Review of Legislation and Policies
that Support the Social Service Workforce
in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

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GLOBAL
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Contents

Introduction

Social service systems are critical to reducing poverty and can have a direct and positive impact on vulnerable families and individuals by improving access to vital services, including health care, nutrition, education, legal protection, psychosocial support, economic strengthening and skills-building. A strong social service system addresses both the social welfare and protection of vulnerable populations and includes elements that are preventive, responsive and promotive. Effective and well-functioning social service systems are essential to a nation's social and economic progress and are as important to global development programs as strong health and education systems.

The social service workforce can be broadly defined to describe a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care and protection of vulnerable populations. Social service workers operate within a system of interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families.

A number of factors are key to ensuring an effective social service system and a strong social service workforce. These are best illustrated in the Framework for the Strengthening of the Social Service Workforce below.[i]

An important aspect of building an effective workforce is designing and implementing legislation that recognizes, supports and funds social service workers and their work with vulnerable populations. This often occurs within the context of broader social protection or child protection and care reform efforts – a recognition that in order to achieve tangible results for vulnerable populations, an effective, trained, monitored and properly funded workforce is required.

Public-sector policies and legislation are fundamental to the creation of formal support structures for vulnerable populations that facilitate social service workers' education, financing, identity and status. The availability of (or gaps in) policies and legislation that provide a mandate for and definition of the social service workforce profoundly affect the development and sustainability of social services in a particular country. Once legislation is established, it needs to be effectively enacted and implemented. Many laws are often not fully implemented – particularly at local levels – not due to a lack of will, but as a result of inadequate resources and limited authority and accountability.

Purpose

The aim of this report is to offer a more in-depth view of social service workforce-supportive policies and legislation in selected countries, provide specific examples of aspects of legislation that feature the workforce and profile strategies implemented by countries that have effectively prepared and enacted legislation. The report is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of global progress in this area. Rather, it is a snapshot of developments in a selected set of countries where DLA Piper conducted research in 2015 and where related information was made available through the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance network.

Methodology

The State of the Social Service Workforce 2015 Report[ii] featured an overview of workforce-supportive policies and legislation in 15 countries. For the purposes of analyzing country-level policy and legislative frameworks in the report, UNICEF contracted DLA Piper to conduct an assessment in this area. Researchers accessed legislation relevant to the social service workforce in 13 low- and middle- income countries that were selected to be featured in the 2015 report due to the range of workforce strengthening developments in each country. This work was carried out by DLA Piper researchers through desk-based research and with assistance from local firms where possible. The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance complemented this effort by reviewing existing human resources gap analyses and other relevant gray literature. Particular attention was paid to legislation that names titles of workers, defines their roles, outlines regulatory structures such as those that register or license workers, or grants other powers related to training and enforcement of regulations for the workforce. Significant variations were found in the legislation with regard to titles, job duties, funding and structure.[iii] The State of the Social Service Workforce 2016 Report[iv] offers some additional updates related

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to the development of policy frameworks that are supportive of the social service workforce. The updates are based on information gathered from responses to questionnaires and reports provided by Alliance members. The information provided in this report also draws from research carried out in preparation of the [Role of Social Service Workforce Development in Care Reform](#), a recent working paper developed by the Better Care Network and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance that explored this theme in case studies of Indonesia, Moldova and Rwanda.

Where policies and legislation support the social service workforce

Currently, information pertaining to legislative frameworks regulating social service systems and workforce is scattered, mostly found in descriptive program reports, situation analyses and grey literature concerning individual countries or regions. Given the considerable variation in laws and policies – and their implementation – it is difficult to analyze overall trends. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable uptick in the number of countries developing legislation and policies related to the social service workforce in the past five to six years. In countries that have made progress in strengthening the social service system, creating and developing a robust workforce is most often anchored on the foundation of laws and policies that create legal mandates and ensure appropriate governance structures and processes to implement them. Such efforts are embodied in national strategic plans for developing the workforce and ideally feature the elements highlighted below in Box 1.

