
Objectives of the evaluation:

- Analyze the organization and operation of the training program for child and family protection personnel.<sup>3</sup>
- Map existing training programs for different groups of child and family protection professionals.
- Determine strengths and weaknesses of the training program for various groups of child and family protection professionals.

Target groups were identified within the evaluation and include (see Figure 1):

1. Representatives of the central public authority (CPA)—An interview was conducted with the director of the ANAS.
2. Representatives of nonprofit organizations/training providers—Eight interviews were conducted with the participation of representatives of Lumos Foundation; Terre des Hommes Moldova; Public Association (PA) Woman and Child—Protection and Support; PA Positive Initiative; Diaconia Social Mission; National Center for Child Abuse Prevention (NCCAP);
3. Experts from Romania—Two interviews were conducted, one with the representatives of Learning Ecosystem Company Romania and the other one with the representatives of PA Concordia Social Projects Romania. The latter was also attended by the representative of PA Concordia Social Projects Moldova.
4. Universities—Interviews with representatives of three universities were conducted (Free International University of Moldova [ULIM], ICSPU, and ARSUB).

Figure 1: Interview Data



The interviews were coded, using the following formula:

- IIA – In-depth individual interview
- Interview number

The abbreviation indicates the representative of the institution/organization that participated in the interview. The list of interviewees is provided in Annex 2.

The evaluation methodology was developed in the first phase of the evaluation process and was based on a number of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Taking into account evaluation objectives and concerns, semi-structured individual interviews and data collection on university education and training programs were both utilized. In accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group’s (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation, the study was based on participatory methodologies that ensure validity and effective mechanisms for triangulation of information.

The methodology encouraged collaboration between members of the evaluation team. The team developed a shared vision and created a working environment that was conducive to collaboration and communication through the use of joint working meetings and constant discussions between partners at all evaluation phases.

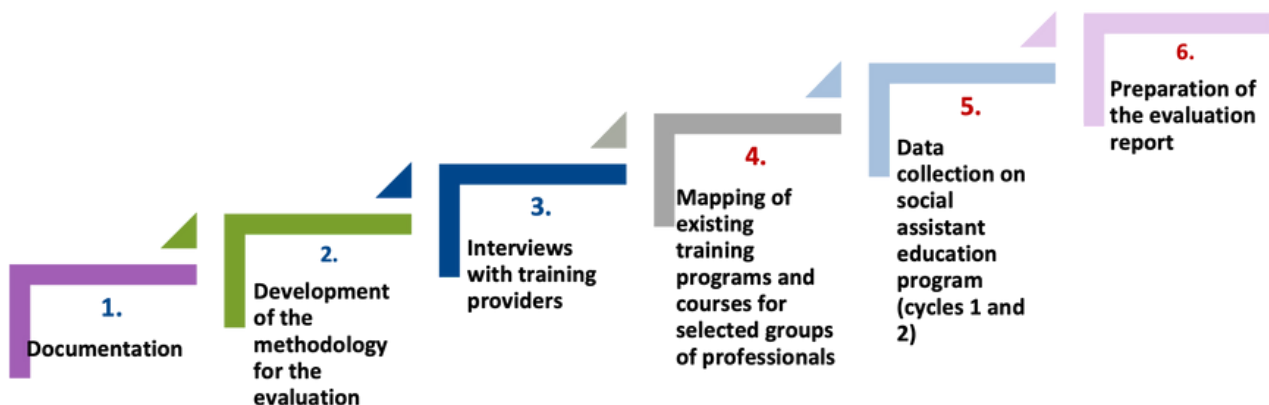
The following research methods, techniques, and tools were used within the evaluation. A more comprehensive list of tools and data collected by the universities are included in Annex 1.

- **Document analysis:** Analysis of the legal and regulatory framework regarding the organization of the training program; the ANAS activity reports and plans; studies conducted in the field; training programs and courses; curricula for a “Social Assistance” academic specialty, and training needs assessment methodologies. A total of 35 documents were analyzed, some of which can be found in the references listed at the end of this report.

- **Analysis of statistical data** on the number of students and graduates with the social assistance specialty from four universities (ARSUB, ICSPU, SUM, and ULIM).
- **Mapping training programs/courses:** A tool that includes general data about the provider, developed programs and courses<sup>4</sup>(target group, number of hours, approval), whether the organization provides training services based on collaboration agreements, and whether the organization has experience delivering training courses under contract.
- **Academic data collection:** A tool that includes quantitative indicators (number of graduates, number of active undergraduate/graduate students, developed master's degree programs).
- **In-depth individual interviews** with ANAS representatives, training providers, and experts in the field. The structure of the interview guide consists of three modules: 1) Opinions on the training system; 2) Organization/institution's experience in the field; 3) Difficulties and recommendations regarding the implementation of training programs.

**Evaluation Phases:** During the evaluation of the training program, a series of phases were completed. They are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Evaluation Process



- **Documentation:** Analysis of the situation in the field, and of the legal and regulatory framework regarding the organization and operation of the training program for social assistance personnel.
- **Development of the methodology** for the evaluation of the situation in the field:
  - Development of conceptual framework of the evaluation.
  - Development of research tools (data collection sheets, semi-structured interview guides [e.g., key evaluation questions]).
  - Reviewing the methodology with the CTWWC technical group and revising it in accordance with the submitted recommendations.
- **Interviews with representatives** from ANAS, training providers, universities, and other experts (see Annex 2). All interviews were conducted online using the Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms. Summaries were prepared after each interview, including the main findings and reflections of the interviewee(s) (see Annex 3).
- **Mapping of training programs and courses:** Mapping of the programs was completed by each training provider and maps were subsequently processed and compiled into a single document (see Annex 4).

- **Data collection on university education of social assistants:** This phase included coordinating with managers of the social services departments from the four universities.
- **Preparation of the evaluation report:** Analysis of data collected onsite; preparation of the evaluation report with the CTWWC technical group, and implementation of revisions based on submitted recommendations.

The evaluation was carried out over seven months, between December 2020 and June 2021.

Ethical considerations took into account the principles and rules promoted by the UNEG.<sup>5</sup> The research protocol, developed for this purpose, included: (i) Protecting the identities of specialists and research participants and (ii) Protecting collected data, etc. The participants were informed about both the context and purpose of the research, as well as their right to anonymity and confidentiality, including voluntary participation. The research team was sensitive to the opinions, beliefs, and habits of the participants. All interactions were based on the criteria of integrity and honesty.

## Limitations of Evaluation

During the evaluation, there were some problems and limitations which created obstacles in fulfilling the tasks. The most important of these were:

- Data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and for that reason individual interviews were conducted through ZOOM or Microsoft Teams platforms, making it more difficult for the interviewer to establish a close relationship with the interviewee.
- Forms for mapping training providers were completed online, which made it difficult to collect the information under the established terms.
- The accuracy of the available information can be considered a limitation. Data collected through forms/sheets were verified and, if necessary, revised by training providers and university representatives.
- The lack of public information on the financial resources allocated to the social assistance training program did not allow for a clear understanding of the budgeting for these activities at the central and territorial level.

## Report Structure

This report contains three main chapters.

The **first chapter** presents and analyzes the primary results of the analysis of the training system for child and family protection personnel, including an analysis of the legislation in the reference field, the organization of the training system itself, the university education of current social services employees, and an evaluation of the components of the training program.



The second chapter analyzes the main thematic findings and addresses key challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations in order to develop and strengthen the training program at the regulatory level (i.e., training needs, organization, programs, impact, and monitoring).

The third chapter provides recommendations on strengthening the social assistance training program as a whole.

# Framework for the Situational Assessment

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## Regulatory Aspects of the Social Assistance Personnel Training Program

The law on social services (No. 547/2003, Art. 156<sup>6</sup>) provides that the MHLSP, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR), oversee the education of social assistance personnel. Further, in order to strengthen the competencies of social assistance employees, training programs and improvement courses are organized, developed, and approved.

In 2015, the MLSPF approved standardized procedures for ongoing training for social assistance personnel employed at STASs.<sup>7</sup> The procedures include activities related to the assessment of training needs and the use of data for planning, as well as tools for self-evaluation and evaluation of basic training competencies (including a tool for community social workers); a sample annual training plan; a training evaluation questionnaire; and a training impact assessment questionnaire (for community social workers).

Additionally, the framework regulations and minimum quality standards for child and family social services contain provisions regarding personnel training and professional supervision, which contribute to improving the quality of provided services by strengthening professional competencies and effectively managing tasks. Thus, the analysis of the minimum quality standards of social services for children and families reveals that STASs must promote, facilitate, and manage the initial and ongoing training of service personnel. Further, the regulatory framework states that training be organized based on a unified curriculum (for each social service) and approved by the MHLSP for the development of theoretical and practical professional competencies.

The analysis revealed that some social services (e.g., Respiro, Mobile Team, etc.) provide no guidelines regarding the number of initial training hours personnel are required to complete. For other services, there are provisions only for the number of hours of ongoing training personnel must complete (e.g., the Maternal Center, the Day Center for the care of children aged 4 months–3 years, etc.). See Table 1.

Table 1: Initial and Ongoing Training of Social Services Personnel

Social Services	Number of Hours Provided for in the Regulatory Framework	
	Initial	Ongoing Training (annually)
Respiro <sup>8</sup>	Not provided	Not provided
Mobil Teams <sup>9</sup>	Not provided	Not provided
Foster care <sup>10</sup>	50 hours	Minimum 30 hours
Family-type home <sup>11</sup>	50 hours	Minimum 30 hours
Day Center for Children at Risk <sup>12</sup>	50 hours	Minimum 20 hours
Community Home for Children at Risk <sup>13</sup>	50 hours	Minimum 20 hours
Placement Center for Children Separated from Their Parents <sup>14</sup>	Not specified	Not specified
Community Home <sup>15</sup>	40 hours	Minimum 20 hours
Day Center for Childcare <sup>16</sup>	Not specified	Minimum 20 hours
Maternal Center <sup>17</sup>	40 hours	Minimum 40 hours
Personal Assistant <sup>18</sup>	Not specified	Not specified

The evaluation highlighted that for the vast majority of social services there is no initial or ongoing training requirement for personnel. There are only a few social services for which curricula have been approved by the MHLSP (Personal Assistance, Mobile Team, Foster Care, Community Home for Children at Risk)<sup>19</sup>.

## Institutional Framework for the Social Assistance Personnel Training Program

One of the key aspects of the relationship between the MHLSP, the ANAS, and STASs is the planning and organizing of social assistance training, including training on various elements of child and family protection.

According to Government Decision No. 38/2019, the training program for social assistance personnel is a set of rules, mechanisms, tools, and approved providers of initial and ongoing training that ensures the organization of the development of professional competencies of social assistance personnel.<sup>20</sup>

The purpose of the training program is to develop and deepen the professional skills of social assistance personnel to ensure the quality of the services they provide.

The objectives of the training system include:

1. Increasing transparency and uniformity in the field of evaluation, and strengthening the capacities of social assistance personnel.
2. Ensuring the competitiveness of social assistance personnel.
3. Clarifying the minimum required knowledge and professional skills of personnel in the social assistance system.
4. Updating and deepening the knowledge and competencies of social assistance personnel.
5. Introducing advanced knowledge, methods, and modern procedures necessary for the fulfillment of professional duties.
6. Ensuring the training system meets the needs of the social assistance sector.

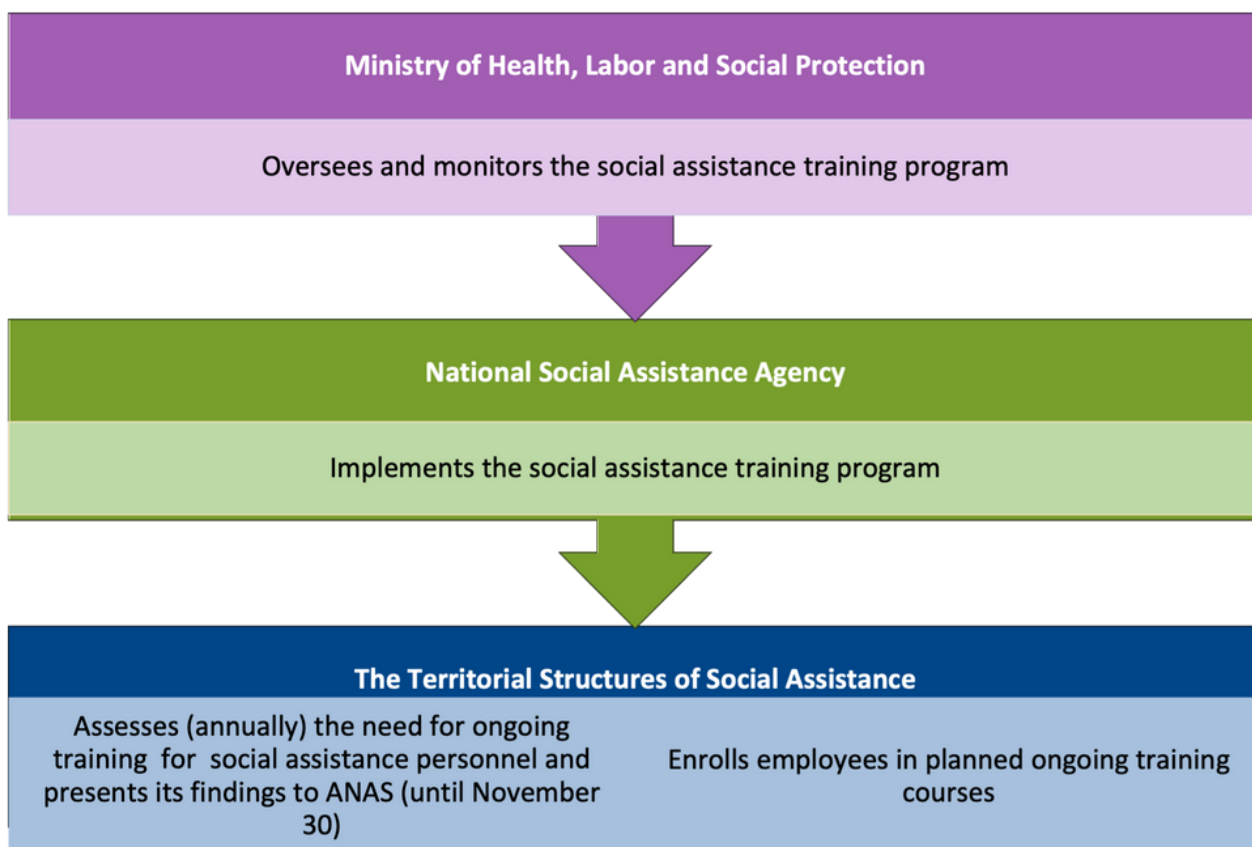
The MHLSP is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the operation of the social assistance training program. The ANAS implements the operation of the training system (see Figure 3) in accordance with its own regulations as approved by Government Decision Nos. 1263/2016 and 38/2019.

Established in 2016, the ANAS is an administrative authority under the MHLSP. It exists in order to improve the quality of social assistance provided to the population through proper and uniform implementation of the regulatory framework in the field of social assistance.

The ANAS employs a maximum of 23 individuals. The training service department oversees the social assistance training program and employs three staff (Head of the Service and two Chief Specialists)<sup>21</sup>. The ANAS facilitates the process of strengthening the professional skills of social assistance personnel. This requires the ANAS to exercise the following powers:

- a. Collect and systematize information on the training needs of social assistance personnel as presented by STASs and other social service providers.
- b. Develop a general annual training plan for social assistance personnel.
- c. Analyze and systematize the curricula and course support materials for the social assistance training program.
- d. Maintain and update the database of providers of training services.
- e. Select and contract (based on STAS needs assessments and criteria approved by the MHLSP) providers of social assistance training services.
- f. Collaborate with international organizations, universities, STASs, and civil society in order to improve the training process.
- g. Keep records of student evaluations and the quality of program activities.
- h. Keep records of and update data regarding training from the State Register of Social Assistance Personnel.

Figure 3: Duties Related to the Initial and Ongoing Training of Social Assistance Personnel



In accordance with Government Decision No. 828/2015 on the approval of the framework regulation on the organization and functioning of the local specialized body in the field of social assistance and family protection and its standard structure, STASS manage the enrollment and supervision of students in social assistance training programs.

During the evaluation, 12 interviews were conducted with 14 participants (representatives of the ANAS, universities, CSOs, and experts from Romania). The opinions and reflections shared during the interviews on the ANAS's role in the development and operation of the social assistance training program highlighted some discrepancies in the opinions on the roles and responsibilities of the ANAS.

It was revealed that the ANAS is perceived to have a particularly important role in the process: "The ANAS ensures the operation of the social assistance training program in accordance with appropriate regulations. One of the basic functions of the ANAS is to facilitate the strengthening of the professional skills of social assistance personnel. The ANAS Training Service is assigned the powers of planning, organization, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the training program" [IIA\_1\_APC].

"I appreciate the training system. It has recently been re-launched and we have noticed the combined effort between civil society and the ANAS in managing the operation of this system" [IIA\_12\_MA].

At the same time, there are opposing opinions that state, "The system of social assistance training is virtually missing as most training courses are carried out without the support of CSOs. Social assistance specialists need to pass an initial training, but professionally, the training is provided only when there is collaboration between service providers and CSOs. In the districts where CSOs operate, qualitative training courses are carried out, and after the completion of the projects implemented by CSOs, the public social service providers don't ensure the continuity of the training" [IIA\_2\_OSC]. There are further opinions that state, "The role of the ANAS in the training program is not clear. The role of universities in the initial training of social assistants is clear, but in terms of ongoing training of social assistants, we note its segmented nature. The ANAS should not have powers regarding the organization of training, as those should be assigned to higher education institutions. There is a positive practice in this regard at the Academy of Public Administration, which involves practitioners in training programs. I believe that the ANAS should exercise powers only in the field of monitoring the quality of social services in order to ensure compliance with minimum standards of quality for social services" [IIA\_7\_OSC].

We emphasize that most of the interviewed training providers pointed out the weaknesses of the training system, highlighting that at the moment, the system effectively does not work.

## University Education of Social Workers

The problems faced by modern society cannot find proper solutions outside the educational space. Moreover, the future of European society depends on how well education can build professional and moral competencies through changes in attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors.

These transformations do not happen quickly, but they are lasting. They arise over time as the work of several generations. Therefore, the process of changing and increasing the quality of life through the internationalization of higher education appears as a natural result of the gradual convergence of educational systems following the development of a common goal. The real tools in this regard are related to the rapid multiplication of common interests supported by shared knowledge, open communication, and cooperation.

The university social assistance system in the Republic of Moldova has significantly contributed to the development of the profession of social assistance at all levels of training and specialization. It was also actively involved in reforming the child and family protection system. Although the start of the social worker profession in the Republic of Moldova has been particularly difficult in terms of the status of social work as a profession/occupation, it should be noted that, together with other modern professions, it has helped to solve social problems and has continuously adapted to changing needs.

Universities began offering social assistance as a degree at different times:

1. ARSUB - 1993
2. ICSPU - 1994
3. SUM - 1998
4. ULIM - 2007

The education of students in the field of social assistance started at ARSUB in 1993 with the offered specialty, "Pedagogy and Social Psychology." From 1995–1998, due to collaboration and partnership with institutions with significant experience in the field (Fachhochschule Düsseldorf, Germany; Hogeschool's Hertogenbosh, The Netherlands; and Ioannina University, Greece) an international training project was implemented. The project, which was financed by the European Union, had a decisive impact on the training of social assistants in the Republic of Moldova. Due to this project, in 1998, the profession of social assistant was included in the nomenclature of areas of training and specialties in higher education in the Republic of Moldova.

In 2003, the profession of social worker was regulated by a law on social services (No. 547/2003, Art. 1<sup>23</sup>), which states that the social worker is a person with relevant special education who provides specialized services to persons and families who, temporarily, are experiencing difficulty and who, for economic, social, physical, or psychological reasons, are not able to achieve, by their own means and efforts, a decent standard of living.