**Box 1: Effective elements included in laws and policies
to strengthen the social service workforce**

✓ Definitions of the various categories of social service workers
✓ Establishment of a governing, regulatory body
✓ Clarity regarding registration and licensing requirements for social service workers
✓ Standardized qualifications certified through national exams
✓ Development and enforcement of a code of ethics and professional standards of practice
✓ Professional development and continuing education opportunities
✓ Clarity regarding working conditions, including rates of pay
✓ Equal opportunity for employment

Below are some examples of national efforts – some further along than others – to strengthen the social service workforce through legislation and other policies since 2010.

Cambodia: In 2011, the Cambodian government issued the [National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable,](#)[v] which establishes a strong and multifaceted mandate for social protection and complements other sectoral policies, plans and strategies of line ministries and stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in this work. The strategy defines social protection,

social safety nets and other related terms. It presents line ministries' institutional structures, mandates and social protection interventions. Informal and traditional social safety nets and civil society interventions are also described. While the strategy clearly underscores the importance of work within the social protection sector, it refers only once to the workforce: "Improved human capacities through a gender-balanced cadre of social workers are at the core of social welfare provision." The social service workforce is not defined or fully considered. Nevertheless, the strategy offers a foundation for further efforts to acknowledge and strengthen the critical role of the social service workforce.

A recent review of social work practice in Cambodia examines the degree of professionalization and institutionalization of the social work profession in government and includes a timeline and listing of relevant legal frameworks and policies. The review's findings confirm that more remains to be done to recognize social work as a profession, particularly as related to civil servants working in the ministries of health, education, justice, women's affairs and the interior.[vi]

China: The central government has been proactively engaged in developing the social service sector. In 2010, it released the [National Plan of Action for Child Development (2011-2020),](#)[vii] which introduces social welfare for children as a priority area, contributing to a more systematic design of child welfare initiatives and a comprehensive systems-based child welfare approach.[viii] Through this process, the government identified social work as a profession that would be intentionally expanded and strengthened, setting the target of generating 3 million social workers by 2020. This target number was modified in 2012 to 1.45 million with specific quotas for social workers (200,000) and senior social workers (30,000). The government also redefined the field of social work to include 17 specific areas of practice.

According to the [Annual Report on the Development of Social Work in China (2011-2012),](#)[ix] published by the Social Work Research Center, under the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and in collaboration with the Social Sciences Academic Press under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the number of specialized social workers in China reached 300,000 in 2012, including more than 80,000 who qualified after passing the government exam.[x] Despite this promising report, a 2012 survey found that fewer than 40 percent of social work students expect to perform any social work activities in the first five years after graduation. A wide gap exists between policies, social service education and the availability of employment in the sector.[xi]

The government's approach to the provision of social services has been described as "a closely watched social engineering process," and the social work profession's agenda cannot stray from national policy.[xii] No research has shown the impact of such centralized governance, but this is a country to watch for large scale data in the near future.[xiii]

Ethiopia: In 2013, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) issued the [National Social Protection Policy](#),[xiv] which aims to expand social services by strengthening social service institutes and promoting human resource development within the workforce. The Policy establishes a Federal Social Protection Council, which includes members from multiple line ministries, with the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs serving as secretary of the Council. The National Social Protection Policy does not, however, specifically regulate the development and management of social service professionals.[xv]

The Policy has triggered other positive developments. For example, MOLSA established National Occupational Standards for Community Service Workers and further efforts are underway to identify and develop standards for other social service occupations. A 2013 [assessment of the public sector social service workforce](#) found that approximately 1,500 degreed social workers serve a population of approximately 90 million.[xvi] In addition, more than 2,000 para social workers have been trained and employed by the government. MOLSA, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists, local universities and vocational institutes, aims to train 4,000 social service workers by 2017.[xvii] Despite this progress, Ethiopia is in the very early stages of developing a comprehensive system for the development and management of social workers.[xviii]

Indonesia: In 2004, the Indonesian Parliament issued the National Social Protection Law, providing a basic legal framework for the development of a social protection system covering five major policy areas: health insurance, employment injury, old-age, pensions and death benefits. In 2009, the [Social Welfare Law](#)[xix] was passed, stipulating requirements for certification and licensing for social workers and clarifying categories within the social service workforce, including social welfare officers, professional social workers, social educators and volunteers. Since then, three additional government regulations were established to more clearly define certification requirements for professional social workers and to clarify the roles and mandates of social volunteers and community social workers.