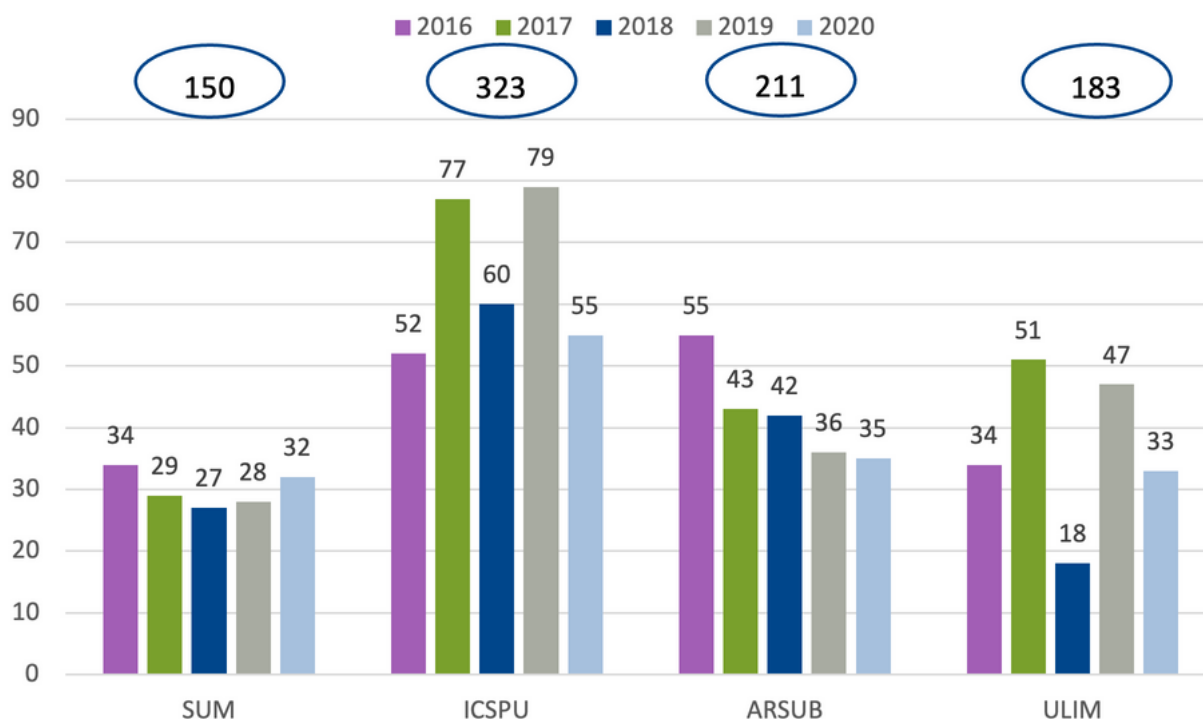
In the last five years, 867 social workers were trained by the four major universities in the Republic of Moldova (see Figure 4). Most graduated from ICSPU (about 37% or 323 social assistants), followed by ARSUB (about 25% or 211 social assistants), ULIM (about 21% or 183 social assistants), and SUM (17% or 150 social assistants)<sup>24</sup>.

Compared to 2016, the number of social worker graduates in 2020 decreased by about 11%. Compared to 2019, this number increased by about 18%.

Interviewees from the universities explained the decrease in the number of students by the fact that salaries in the field are very low and the duties are particularly complex:

- “Young people don’t accept the profession of social assistant because it is poorly paid.” [IIA\_10\_MA]
- “The number of students in the social assistance specialty has decreased because the work is hard, demanding; there are major responsibilities related to [low] financial resources.” [IIA\_12\_MA]

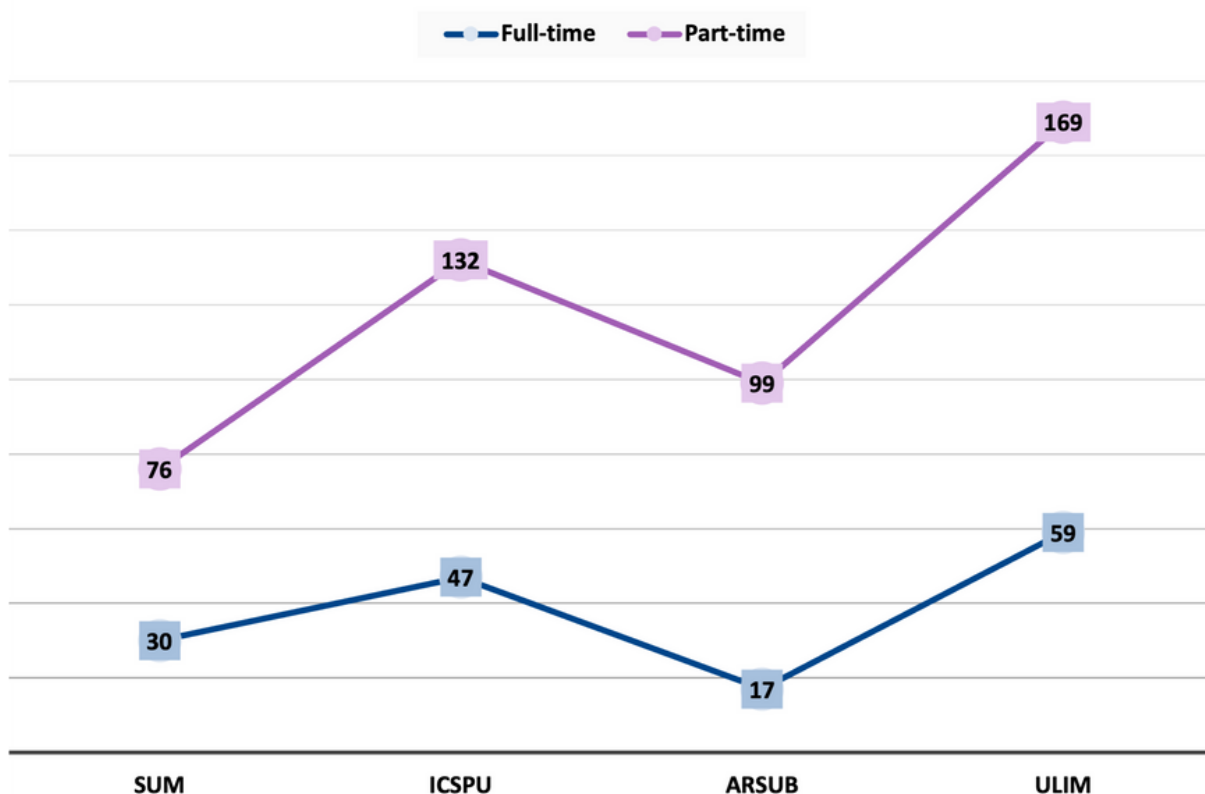
Figure 4: University Graduates, Social Assistance Specialty (Cycle I), 2016 - 2020



To forecast the number of future workers, data were collected on the total number of students in the social worker specialty. Thus, as of May 1, 2021, a total of 629 students were studying at the four universities (both full-time and part-time). Most students were enrolled at ULIM (about 36% of the total number or 228 students), followed by ICSPU (about 29% or 179 students), ARSUB (about 18% or 116 students), and SUM (17% or 106 students).



Figure 5: Number of Students in the Social Work Specialty (Full-Time and Part-Time)

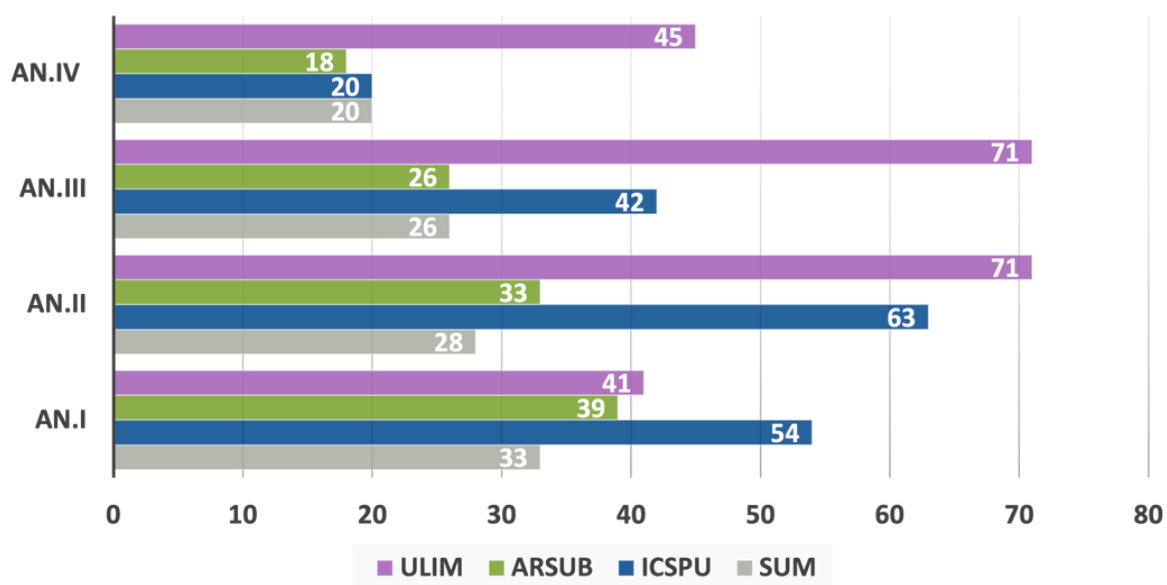


It is important to emphasize that 476 students were enrolled in part-time education, which is about 76% of the total number of students in the social work specialty (see Figure 5). In recent years, students preferred to combine their education with work as this brings them both income and professional experience. “We have a nice experience in terms of connection with social reality, inviting practitioners to university courses. This is how we create a connection between the student and the labor market, and practitioners also contribute to the improvement of the university curricula” [IIA\_12\_MA].

In the academic year 2020–2021, there was an increase of about 38% in the number of students at the four universities as compared to the academic year 2017–2018; and a decrease of 15% compared to the academic year 2019–2020 (see Figure 6). According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics, at the beginning of the 2019/20 academic year, 56,800 students were enrolled in higher education (i.e., 30% less than in 2015/16). Of the 56,800 students enrolled in the 2019/20 academic year, 73.5% followed the undergraduate program, 19.3% followed the master's degree program, and 7.2% were in integrated higher education. The number of students in higher education continues the downward trend of recent years (compared to the academic year 2015/16, numbers are down by 21,000, or 33.5%).

The curricula for the social worker specialty have been revised and are now in line with social changes, with an emphasis on training programs in the field of child and family protection. “There are courses and modules focused only on child and family protection, such as ‘Community Social Services,’ ‘Family Support Service,’ ‘Domestic Violence,’ ‘Child and Family Social Worker Techniques,’ etc. In the department, we have several practitioners and this is how we have a clear understanding of reality. There is a tradition at ULIM, we invite a practitioner to every compulsory course...” [IIA\_10\_MA].

Figure 6: Number of Students of the Social Assistance Specialty (Cycle I)



Internships are particularly important in the training of social assistants. Analysis of the curricula highlighted the existence of two types of internships: 1) Specialized internships (performed onsite) and 2) Research internships (for the development of a bachelor's thesis). The number of hours allocated for (onsite) internships by universities varies from 270–480 hours (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Hours/Credits Allocated for Internships

Institutions	Internships: Number of Hours/Number of Credits		
	Year I	Year II	Year III
ARSUB	–	–	420 hours/14 credits
ICSPU	–	240 hours /8 credits	240 hours/8 credits
SUM	60 hours /2 credits	120 hours/4 credits	180 hours/6 credits
ULIM	–	–	270 hours/9 credits

During interviews with university representatives, it was emphasized that:

- “Student internships are carried out in the second year (within the universities) and in the third year (with institutions providing social services). In the third year, students also participate in a research internship, where they carry out small research projects that they can include in their bachelor’s theses” [IIA\_II\_MA].
- “CSOs are not open to taking students for internships, and in some STASs, where students often carry out internships, many students find that they are not involved in activities that correspond to the internship objectives” [IIA\_10\_MA].

Universities designate persons responsible for the organization and coordination of onsite internships within specific departments. On the basis of those internships, an external host institution then appoints a second internship coordinator. After completing the internship, students are evaluated by both internship coordinators.

Admission to a master’s degree program (cycle 2) is based on a competitive application process for access to an accredited university or temporarily authorized study programs, in line with the provisions of the legislation in force. The admission process requires an applicant to hold a bachelor’s degree, or an equivalent education document, to have access to the competitive application process.

A master’s degree corresponds to 90–120 transferable academic credits (30 credits per semester). In cases where students enroll in different fields of study in their first and second cycles of education, students will accumulate 30 transferable academic credits which can be applied to basic and specialized disciplines related to their preferred field of study. The master’s degree program is completed with a public defense of a master’s thesis/project and with the issuance of a master’s degree diploma.<sup>25</sup>

From 2016–2020, 456 people graduated from the four universities (see Table 3). Most of the students graduated from ULIM (195) and ICSPU (131).

Table 3: Number of Graduates from Master’s Degree Programs

Institution	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
ARSUB	14	16	16	16	12	74
ICSPU	16	27	30	28	30	131
SUM	12	15	12	8	9	56
ULIM	13	17	24	57	84	195
Total	55	75	82	109	135	456

The four universities have nine master's degree programs in the field of social assistance (see Figure 7), including:

- Three master's degree programs that are developed directly for employment in the field of family and child protection (at SUM, ICSPU, and ARSUB).
- Six focused master's degree programs.

Figure 7: Master's Degree Programs in the Field of Social Assistance



The universities have ongoing training centers that play an important role in the development of professional training programs and courses.

"The Ongoing Training Center was created within ICSPU and proposes ongoing training programs in the field of social assistance as well as thematic programs such as: 'Strategies for Preventing and Solving Risk Situations in the Community,' 'Management in Social Assistance,' and 'Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Social Assistance'" [IIA\_11\_MA].

The academic environment has an important role in the initial training of social assistance specialists and is involved in the development of policy documents as well as studies and research in the field. However, representatives from three universities noted that there is also weak collaboration between universities and the ANAS regarding the connection between initial and subsequent training of specialists.

## Evaluation of the Functionality of the Components of the Initial and Ongoing Training System

In accordance with Government Decision No. 38/2019, the social assistance training program contains seven components. They are reflected in Figure 8. To reflect the current situation of personnel employed in the child and family protection system, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with training providers, experts in the field, representatives from universities, etc. The situation was assessed in terms of the seven components of the system.

Each component of the system is presented in terms of the analysis of the regulatory framework of the Republic of Moldova, as well as opinions shared by training providers and experts during interviews conducted during the evaluation.

Figure 8: Components of the Social Assistance Training Program



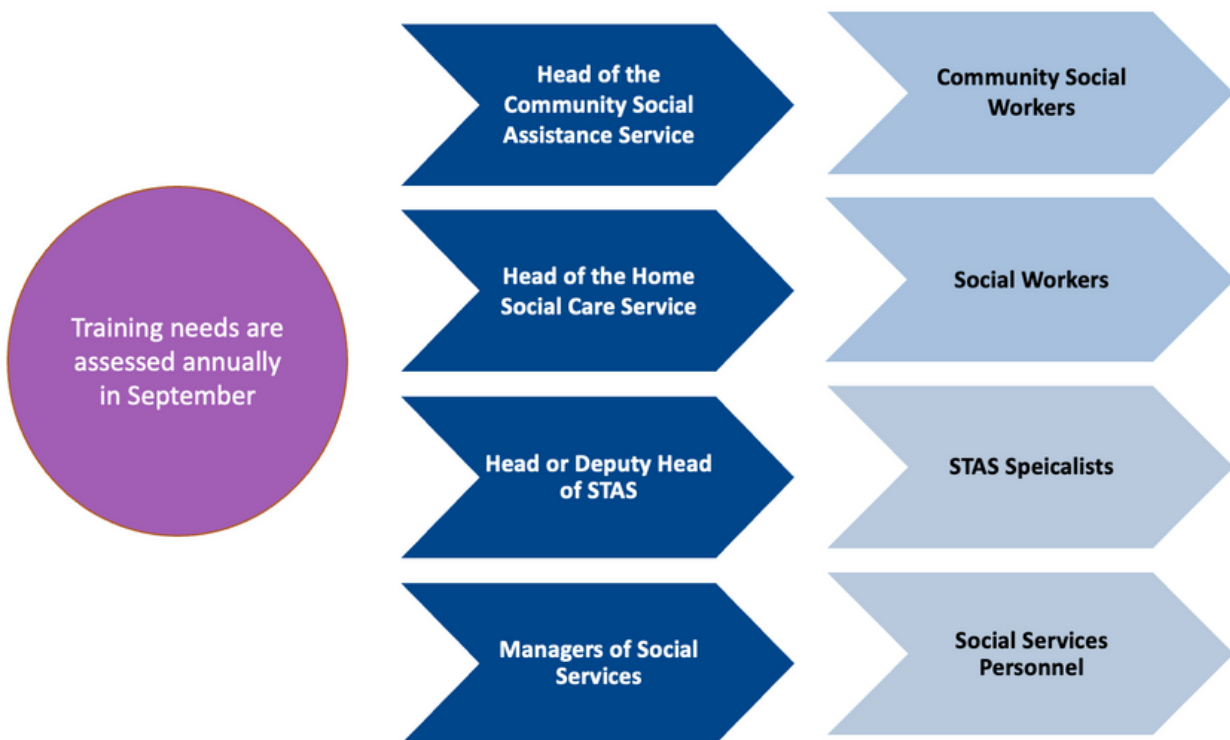
## Assessment of Training Needs and Planning of Training Courses

In accordance with Government Decision No. 38/2019, Chapter IV, Section I,<sup>26</sup> managers of STASs and/or managers of social services shall send requests regarding the categories and number of persons requiring training to the ANAS on a quarterly basis (until the 15th day of the month following the quarter).

The needs assessment for ongoing social services training is carried out annually (until November 30) by STAS managers and/or by managers of social services.

The needs assessment of the training requirements for STAS personnel is carried out based on standard procedures approved by MLSPF Order No. 90/20152.<sup>27</sup> The procedure states that needs shall be assessed annually by managers/supervisors for each group of personnel, as reflected in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Assessment of Training Needs (Per Group of Personnel)



The procedure includes tools for self-evaluation and for the evaluation of professional competencies, as follows:<sup>28</sup>

- Self-evaluation questionnaires for basic training competencies (one for community social assistants and one for social workers). Self-evaluation questionnaires include the following: a) Self-assessment of the degree of understanding and development of professional competencies/powers as set in the employee's job description, as well as determination of competencies that need to be developed; b) List of questions/problems that cannot be solved based on the employee's existing knowledge/skills; and c) Needs assessment for information/knowledge and building/development of new skills.
- Two questionnaires for the evaluation of professional competencies and assessment of training needs for community social assistants (used by the head of community service of social assistance) and for social workers (used by the head of the Home Social Care Service). The evaluation questionnaires used by managers of CSA services and Home Social Care Services include: 1) Acknowledgement of the level of professional competencies for each employee; 2) Problems/difficulties experienced by employees; 3) Individual personnel training needs; and 4) Individual support/conditions needs. Needs assessment tools also contain a component for the evaluation of an employee's professional performance.

According to the procedure, the person responsible for assessing training needs collects and analyzes the completed questionnaires. The analysis of the questionnaires will be focused on determining training topics requested by employees and those that directly influence the quality of the work.

“The information on training needs collected from heads of STASs and managers of social services is incomplete and does not reflect reality. It is superficial information and because these evaluations are not carried out, the information is presented only from their point of view” [IIA\_1\_APC].

As a result of the assessment and prioritization of training needs by groups of employees, an administrative meeting is held with the participation of the head of the STAS and heads of services in which priority is given to the topics for organizing training in the next year.

According to the standard procedure, the following will be taken into account when planning future training for STAS employees:

1. Personnel training needs.
2. Quality of provided social services.
3. Training requests (based on the STAS strategic work plan).

Government Decision No. 38/2019 stipulates that the ANAS has until January 31 to develop an annual plan based on the training needs requests received from STAS managers (and/or managers of social services) for ongoing training of social services personnel. The ANAS has until February 15 to enroll employees in the planned ongoing training courses.