As a result of the Social Welfare Law and corresponding regulations, the Indonesian Association of Professional Social Workers – which currently includes approximately 1,000 members[xx] – joined with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Indonesian Social Worker Education Association and the National Council of Social Welfare to establish a social work certification body, a national curriculum, code of conduct and a state exam to ensure core competencies. There are currently 35 undergraduate, 3 graduate and 2 doctoral programs offering degrees in social service work in Indonesia. More than 6,400 social service workers have been employed by the government.[xxi]

Namibia: The [Social Work and Psychology Act of 2004](#),[xxii] which amends the [Social and Social Auxiliary Workers Professions Act of 1993](#),[xxiii] establishes a professional council for social workers and psychologists with specified authorities, duties and functions; regulates the registration of social service workers; and identifies the education, training and qualifications required to practice social work and psychology. [The Social Work and Psychology Council of Namibia](#) regulates the registration of social workers and psychologists; specifies the education, training and qualifications required to practice these professions; and prohibits practice without registration.[xxiv] Reports indicate that despite this progress, there continues to be a severe shortage of social workers, primarily due to low salaries, which have also contributed to an "exodus" from the profession. According to information provided by the Namibian government, approximately 700 social workers are registered with the Social Work and Psychology Council.[xxv]

In 2011, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare issued [Standards for Foster Care Services](#).[xxvi] These standards are intended to guide social workers and other service providers in carrying out the tasks of recruiting, assessing, training, matching, supporting, supervising and monitoring when providing foster care services. The primary aim of the standards is to ensure that the best interests of the child are sought when a child is in need of foster care.

South Africa: The Policy for Social Service Practitioners regulates the social service workforce. It is the product of a protracted process to review the [Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978, as amended in 1998](#).[xxvii] The aim of the 1998 amendment and of a number of subsequent amendments was to transform the social services sector and to make the legislation more inclusive of a broader range of social service practitioners, including child and youth care workers at both auxiliary and professional levels, effective from October 2014. The objectives of the Policy are to 1) provide a framework to guide and refine the legislation that serves as a regulatory framework for social service practitioners; 2) expand and give recognition to the human resources required to provide effective social services; and 3) serve as an enabling framework to facilitate the professionalization of the social development sector.

In 2013, the Department of Social Development issued a [Framework for Social Welfare Services](#),[xxviii] which builds upon the [1997 White Paper for Social Welfare](#)[xxix] and seeks to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive, integrated, rights-based, well-resourced and quality social welfare service. The Framework provides direction regarding integration of services within communities and coordination with other sectors. In the same year, the [Generic Norms and Standards for Social Welfare Services](#)[xxx] were developed to align social welfare, community development and social security programs and the associated workforce with the required context, processes and outcomes required for integrated delivery of quality services. The Department of Social Development continues to develop further policies and guidance, including a forthcoming supervision framework and a child care and protection policy, due to be

released in 2016. The child care and protection policy is expected to clarify the roles and build the capacity of social service practitioners working with children.

The Department of Social Development tracks the number of social service workers in South Africa. The number of social workers grew from 14,000 in 2010 to 20,000 in 2015, representing a 70 percent increase. The number of social auxiliary workers increased by 44 percent in the same period, with nearly 5,000 workers in 2015.

Tanzania: The mandate and training of social workers in Tanzania is defined in the [National Social Welfare Training Institute Act] of 1973.[xxxi] Recognizing the need to strengthen the social welfare system to more effectively respond to vulnerable children, people with disabilities and the elderly, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare issued a [Human Resource for Health Strategic Plan (2008-2013),][xxxii] which committed the Department of Social Welfare to develop and implement a Social Welfare Workforce Strategy. The strategic plan has since been updated three times, with the [most recent plan][xxxiii] covering the period between 2014-2019. These plans have indicated that the Department of Social Welfare should facilitate high quality recruitment, retention and development of staff to improve the delivery of social welfare services.