The annual ongoing training plan developed by the ANAS includes three sections:

1. Title of the training course and basic content.
2. Category and number of trainees.
3. Period (month).

Once approved by the MHLSP, the annual plan for ongoing training of social services personnel is published on the official webpage of the ANAS. As of the evaluation phase, the plans have not been published on the ANAS page. Analysis of the activity plans for 2019,<sup>29</sup> 2020,<sup>30</sup> and 2021<sup>31</sup> highlighted that plans from 2019 and 2020 regarding the strengthening of professional skills of social services personnel (Objective 3) are virtually identical. The ANAS's 2021 activity plan differs from previous years in terms of structure and includes (as a basic indicator) the share of social assistance employees who promoted training courses (categorized by sex, age groups, disability, categories of positions, and topics). The target level set for 2021 is 80% of the social assistance workforce have graduated from at least one training. The activities included in the plan with regard to training are identical to those reflected in the annual activity plans of the previous years.

During the evaluation, the ANAS presented the training plans for 2019 and 2020 to the technical group.



## Approval of Initial Training Programs and Courses

In accordance with Government Decision No. 38/2019, Section 2, initial training programs are to be approved by the MHLSP. The training courses are then examined by a commission based on the methodology approved by the MHLSP. The regulatory framework contains provisions regarding the approval process for training courses (deadlines, application procedures, evaluations, etc.). The methodology for the evaluation of training courses and training providers, however, was not approved during the evaluation phase and consequently, the commission was not set up.

“According to Government Decision No. 38/2019, two commissions were to be established by the MHLSP: 1) The Commission for Evaluation of Training Courses and Training Providers, and 2) The Commission for Evaluation of the Quality of Social Assistance. At this time, these commissions have not been established and a methodology of evaluation has not been finalized. The document is being reviewed and approved” [IIA\_1\_APC].

To consolidate the knowledge of the ANAS specialists, as well as that of social workers, the ANAS developed an e-learning platform<sup>32</sup> with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway (within the “Regional Program Against Human Trafficking, Phase II” project). The e-learning platform is being implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). At the evaluation phase, a single online course, “Preventing and Fighting Human Trafficking,” was available on the platform. The course includes six lessons and seven tests.

In 2019, the ANAS, with IOM support, organized field training for preventing and fighting human trafficking. The trainees (specialists working at placement and rehabilitation centers managed by the ANAS whose beneficiaries are children) were trained on such topics as: difficulties associated with human trafficking through labor exploitation; begging and engaging in criminal activities; providing assistance and protection to victims and potential victims of human trafficking; rehabilitation of child victims of trafficking; preventing and fighting violence against children; free telephone helpline for children; and the role of labor inspectors in the prevention of human trafficking.<sup>33</sup> The ANAS, with the support of the U.S. Embassy, also organized training in this field for specialists (psychologists and social assistants) at Maternal Centers, emphasizing the rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking, how to understand the behavior of victims, how to apply therapeutic models and role-playing games using certain types of therapy (sand therapy, anatomical dolls, psychotherapy, and other complex interventions), and how to provide assistance in cases of sexual exploitation.

From 2018–2020, the ANAS, with the support of development partners, has conducted training for various categories of personnel, most of whom were trained in 2018<sup>34</sup> (see Table 4).

Table 4: Categories of Personnel Trained in 2018–2020

Institutions	2018	2019	2020
Community Social Workers	550	161	202
Supervisors	15	23	-
Specialists with Related Competencies other than Social Assistance	27	79	-
Chief Specialities	-	94	29
Foster Carers, Educating Parents	-	17	69
Heads of STAS and Managers of Social Services	-	23	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>319</b>

Source: The data were taken from information provided by the ANAS.

According to ANAS reports, all training conducted between 2018–2020 was funded by development partners. The category of trainees and the topics identified for training did not fully reflect the reality of the identified training needs of social assistance personnel as included in the annual training plans.

## Approval of Providers of Initial/Ongoing Training

According to Government Decision No. 38/2019, Section 3, providers of initial and ongoing training are approved for a period of four years for their respective area of training. Relevant regulatory framework also stipulates that eligibility criteria (regarding approval, evaluation, etc.) for the training provider be regulated.

Thus, according to the Government Decision No. 38/2019, points 31–33, to apply for approval, the training provider must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Is established in accordance with the law.
2. Have established and approved training activities.
3. Fulfill tax obligations, duties, and contributions.

Approval for training providers is based on the following evaluation criteria:

1. Has at least two trainers.
2. Has experience in organizing relevant training.

Trainers are approved based on the following evaluation criteria:

1. Possesses general training experience.
2. Possesses specific training experience in the field of social assistance or in other related fields.

## Contracting Initial and Ongoing Training Services

The Annual Ongoing Training Plan, in accordance with the identified initial training needs, states that the ANAS will contract approved training instructors. The ANAS is also responsible for contracting third-party vendors to provide, as necessary, accommodation services, catering services, and/or spaces and equipment for training, depending on the specific needs of each training course.

Thus far, training has been based on the agreements between the MHLSP, the ANAS, and various development partners. From 2019–2020, training was carried out in partnership with the IOM, the Czech Development Agency, USAID, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN WOMEN Moldova, People in Need Moldova, Keystone Moldova, CCF Moldova, Diaconia Social Mission, etc. Reports for 2019<sup>35</sup> and 2020 (sem. I)<sup>36</sup> show that the ANAS, based on agreements with development partners, carried out training sessions for various categories of professionals (community social assistants, supervisors, STAS managers, social services managers, foster carers, parents, social assistants within the Foster Care Service, etc.).

In 2020 (based on the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding between the MHLSP, CCF Moldova, and RISM Diaconia regarding the implementation of the “Capacity Building of Child Protection Specialists in the Republic of Moldova” project funded by Caritas Vienna), nine training sessions were organized in which 201 persons were trained. The training sessions targeted six pilot districts (Glodeni, Riscani, Drochia, Straseni, Causeni, Nisporeni) for engagement in the project.

During the organization of some training courses, the ANAS assumed responsibility for logistical needs and provided the necessary space and technical equipment for training.

Table 5: Topics of the training sessions and number of academic hours reserved for each course

No.	Course	Hours
1	<b>Role of the social assistant in community mobilization:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the role of social assistance in the community;</li> <li>• Correct identification of issues the child is facing.</li> <li>• Detailed review of the on-site work situation.</li> <li>• Designing the plan.</li> <li>• Team building at community level.</li> </ul>	24
2	<b>Strengthening the capacity of foster carers and educating parents to effectively manage the behaviors of children in placement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental roles and attitudes of foster carers and parent educators.</li> <li>• Developmental needs of children (age-based approach).</li> <li>• Wanted and unwanted behaviors in children (including causes of unwanted behavior in children).</li> <li>• Overcoming unwanted behaviors in children:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Overcoming unwanted behaviors in children: behavior assessment;</li> <li>◦ Developing of new behaviors: support imitation, modeling, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Analysis of unwanted behaviors in children in placement; including the development of wanted behaviors.</li> <li>• Prevention of professional burnout of foster carers and parent educators.</li> <li>• Development of resilience capacities (e.g., emotional health of foster carers/parent educators).</li> </ul>	24
3	<b>Child protection policy:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principles of an efficient policy.</li> <li>• Elements of an efficient policy.</li> <li>• Recruitment and training of personnel.</li> </ul>	8

Source: : NSSA Report, 2020

## Monitoring and Evaluation of Training Quality and Reporting

Government Decision No. 38/2019 states that the ANAS shall monitor the quality of social assistance training. The regulatory framework contains a list of tasks for training providers after the completion of the courses (submission of reports, pre- and post-training evaluation questionnaires, analysis summary of questionnaires, list of trainees). The ANAS can observe training sessions, carry out evaluations, hold discussions with trainees, and prepare training quality evaluation reports. There are also provisions for situations in which violations are found. By the 15th of the month following the end of each quarter, the ANAS draws up an evaluation report and sends it to the Training Quality Evaluation Commission. By January 31, the ANAS prepares and submits the annual evaluation report to the MHLSP on the operation of the training system for the previous year. As there is no monitoring methodology with clear indicators, the activities described above are sporadic.

According to the activity report for 2020 (semester 1), the ANAS carried out certain activities to monitor the quality of training with an emphasis on the monitoring of trainee records, schedule compliance, and presentation of approved material.

## Extension, Suspension, or Cancellation of Training Course and/or Provider Approval

According to Government Decision No. 38/2019, the ANAS may request either the cancellation of courses and/or the removal of a training provider through the MHLSP

The approval of the training provider will be withdrawn in the following cases:

1. Provider submits a request to this effect.
2. Provider (legal entity) is liquidated.
3. Death of the trainer.
4. Provider providing falsified records in order to gain approval.
5. Provider did not correct inconsistencies and/or violations within established deadlines.
6. Failure to submit report or submission of report after stated deadline.

According to the regulatory framework, the approval of the training provider can be suspended in the following cases:

1. Failure to submit reports regarding training by stated deadlines.
2. Notification of law enforcement and/or financial bodies.
3. Initiation of a criminal investigation against training provider.

The approval of a training course will be canceled in the following cases:

1. Plagiarism.
2. Course is no longer relevant.

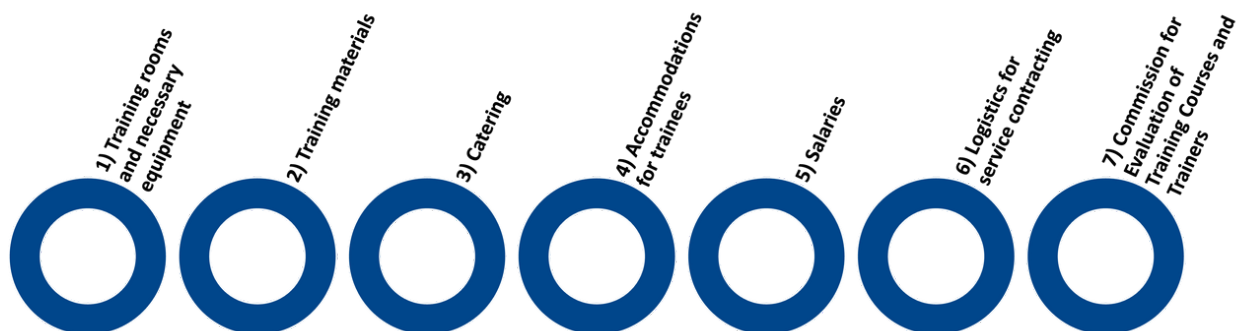
### Financing of the Training System

Government Decision No. 38/2019 states that the social assistance training system will be funded by the following sources:

1. State budgets.
2. Local budgets.
3. Employer funds.
4. Other sources not prohibited by law.

In the opinion of the interviewees, there is a shortage of funds allocated to the training system. "One of the problems we face is the shortage of funds allocated for the training of specialists, as only 0.5% of the required funds is covered" [IIA\_1\_APC]. However, it is noted, that funds are provided to ensure the functionality of the training system in the categories shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Basic Payments to Ensure the Functionality of the Training System



For course and provider approval, applicants must file their applications and pay a one-time fee (in the amount established according to the methodology) which covers:

1. Analysis and evaluation of training courses.
2. Examination of applications and files for potential training providers.