In addition, the [Child Development Policy (1996)][xxxiv] emphasizes a child's right to nutrition, health, shelter, education, safety and non-discrimination. The policy stipulates the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders for children, including community development workers and social workers, and aims to provide an enabling environment for effective implementation of various programs for child protection. In 2009, the [Law of the Child Act][xxxv] was passed, consolidating other laws related to children and further clarifying the duties of social welfare officers in relation to children's rights and protection. The Act provides specific guidance with regard to child custody, foster care, adoption and children in conflict with the law. Likewise, the [Zanzibar Law of the Child Act] of 2009 outlines similar roles of social welfare officers. The roles and responsibilities of mental health practitioners are defined in the [Mental Health Act][xxxvi] of 2008, which also establishes the National Council for Mental Health and the Mental Board.

In 2012, the Department of Social Welfare released an [Assessment of the Social Welfare Workforce].[xxxvii] According to the assessment, the government has demonstrated commitment and political will to address vulnerability issues in accordance with national laws and international commitments. However, "there is concern over limited evidence on the implementation and application of the laws and policies in question. There is general lack of understanding and awareness among social welfare workers, of the content of such laws and policies. This is occasioned, primarily by to the inadequate dissemination of the documents and inadequate capacity building of the workforce around policies and legislation." The most recent

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national strategic plan for workforce development notes that there are currently just over 400 social workers in Tanzania, representing 13 percent of the national requirement.

Vietnam: In 2010, Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) launched the National Program on the Development of Social Work as a Profession (2010-2020), with a budget of $120 million. The program seeks to: (1) develop a legal framework for the development of the social work profession; (2) improve knowledge and skills of social work professionals and para-professionals; (3) develop social work services; and (4) increase knowledge and understanding within society about the role of the social work profession. According to the plan, 35,000 social workers will be trained and 25,000 existing staff and collaborators will be provided with short-term training. Social workers will be designated in the MOLISA system as well as in other key government agencies and organizations.[xxxviii] According to MOLISA's National Program, Vietnam currently has 32,000 social workers, but more than 80 percent lack professional training.

A snapshot of legislative and policy frameworks that support the social service workforce

Country	Legislation Relevant to SSW	Regulatory Body	Licensing/ Registration	Code of Ethics	Professional Standards of Practice	Working Conditions
Cambodia	X				X	
China	X				X	
Ethiopia	X			X		
Indonesia	X	X	X	X	X	
Moldova	X	X		X	X	
Namibia	X	X	X	X	X	X
S. Africa	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tanzania	X			x		
Vietnam	X					

Strengthening the workforce through care reform

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that the family has the primary responsibility to protect and care for the child and that governments have the responsibility to protect, preserve and support the family-child relationship. Although the Convention does not make explicit reference to the social service workforce, it does call for ensuring "effective procedures for the establishment of social programs to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up."[xl]

In addition to the Convention, a number of other international guidelines allude to the vital role played by the social service workforce in protecting children and strengthening families. For example, the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children makes several references to social work, professional assessments, best interest determinations, counselling

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and social support.[xli] The [UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interest of the Child](#) also call for "social work with the family" and the importance of rigorous assessments to determine the best interests of the child.[xlii]

Such international guidance has come into dynamic play in a number of countries where a nation-wide shift from institutional care toward family-based care for children has begun to occur. As government, NGO, community and faith-based actors engage in these issues and processes, the critical need for laws, policies, regulations and coordination structures has become starkly apparent.[xliii]

A recent working paper developed by the Better Care Network and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance explored this theme in case studies of Indonesia, Moldova and Rwanda, three countries in the process of care reform.[xliv] The development of laws and policies to support the social service workforce in the care reform process in these three countries is highlighted below.

Indonesia: Following the passage of the [Social Welfare Law](#)[xlv] in 2009, which ushered in a series of developments related to the professionalization of the social service workforce (as noted above), the Ministry of Social Affairs issued the [National Standard of Care for Child Welfare Institutions](#)[xlvi] in 2011. These were drafted in response to recommendations from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Standards outline principles of alternative care, appropriate responses for vulnerable children that prioritize family-based care, gatekeeping, standards for residential care facilities and the role of the social service workforce.

The reform efforts engaged diverse stakeholders, including national, provincial, district and local governments, NGOs, the United Nations, faith-based organizations, international donors, universities, community-based organizations, social service workers and volunteers. Outcomes include improved and targeted social assistance support for vulnerable families, redirection of funding away from institutional-based care toward family-based care for children, and increased support for community services, including fostering and domestic adoption. During this period, an expanded network of social service workers collaborated with the Ministry of Social Affairs to draft regulations establishing certification processes and an accreditation system for social service workers.[xlvii]

It is important to recognize the significant support of the international community in the child protection and care reform process. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the national government engaged a team of international and national child protection experts seconded by Save the Children with international donor support to work with Indonesian policy-makers, build capacity and provide direct technical assistance in care reform over a five-year period. These

efforts resulted in an empowered national social service workforce with the skills to implement and continue the reform efforts.[xlviii]

Moldova: In 2007, the Government of Moldova approved the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Reform of the Residential Childcare System (2007-2012), which sought to reduce the number of children living outside a family by 50 percent and reorganize residential institutions to support children in families. To facilitate this process, the National Strategy and Action Plan aimed to establish a network of community social workers, develop family support services and alternative family placement services, and reorganize residential childcare institutions. As part of the strategy, a Master Plan for Deinstitutionalization was approved in 2009. The reform process involved coordinated efforts on the part of the government, NGOs, UNICEF and academic institutions to develop and strengthen the policy framework, including laws, regulations and strategies. Critical to this process was transitioning the residential care system's workforce – a cast of thousands – to a social service workforce with specialized skills to facilitate family-child reunification and prevent further separation.[xlix]

The success of the care reform movement in Moldova – the number of children living in institutional care was reduced by 54 percent between 2007 and 2012 – led to additional legislative and policy reform initiatives.[l] A 2013 Law on the Special Protection of Children at Risk and Children Separated from Parents introduced the role of child protection specialists as part of the social service workforce operating at the community level. In 2014, the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family launched a National Strategy for Child Protection. In the same year, a National Working Group for Child Protection formed to facilitate collaboration between social service workers responsible for children's care and protection from various sectors, including social assistance, health, education and law enforcement.[li]

The impetus for child care reform, spurred by collaborative action on the part of NGOs, community-based organizations and international donors, led to significant changes in the provision of social services. This included building the capacity of local authorities to oversee decentralized child welfare and protection mandates and an increased focus on social work. Remarkably, national-level working groups and regional authorities successfully advocated the Ministry of Finance to redirect funds once used to support the institutionalization of children to support community-based services and the new social service workforce. As a result, regulations to reallocate funds at the national level were established in 2012. Projects supported by international donors, notably the USAID-funded Partnerships for Every Child, have been instrumental in assisting regional authorities shift in human and financial resources toward social service support for family-based care.[lii]

Rwanda: The Government of Rwanda has made a strong commitment to child protection, social service system strengthening and care reform. In 2003, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion was tasked with coordination of programs to ensure the protection and promotion of children's rights. The [National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children](#)[liii] and a corresponding four-year action plan were released the same year. In the following years, several additional child-focused policies were adopted, including a monitoring framework for the implementation of the OVC policy and plan, Guidelines for Community-Based Committees to Protect Children's Rights, international adoption regulations and the [minimum package for vulnerable children](#).[liv]

Recognizing the need for coordination and consistency in government interventions for children, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion initiated the development of the [Integrated Child Rights Policy](#)[lv] in 2011, a comprehensive national document detailing Rwanda's commitment to its children and to the coordination of government activities and programs for the realization of children's rights. Because Rwanda's bold social sector reforms have been backed by strong government commitment, the policy framework is comprehensive and care reform has progressed alongside broader social service reform.