The standard procedure (approved by MLSPF Order No. 90/2015) stipulates that STASs determine which training can be covered internally and which require external resources. The category of internal resources includes STAS employees who have knowledge, competencies, and experience in the field.

External resources are divided into three groups:

1. Resources within the social assistance system.
2. Resources from projects implemented by CSOs in partnership with STASs.
3. Advanced experiences/best practices of other STASs.

Analysis of ANAS procurement plans for 2020 and 2021 published on their official website (2019 plan is missing) reveal that the ANAS planned the procurement of training services as follows:

- 2020: 688,500 MDL<sup>37</sup>
- 2021: 8,688.500 MDL<sup>38</sup>

The 2019 report on low value public procurement shows that two procurement contracts were signed for training services (with values of 16,600 MDL and 22,050 MDL, respectively), and the level of implementation was 100%.<sup>39</sup> In 2020, the ANAS did not utilize low value public procurement for training services.<sup>40</sup> The MHLSP report on the implementation of the Expenditure Strategy for 2019 (2020 report is not published) shows that the ANAS did not execute 864,800 MDL (approximately \$50,000 USD) due to the lack of approval for the methodology for implementation of the social assistance training system.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the study “Evaluation of Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity and Support Plan for Territorial Assistance Structures. Republic of Moldova” (implemented within the “Data for Impact” project,<sup>42</sup> and financed by USAID) showed that the ANAS had been approved for 2019 funds amounting to 2.2 million MDL (about \$128,000 USD) for the training of social assistance personnel, which was returned to the state budget.

The lack of methodology, mechanisms and procedures for organizing and operating the training system is the most significant impediment to ensuring the proper function of the training system for the field of social assistance. The establishment of the Commission for Evaluation of Training Courses and Training Providers and the Commission for Evaluation of Quality of Social Assistance Training (membership of which should include university representatives and CSOs engaged in the field) will ensure the implementation of the approval process for training providers and programs.

## Mapping of Training Programs and Courses in the Field of Child and Family Protection<sup>42</sup>

During the evaluation, the CTWWC working group collected data from training service providers who developed training programs and courses in the field of child and family protection. A form was used to collect the data, which includes the following information: (i) General data about the provider (name of the organization, year of establishment, contact details); (ii) Methodology for assessing training needs; (iii) Training program information (title, target group, number of hours); (iv) Who contracted the training services (STASs or other social service providers); and (v) Whether the organization provides training services based on collaborative agreements and/or by requests by STAS/MHLSP/ANA. Additional information was collected through individual interviews with training providers.

Figure 11: Trainees



As a result of the mapping, 12 training providers were identified and subsequently developed a total of 66 training programs and courses in the field of child and family protection. Most training programs and courses were developed by P4EC (21 programs and courses); Terre des Hommes Moldova (12 courses aimed at teachers, psychologists, other specialists in related fields, etc.), and the NCCAP (8 programs and courses).

The categories of beneficiaries (target groups) are varied. Eleven categories of trainees were identified for which training programs or training courses were developed (see Figure 11).

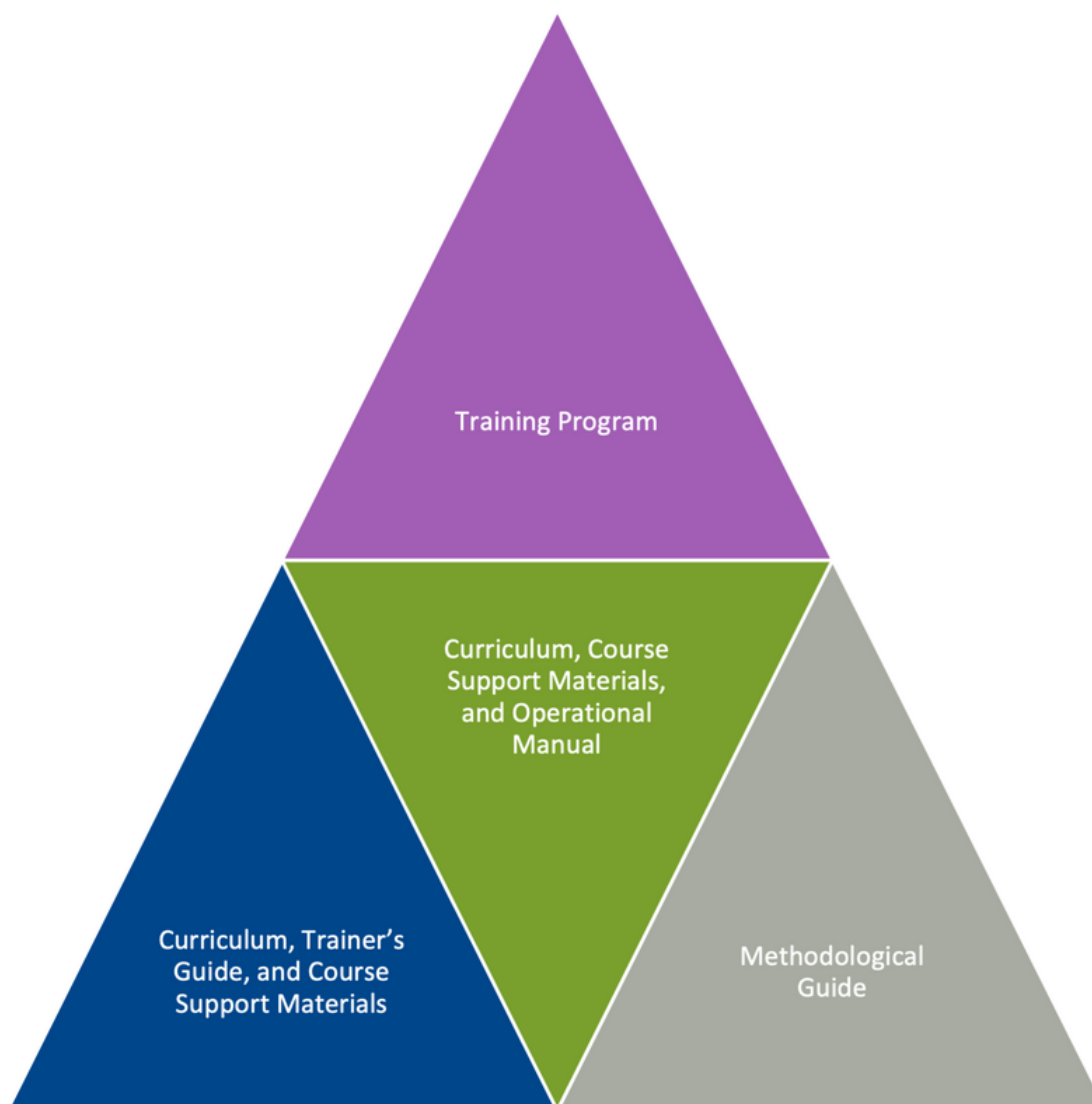


In accordance with Government Decision 38/2019, all professional categories are largely covered, as follows:

1. Those with direct competencies in the field of social assistance, e.g., specialists from STASs, community social assistants, supervisors from other social services, foster carers/parent educators.
2. Those with average competencies in the field of social assistance, e.g., personal assistants.
3. Those with competencies in the field of management and social assistance, e.g., managers of STASs and social services, etc.
4. Those with relevant direct competencies in a field other than social assistance, e.g., medical personnel, educators, psychologists, etc.

The mapping of training programs and courses in the field of child and family protection has revealed a wide range of curricula, course support materials, guides, etc., some of which are approved by the central authority in the field of social protection (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Types of Training Programs and Courses Used by Training Providers



## Training Programs

Keystone Moldova has developed a training program for personal assistants which was approved by MLSPF Order No. 2018 on November 24, 2016. This course includes topics related to:

1. Understanding disability.
2. The legal and regulatory framework regarding the social protection of persons with disabilities.
3. The institutional framework for social protection of persons with disabilities.
4. Professional ethics.
5. Job description for personal assistants.
6. Services provided by personal assistants.
7. Promoting the social role of people with disabilities.
8. Communication.
9. Problematic behaviors.

In addition, Keystone Moldova developed a package including curriculum, course support materials, and operational manuals for the Mobile Team, which was approved by MLSPF Order No. 107 on June 19, 2013.<sup>43</sup>

P4EC developed a curriculum and course support materials for the initial training of social assistants. Course materials were approved by MLSPF Order No. 56 on June 15, 2009. Curriculum and course support materials for the ongoing training of social assistants were approved by MLSPF Order No. 115 on June 4, 2010.

Topics covered are:

1. Concept and principles of social assistance, integrated system of social services, and related regulatory and legal frameworks.
2. Professional standards in the field of social assistance; i.e., code of ethics, ethical dilemmas.
3. Fundamental skills of communication.
4. Fundamental theories of social assistance.
5. Working methodology of social assistants: i.e., case management, working with groups and communities, working with multidisciplinary teams).
6. Specialty areas: e.g., families with children, people with disabilities, the elderly, young people, marginalized groups, etc.
7. Procedures of application for social assistance.

### Curriculum, course support materials and trainer's guide

From 2014–2016, the Center of Investigations and Consultation (“SocioPolis”) and Caritas Czech Republic, with financial support from the Czech Development Agency and in partnership with the MLSPF, implemented the “Strengthening the Professional Skills of Social Services Personnel Working with Children and Young People from Moldova” project.

The aim of this project was to contribute to strengthening the knowledge and professional skills of social services personnel working with children. The project strove to teach international standards and good practices, and to provide experience in raising and educating children separated from their parents, as well as children at risk of separation.

Training topics were identified in the study, “The Needs of Social Service Providers Working with Children Separated from their Parents And Children at Risk of Separation.”<sup>44</sup> Based on the needs identified in the study, the following were developed: (i) Training curriculum for social service professionals working with children separated from their parents and children at risk of separation (20 hours); (ii) Course support materials (“Psychosociology of the child–social professional relationship,” approved by MLSPF Order No. 133 on August 22, 2015<sup>45</sup>); and (iii) Trainer's guide.<sup>46</sup>

Within the “Strengthening the Professional Skills of Social Services Personnel Working with Children and Young People in Moldova” project, 906 professionals were trained to work in the field of child protection and to work with children separated from their families and children at risk or separation. The trained professionals are: foster carers; parent educators from family-type orphanages; managers; psychologists; social assistants; psycho-educationalists; social pedagogues from temporary placement centers, day centers, community centers or multifunctional centers; and specialists from STASs.

### Methodological guides

Guides have been developed by P4EC and Keystone Moldova and are based on training courses for specialists. The guides have been approved by the central authority in the field of social protection.

In recent years, multiple parent education programs have also been developed. The groups developing the programs target the most vulnerable families, including those in which there are difficult parent–child relationships.

1. P4EC has developed a parent education program called “Mellow Parenting,” which is an early intervention method based on relationships and is focused on improving the parent–child relationship. Implemented by P4EC in collaboration with four Administrative Territorial Units (UAT) (Chisinau, Orhei, Singerei, and Soroca), the Mellow Parenting groups sessions are intense, lasting for 14 weeks (one day per week).<sup>47</sup> The Mellow Parenting program aims to support parents in developing parental skills at various phases of child development, from prenatal to preschool, and is based on the principles of attachment, social learning, and the theory of cognitive behavior. The program was adapted for an online format and was piloted in Ungheni district with the support of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection in Ungheni, with possible extension into other districts. The online program was implemented with financial support provided by the World Childhood Foundation and with funds accumulated by redirecting 2% of the 2020 income tax.
2. The NCCAP, with support from UNICEF, has developed the CONECT parent education program, which is a structural group intervention program that addresses sensitive topics relevant to adolescence. The training program consists of 15 sessions of two hours each and modules include: vocational counseling or support for teenagers in cases of bullying, or education for health. Each session gives a basic scenario in two versions: a negative version of parent–child communication and a positive version of how it should be. Parents learn onsite during the session and then practice the competencies in their relationships with their own teenagers. When they come to the next session, they share their experiences of utilizing their new skills. The program aims to develop five fundamental competencies among parents: empathic communication; support; guidance; observation and monitoring; and behavior modeling. The CONECT program is designed for parents and caregivers of teenagers in Chisinau municipality and Singerei, Cahul, and Ungheni districts.<sup>48</sup>
3. The NCCAP developed the parent education program, “Without Slaps and Abuse, or How to Set Limits for Children with Love and Respect.” The purpose of the program is to develop parents' knowledge and skills on how to discipline their young children without violence. This program has been implemented in 11 districts (Chisinau, Balti, Criuleni, Cimislia, Cahul, Ungheni, Straseni, Orhei, Causeni, Hincesti, and Cimislia).<sup>49</sup> As part of the program, educators were trained to respond qualitatively to the needs of the parents they interact with. They had the opportunity to access useful materials and tools, and to think about future plans. Parents of preschool-aged children were guided on how to control their anger in difficult situations, and how to become aware of their own feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and needs.
4. Terre des Hommes Moldova (with the financial support of Canton Zurich and MIGROS Switzerland) has developed a 40-hour parent education program, which includes modules on personal and professional development, training of adults, positive parenting, and group psychosocial activities for parents. The course is part of the “Let's Make School a Friendly Environment for Children, Including for Roma Children” project. The project was implemented from 2015–2016 and was focused on improving the educational inclusion of Roma children in 30 communities from 14 districts.

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Training courses were also developed for specialists in related areas (education, justice, health, etc.). In this context, ensuring the functionality of cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms for solving various issues related to child protection is still a challenge, and the courses developed by the training providers are focused on specific content units. This category includes the courses developed by the NCCAP for local multidisciplinary teams, which include curriculum for professionals involved in identifying, examining, and reporting cases of violence, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking. The training course consists of three modules (40 hours):

- Module I – Understanding the needs and rights of the child.
- Module II – Recognition of violence against children and response of professionals to identified cases.
- Module III – Intersectional procedures to help and monitor child victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking.

This category also includes the 40-hour training course, “Reducing Criminal Behavior in Teenagers at Risk,” developed by Terre des Hommes Moldova for probation counselors and psychologists from the juvenile prison.

Several training providers mentioned that they developed training programs and courses in line with determined training needs. One of the practices was developed within the “Strengthening the Capacity of Human Resources in the Child Protection System of the Republic of Moldova” project implemented by the Diaconia Social Mission and CCF Moldova (January 2019–December 2021) and funded by Caritas Austria, which developed the methodology for assessing training needs applied in six UATS (Causeni, Drochia, Glodeni, Nisporeni, Rascani, and Strasenii). Training courses developed and delivered for specialists from these UATs are as follows:

1. “Assistance to Families in Crisis” (24 hours), delivered to 250 social assistants.
2. “Management of Behaviors of Children in Placement” (24 hours), delivered to 50 foster carers
3. “Legal Assistance” (8 hours), delivered to STAS specialists.
4. “Child Protection Policy” (8 hours), delivered to 20 social services managers.
5. “Working with the child who has been separated. Work methods and techniques” (24 hours), developed for employees of residential care institutions.

An example of best practices is Concordia Academia, a training and professional development center set up under the umbrella of the Concordia Organization Social Projects, an organization founded in Romania in 1991 and currently operating in five countries (Romania, Republic of Moldova, Austria, Kosovo, and Bulgaria). Concordia Academia offers certified training programs for practitioners, managers, and supervisors in the social services field, as well as supervision, coaching, and consulting services in order to improve the quality of social services. Three training programs have been developed within Concordia Academia, which have also been successfully implemented in the Republic of Moldova.

1. **Social Services Manager (authorized by the National Qualifications Authority from Romania)**: The training program is intended for directors, managers, team coordinators, and management departments of public and private providers of social and socio-medical services. The program provides a total of 360 hours (120 hours of theory and 240 internship hours) over 4–5 months. Course content is developed in partnership with the Vienna Academy of Social Management and other European institutions with high quality standards. Beginning in 2020, Concordia Academia began issuing diplomas recognized by Eurodir to graduates of the social services manager department. In the Republic of Moldova, these courses were conducted free of charge, however, in Romania, the cost of such a course is 3,900 RON (about 800 EUR), and a scholarship covers 80% of the value.<sup>51</sup> The total number of graduates is 410 (including data for Romania and the Republic of Moldova).
2. **Social Services Practitioners (authorized by the National College of Social Assistants from Romania)**. The training program was designed for practitioners (social assistants, psycho-educationalists, educators, medical assistants, psychologists, counselors, etc.) from the public and private social sector who work directly with people who are socially vulnerable. The training program has a modular structure and varies between 240–360 hours, including internships. The cost of the course is 3,700 RON (approximately 760 EUR), with a scholarship covering 80% of the value.<sup>52</sup>
3. **Social Services Supervisor (authorized by the National Qualifications Authority from Romania.)** The training program was designed for professionals with eligible socio-human studies who, following the successful completion of the course, are able to provide individual and group supervision services. The program requires a total of 375 hours (125 hours of theory and 250 internship/interview hours) and lasts about 12 months.

Although there are a variety of training programs and courses developed by CSOs, we note that they are fragmented in nature. The training courses are carried out only during the implementation of the projects, thus they are not used for the training of newly employed specialists. This is also confirmed by the representatives of CSOs, universities, and the interviewed experts.

- “CSOs have an essential contribution in the training of specialists in the field, also depending on the project awarded and the available funding. Non-profit organizations invest heavily in training, but there must be uniformity at the country level so that all districts benefit equally. It turns out that the districts, where those projects are implemented, have all kinds of training, while the others miss all of them...” [IIA\_3\_OSC].
- “Each CSO seeks to find opportunities and resources to create and deliver courses, which is a difficult process... It’s difficult for organizations to personally identify, train, and keep them dedicated. The ANAS should find resources to contract training providers, which would make this process much better...” [IIA\_6\_OSC].
- A large section of personnel is not open to real training. Therefore, it’s necessary to join the process of ongoing training gradually and not scare employees” [IIA\_9\_OSC].

- “CSOs are a very important pillar in terms of training of specialists, as well as provision of social services. If CSOs didn’t exist, the state would confirm its financial incapacity. At the same time, most CSOs are not educational service providers; they monitor and work directly with the beneficiaries, but cannot provide credits. Universities must be involved as educational service providers; they can assume the ongoing training of specialists in the field” [IIA\_10\_MA].
- “CSOs provide training services within projects funded by various donors. It’s a good thing, but it should be included in the system, and these training programs should be accredited” [IIA\_11\_MA].
- “CSOs play an important role in training specialists; they have experience in very specific areas and cover narrow areas. Deepening these areas allows transferring good practices, adjusting procedures to a certain category of trainees. If ongoing training were provided by universities, it would be possible to involve CSOs. Nevertheless, it’s also necessary to analyze how to ensure the sustainability of the training programs developed by them” [IIA\_12\_MA].

In conclusion, training programs and courses developed by CSOs in the field of child and family protection are important resources that need to be capitalized on by the training system. At the same time, to ensure the sustainability of training programs and courses, they should be approved on the basis of the methodology of evaluation of training programs and providers, which has yet to happen.