The government has recognized the development of the social service workforce as a key element in its reform efforts. The National Child Care Reform Program prioritizes introducing a new cadre of professional social workers and psychologists into civil service and creating effective linkages with child protection and health workers.[lvi]

The success of national care reform and social service workforce development efforts in Rwanda is largely attributable to the government's central role in planning, coordination and funding. For example, an agreement between the National Commission for Children and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning resulted in funding for professional social workers and psychologists as part of the civil service employment plan in each district beginning in 2013.[lvii] Since then, 70 social workers and clinical psychologists were deployed to 30 different districts to implement child care reforms. These workers in turn supervised a cadre of para professional volunteers.[lviii]

Laws and policies are not enough

Efforts to develop and support a skilled and effective social service workforce are most successful when supported by legislation and policies that create legal mandates and ensure appropriate governance structures and processes to implement them, including at the most local levels. In some cases, legal frameworks have stimulated stakeholder engagement, but have not been sufficient to mobilize institutional, financial and human resources to effect substantive change. Laws, policies and national plans are insufficient without mechanisms for implementation, oversight and accountability, adequate funding, data for decision-making and

strategic coordination. Strengthening the social service workforce requires a multifaceted effort to connect laws and policies with strategic steps to build workforce capacity, collect and analyze data, link service models and practice standards and measure outcomes.

For example, a study commissioned by USAID on human capacity within the child welfare systems in Africa found that despite the resolve of the African Union and many African countries to accelerate efforts to address children's issues, the commitments to reform have not been fully realized due to limited resources, lack of a systematic assessment of workforce capacity linked to service outcomes and inadequate human resource management information systems.[lix] A country-level case study in Tanzania showed that although there were adequate policies, governance on the implementation side was weak, with an overwhelming shortage of social welfare officers in districts burdened by high levels of need.[lx] Similarly, a study in Kenya demonstrated a low level of awareness on the part of the government regarding the expertise required of child protection workers, with more vacancies than filled positions in the primary ministry responsible for children.[lxi] A review of the care reform processes in Indonesia, Moldova and Rwanda concluded that effective planning of the workforce requires not only a regulatory framework but also an understanding of the current workforce and a projection of future need, as well as a concerted effort to engage social service workers in the planning and change process.[lxii]

To fully maximize the potential of a legal framework to support the social service workforce, the following elements must also be in place:

- ✓ *Central oversight and decentralized services*: Striking the right balance between central-level oversight and decentralized implementation is key. Local-level service provision must inform overall coordination and central government responsibility must be maintained to ensure standards as well as realistic human and financial resource allocations.

- ✓ *Inter-departmental coordination*: Social service work is often the responsibility of several governmental departments or agencies, including social welfare, health, education and justice. When social services are located within several departments, coordination, planning and resource allocation can become cumbersome. Mechanisms to ensure effective inter-departmental and multi-stakeholder coordination and monitoring must be in place.

- ✓ *Regulatory mechanisms*: Licensure, certification and registration are essential for the professionalization of the social service workforce, as well as for ensuring accountability.

- ✓ *Clear definitions and scopes of work*: Even in countries where legislation and policies are supportive of the social service workforce, many countries lack a clear set of definitions,

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criteria and job descriptions for various elements within the workforce. Blurry lines between governmental and non-governmental social service workers and community volunteers remain a challenge, underlining the importance of setting parameters and harmonizing workforce assessments, development, deployment and pay scales.[lxiii]

✓ *Data for decision-making*: Projected demand for services and workforce requirements are rarely researched, articulated and costed. Current and reliable data regarding human resource capacity and gaps is critical for effective service provision.

✓ *Funding*: Workforce requirements must be matched by appropriate and consistent budget allocations. Uncertain and inadequate funding can fundamentally undermine the training, recruitment, management and retention of social service workers. The implications of relying on international donor funding to support the workforce must also be fully considered.

Monitoring progress

It has been said that we measure what we care about and we care about that which we measure. Increased attention to developments within social service systems over the last decade would therefore indicate that national governments as well as the global development community are clearly beginning to care about strengthening this vital sector. Indeed, the introduction of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals[lxiv] (SDG) offers an opportunity to bring partners together around key issues, including "the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels," which is the aim of Goal 16. A number of SDG targets depend on the effective functioning of the social service workforce and its ability to create protective environments by tackling poverty, reducing discrimination, promoting social justice, ensuring protection from violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and family separation and providing essential services.

Effective monitoring and evaluation of the social service workforce in countries requires the development of an agreed core set of indicators and their means of measurement. Such indicators exist to measure developments within the health workforce and these are used to inform decision-making among national authorities and other stakeholders.[lxv] Currently, the result of efforts to strengthen social service systems in lower- and middle-income countries are largely unknown due to the absence of a way to capture and measure them. In the last five years, a number of steps have been taken to develop measures to get a better grasp of the state of the social service workforce globally. For example, new indicators from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have been designed to help answer the following questions:

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- ✓ What is the current status of the national social service system?
- ✓ Is the system showing signs of improvement over time?
- ✓ Are investments from donors and other sources making the system stronger?
- ✓ Is the system being developed sustainably?

The set of [32 core indicators](#)[lxvi] measures the five components of a functional social service system that PEPFAR deems essential:

1. *Leadership and governance*: laws and policies that promote, coordinate and regulate the provision of governmental and non-governmental child welfare and protection services.

2. *Social service workforce*: well-trained and effectively deployed governmental and nongovernmental staff who work individually or collectively to address the needs of vulnerable populations—especially children and families.

3. *Financing*: mobilizing, accumulating and allocating money in sustainable ways to cover the child welfare and protection needs of vulnerable populations.

4. *Information management and accountability systems*: processes for collecting, analyzing, disseminating and using data on child welfare and protection policies and programs.

5. *Coordination and networking mechanisms*: mechanisms for all actors working in child welfare and protection to develop and implement policy, share information and coordinate services.[lxvii]

The new PEPFAR indicators are promising, though they are still in the process of being field tested and have yet to be broadly applied. It is unlikely that they will be used outside of countries where PEPFAR programs are underway. In addition, because the social service systems in various countries applying these indicators are likely to involve different actors and processes, the indicators cannot be used to draw comparisons between countries. Although there is interest for stakeholders to monitor public sector and non-governmental elements within the social service system, this framework focuses only on government-led aspects of the social service system, including all publicly-funded ministries, departments and offices and officials with statutory authority and legal responsibility for the welfare and protection of children and their families. It does not include other keys areas of system strengthening, including by non-government actors, civil society organizations, private companies, faith-based organizations and community organizations and leaders.[lxviii]

UNICEF has also supported child protection system mapping in a number of countries. These mapping and assessment processes are broad in scope and are intended to provide both qualitative and statistical data about the country's child protection system and the social service workforce. The methodology involves collating information on workforce numbers, job titles

that are currently used and the functions performed by various categories of social service workers. The [Child Protection Systems Mapping and Assessment Toolkit](#)[lxix] has been tested in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Tunisia. Like the PEPFAR indicators, information gleaned from this mapping exercise is difficult to compare across countries and time.

Conclusion

An encouraging amount of momentum is building around the development of laws, policies and national action plans that support the social service workforce. These efforts, occurring in countries across the globe, demonstrate the growing recognition of social service workers as vital to the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations and the effective delivery of essential services. With the emerging policy and legislative frameworks, the workforce is increasingly legitimized and professionalized. However, it is too soon to comprehensively analyze the implementation and impact of laws and policies on workforce development across countries and regions. This will become easier to do as national efforts to monitor and measure the implementation of laws and policies are strengthened. Focusing in on specific programmatic areas such as care reform is helpful when examining the effects of social service workforce strengthening on discrete outcome areas, including the number of children living outside of family care or transitioned from institutional care to family-based care. Of course, the potential of laws, policies and national plans to affect real change for social service workers and their constituents is realized only when coupled with effective coordination mechanisms; appropriate oversight and accountability; clearly defined roles, responsibilities and mandates; data for effective decision making; and sufficient and appropriately allocated funding.

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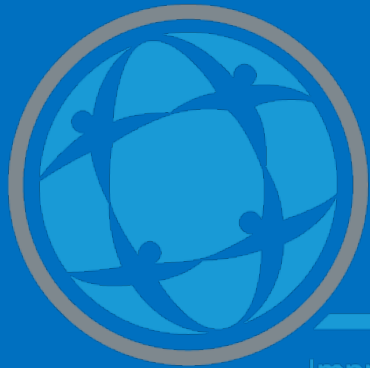
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