## MAIN FINDINGS

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- The evaluation revealed that the training program for social assistance personnel is at an early phase. The ANAS manages the process of strengthening the professional capacities of social services personnel with a focus on collecting information on training needs; development of a general annual training plan; analysis of curricula and course support materials; hiring and keeping records of training providers; keeping records of trainee evaluations; and monitoring the quality of program activities.
- The MHLSP is responsible for approving initial training programs and courses as well as training service providers, but up to this point, the methodology of evaluation of courses and training providers has not been approved. Therefore, neither of the two commissions (Commission for Evaluation of Courses and Providers and Commission for Evaluation of Quality of Social Assistance Training) have been set up by the MHLSP, nor were training courses for the child and family protection personnel approved.
- The analysis of the regulatory framework for the organization and operation of social services for children and families revealed that for some social services there are no minimum guidelines regarding the number of hours of initial and/or ongoing training for personnel. For other services, there are only provisions regarding the number of hours for ongoing training.
- For most social services, initial and/or ongoing training of personnel are not based on unified curricula or approved by the MHLSP, nor are they in accordance with existing regulatory framework.
- The evaluation found that the collaboration between the ANAS and higher education institutions, which train social assistants, is modest. Universities are interested in developing partnerships with the ANAS to provide ongoing training services.
- CSOs are a very important pillar in the development and operation of training programs for child and family protection personnel. The partnerships developed between the ANAS and CSOs have ensured the organization of a series of training courses in the field, but do not provide systemic interventions as they are carried out in accordance with the CSO project objectives which are not always correlated with the training needs of personnel.
- In the opinion of the interviewees, funds allocated for initial and ongoing social service training programs are not sufficient. Most STASs do not allocate resources for personnel training or, when the funds are present, they are redirected to cover other needs. They do not consider ongoing training valuable and often have other financial needs that they cannot cover. Further, there is no agency to monitor where and how the funds allocated for personnel training are used.



- There is a wide variety of training programs and courses, but most of them are not approved.
- In districts where CSOs operate, qualitative training courses are carried out, however, after the completion of the projects implemented by CSOs, public social service providers do not ensure the continuity of the training courses.
- Training needs assessments and post-training evaluations are carried out by most training providers, but they are not based on a clearly determined methodology.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## The Regulatory and Methodological Framework

- Expand and gain approval (by the MHLSP) for the methodology, mechanisms, and procedures regarding the organization and operation of initial and ongoing social assistance training programs. Utilize the active involvement of CSOs engaged in the field and universities (assistance and expertise in the field, working groups).
- Clarify roles and mechanism of cooperation between the MHLSP, ANAS, and the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) regarding the methodology of evaluation and approval for training programs and training providers.
- Establish the Commission for Evaluation of Training Courses and Training Providers and the Commission for Evaluation of Quality of Social Assistance Training and ensure the functionality of these bodies. Membership of the commissions should include representatives of universities and CSOs engaged in the field.
- Establish credit system for the ongoing training of social assistance specialists by allowing accumulated credits that are directly correlated with the process of employee performance evaluation, which is currently a formal one.
- Revise the regulatory framework regarding the mandatory number of hours required for the initial and ongoing training of social services personnel in order to develop professional competencies and ensure quality standards.
- Develop regulatory framework to provide for supervision as a mandatory activity with an emphasis on providing psychological support to social services personnel.
- Improve training methodologies, including online work tools.
- Develop and manage a database on training providers and trainers by areas of expertise. (This is a responsibility of the ANAS.)
- Allocate needed funds for initial and ongoing training programs.
- Introduce amendments to the regulatory framework regarding the possibility of continuing education for social assistance employees who have experience, but do not have higher education in the field. In this regard, the training system should be rethought.
- Develop a clear procedure for partnership between universities and social service providers to create ongoing training programs (annual contracts).

- Create a common platform to ensure collaboration between ongoing training centers in various fields (health, police, social assistance, justice) in child and family protection.

## Assessment of Training Needs

- Analysis of practices and methodologies for assessing the needs developed by training providers and taking over best practices.
- Collaboratively develop, with the involvement of all relevant actors, a methodology for assessing training needs of specialists in the field of child and family protection, which includes:
  - The profile of participants in the training programs (age, seniority, level of education, qualifications, motivation, satisfaction, attitude towards learning, attitude towards children and families, relationship with local social service providers, expectations from the training program, etc.).
  - Analysis of categories and subcategories of knowledge and skills in terms of importance, level of knowledge, and order of priorities in order to determine immediate and long-term training needs of specialists.
  - Training objectives and structured learning concepts for training modules.
- Develop platforms enabling adaptive training where trainees must pass an adaptive pre-test based on training courses. Themes and topics should be customized to trainees' preferred field.
- Regularly map training needs, including digitizing training needs assessment process.

## Organization of Training

- Publish the Annual Ongoing Training Plan and the schedule of training courses on the ANAS website to ensure better information and visibility of the training process for specialists.
- Organize training courses for caregivers (foster carers, personal assistants, etc.) at zonal/regional levels, as it is difficult for potential participants to be away from home for several days in order to participate in trainings organized in Chisinau.
- Organize training for pandemic (COVID-19) conditions; i.e., train participants on the use of online communication platforms to apply to programs, etc. Online courses are a solution, but they are not very effective.
- Reimburse transportation expenses for personnel participating in training courses.
- Register certificates of participation with the Ministry to ensure value.
- Identify enough training providers to cover the needs of the geographical area.

- Coordinate the efforts of various training providers to avoid duplication in the implementation of training programs or training courses.
- Set up a platform/network which will allow for collaboration and connection between specialists to discuss problems and solutions.
- Establish and maintain an effective platform for the digitization of ongoing training programs in the field of child and family protection.
- Ensure collaboration between all actors (the MHLSP, the ANAS, universities, CSOs, etc.) so all actors offer training courses and partnerships are based on results and no one organization dominates the field.

## Training Programs

- Implement training programs in a decentralized way, focusing on training needs.
- Develop ongoing training programs by modules so that specialists have the opportunity to access specific modules depending on their training needs (individual and group needs).
- Differentiate curricula for training (e.g., community social assistants with experience in the field of social assistance may require a certain number of hours, while those without experience may require a higher number).
- Ensure the connection between training programs and professional competencies.
- Involve universities in ongoing training of social assistance specialists.
- Evaluate the capacity of ongoing training centers within universities with a view to develop ongoing training programs for social assistance specialists. Universities can ensure the connection between knowledge and competencies formed during the first cycle and ongoing trainings, which would enable graduates to fill their knowledge gaps.
- Adjust existing training programs and develop new programs at different levels that offer new services.
- Expand initial training program for newly employed specialists in the field of child and family protection.
- Unify contents of training courses as each CSO or training provider currently provides its own methodologies (for example, case management should be approved by the central authority and all specialists should be trained on its basis).
- Codify minimum sufficient number of training hours in order to better train specialists (include mandatory practical applications, case studies, etc.).

- Encourage the development of new training programs in coordination with relevant actors (universities, practitioners, training providers, etc.).
- Develop new training programs based on identified training needs and professional categories (for example, for specialists working with children at risk of separation; for specialists working with children and people with disabilities, etc.). The evaluation revealed the need to develop training programs or training courses with reference to:
  - a. The rights of the child
    - Child protection policy.
    - Children's involvement in decision-making processes.
  - b. Communication and professional supervision
    - Personal development.
    - Communication and networking.
    - Supervision and interviewing.
    - Prevention of professional burnout.
  - c. Development of professional competencies in specific areas of assistance
    - Case management.
    - Support and assistance for children addicted to psychoactive substances.
    - HIV/AIDS prevention.
    - Reproductive health.
    - Providing psycho-social services for children at risk.
    - Community mobilization.
    - Communication with children and teenagers.
  - d. Management
    - Organizational development.
    - Financial management.
    - Monitoring and evaluation.
    - Strategic planning.
    - Performance management.
- Capitalize on experiences and good practices in the field and promote new training programs for child and family protection specialists.
- Use modern technologies in the training of specialists (i.e., use videos during training, etc.).
- Develop, publish, and update textbooks and course support materials frequently as social assistance products rapidly become obsolete and out-of-date.
- Diversify training forms (mentoring, supervision, training seminars, study visits).

## Assessment of the Impact of Training Programs

- Develop a methodology of assessment regarding the impact of programs and courses with an emphasis on:
  - Evaluation of the knowledge and competencies of trainees (e.g., use of tests).
  - Impact of the program over a specified time period.
  - Specific indicators to gauge what changes have taken place.
  - Development of an evaluation and monitoring mechanism focused on the theory of impact (which is based on the theory of change) and ensuring a connection with performance management.
- Evaluate the impact of training programs including:
  - Carrying out follow-up activities.
  - Assessing the impact of training in partnership with the management team of the institution/social service.
- Diversify methodologies and forms of evaluation:
  - Online and offline.
  - Individually and in groups.
  - Synchronous (all online) and asynchronous (everyone prepares homework when he or she wants).
- Carry out impact studies targeting professionals involved in the training at various phases, as well as potential beneficiaries of social services who communicated an interest in offered services.
- Promote and disseminate the results of training programs on various platforms and forums to highlight the importance of professionalism.

## Monitoring

- Ensure the MHLSP monitors the operation of the social assistance training program based on the following seven components:
  - Assessment of training needs and planning of training courses.
  - Approval of initial training programs and courses.
  - Approval of training providers
  - Contracting providers of initial and ongoing training services.
  - Monitoring and evaluating training quality and reporting.
  - Extending, suspending, or cancelling the approval of training courses and/or training providers.
  - Financing the system.
- Expand and gain approval for the quality monitoring methodology, which should include the monitoring procedure and sample documents used in the process:
  - Report on training (should include qualitative and quantitative indicators).
  - Trainee evaluation questionnaire.
  - Training evaluation questionnaire.
  - Sample list of trainees.
  - Sample training evaluation report.
- Improve mechanism for monitoring of funds allocated for the social services training program.

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# END NOTES

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1. See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/139/educatie-si-formare-profesionala>
2. Note: The minimum quality standards of social services contain provisions regarding the obligation of initial and ongoing training of the personnel.
3. Note: Government Decision No. 38/2019 lays down four categories: 1) the group of functions with direct competencies in the field of social assistance; 2) the group of functions that require average competencies in the field of social assistance; 3) the group of functions with competencies in the field of management and social assistance; 4) the group of functions with direct competencies of a nature, other than social assistance.
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