

HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

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Annotation. The first steps of introducing social work role in the newly independent Georgia were initiated in late nineties, and were linked with the newly started process of de-institutionalizing child care institutions. The article outlines the key milestones of these developments, and provides a summary of the achievements and challenges in the field of social work.

Keywords: *social work, education, law, professional development.*

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is an ancient country in the Caucasus region of Eurasia. Located at the crossroads of the Western Asia and the Eastern Europe, the population of the country is about 3.7 million, around 300,000 of which has been internally displaced due to the occupation of the 20 percent of the Georgian territories.

After regaining independence in 1991, Georgia engaged in diverse reform initiatives, aiming to overcome the legacy inherited from the socialist regime. Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, followed by growing understanding of the negative impact of the existing child protection mechanisms largely relying on residential care, resulted in spotlighting a need of reforming this system. The Government of Georgia (GoG) embarked on a large-scale reform, at the initial stage prioritizing prevention of institutionalization

and deinstitutionalization of children already enrolled in institutional care. The state strategy for deinstitutionalization soon was also extended to mental health system, resulting in a closure of large psychiatric clinics.

At the beginning of 2000 the Government of Georgia initiated deinstitutionalization process, aiming to close existing 40 institutions housing about 5300 vulnerable children, considered as deprived of parental care. Majority of these children had one or both living parents, unable to care for them due to socio-economic problems and lack of community-based services, able to provide them with individualized support. The country also lacked alternative care services, like foster care or small group homes; as in most of the countries of the region, one of the key components of a functional child care system – the social work workforce required for supporting deinstitutionalization of the system and its healthy functioning at large, did not exist either (Greenberg and Partskhaladze, 2014).

Hence, introduction of social work profession became a stepping stone for a success of the child care system reform and can be considered as the beginning of this profession in Georgia.

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS ESTABLISHING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

The first steps of introducing the social work role in the country were initiated in 1999, when with the support from the UNICEF Country Office in Georgia, a British Charity Organization European Children's Trust (predecessor of Every Child) recruited and trained 18 pioneers representing different professions. A non-degree training course aimed at building knowledge and skills of these workers to support the deinstitutionalization process. After being trained on the basic social work theories, principles, methods and techniques, child welfare principles, work with the parents and other relevant topics the first batch of these professionals were tasked to provide support in assessing the needs of the children and families and supporting deinstitutionalization process (O'Brien & Chanturidze, 2009; Doel et al, 2016). The nongovernmental

sector continued backstopping the state social work provision in the subsequent years as well. During the latter active phase of the child care system reform, social workers hired by several NGOs were involved in assessing, supporting reintegration and monitoring the cases of hundreds of children returned to their biological families from the institutions. As a result of this coordinated effort between the state and non-state actors, in 2005–2013 the GoG closed almost all but two large scale state residential institutions, reintegrating over 30 percent of their residents (Greenberg and Partskhaladze, 2014). Remaining two state residential institutions still serve children with moderate to severe disabilities. The efforts are being made to downsize or close them as well. Based on the agreement reached with the GoG, social workers employed by the NGOs and supporting the deinstitutionalization process were mostly taken over by the state entity responsible for child protection.

In early 2000 introduction of social work at a professional level was supported by the Open Society Foundation (OSF). OSF played an instrumental role in introducing new fields of practice and advancing knowledge of individuals to implement reform, create policy, and foster the development of social work in the countries engaged in the initiative. At the outset of the Social Work Fellowship Master's Program in 2000 OSI has provided scholarships to up to 16 individuals from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to study at the Schools of Social Work at the Columbia University in New York and the Washington University in St. Louis (George Warren Brown School of Social Work). A list of the eligible countries changed during the course of the program, based on the success rate and outcomes of the program.

During the years of its existence (2000–2013) up to 20 professionals graduated and returned to Georgia. Passionate about developing modern social service and introducing social work profession in their home country, Georgian, as well as Mongolian alumni were reported to have highest return rates after graduating from the program. A core group of committed alumni lead and supported most of the subsequent developments in the field of social work in Georgia, including but not

limited with the fields of child welfare, justice (including juvenile justice), crime prevention, disabilities, school social work, social housing, gerontology, etc.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

Establishment of the Georgian Association of Social Workers (GASW) in 2004 was one of the key steps in increasing awareness and profile of social work in the country. This idea and a lifelong commitment of the six alumni who have returned to Georgia in 2002–2004 was supported by OSI Alumni Grant. During the 15 years of its existence GASW was proactive in achieving its objectives defined as providing the professional expertise to social service providers; developing a strong education base; setting and endorsing the professional standards; lobbying for the development and implementation of the necessary legal and policy changes; and strengthening social workers professional network.

The Georgian Association of Social Workers unites over 600 members and also a part of the global social work professional community. GASW is a member or is otherwise affiliated with the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Council of the Social Welfare (ICSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)/ Eastern European Association of Schools of Social Work, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), International Association of Social Work with Groups (IASWG), and many other global, regional and national entities. In 2010 the Chairperson of GASW became a member of the Executive Committee of the IFSW, and in 2014 the Vice President of the Federation. In 2015 the Chairperson was invited as the first International Scholar to present at the IASWG Symposium held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA. The proceedings of the Symposium titled Association of Social Workers' Approach for Promoting Collective Action in Group Work outlining the work of the Georgian Association of Social Workers was including in the book *Creating Space for All Voices* (Partskhaladze, 2019). In 2018, the Chairperson became a substitute representative of the ICSW in the Council of Europe.

Nowadays GASW offers a range of services to its members and a wider community. GASW staff, board members and collaborators provide lectures and in-depth trainings to social workers, as well as awareness-raising trainings to the workers in education, justice, health-care and in the fields. In 2016 the Association has established a Social Work Club - the semi-formal entity, aimed at educating GASW members about the global scientific achievements in the field. Bimonthly lectures have been offered by the well-known international and local social workers on the diverse topics.

The Association has supported development of the professional social work supervision system in various ministries and social service provider organizations and providing external supervision of social workers and methodological support to the providers, as required. As the key professional entity in the country, the Association serves as a platform for organizing case conferences, discussing challenging cases and supporting the members in tackling professional dilemmas. At the outset of its existence, GASW has developed the Professional Code of Ethics and all members of the organization are expected to adhere to its principles.

GASW has always been engaged in activism, promoting the profession and advocating for the right of the social workers and their clients. Several examples noteworthy mentioning are GASW efforts for ensuring participatory approach in drafting the Georgian Law on Social Work and providing technical advice; engaging with the high level decision makers and media, as well as participating in the street events and other actions during the strike of the state social workers in 2018 and 2019.

ACADEMIC EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK

Intensive developments in the field of child care and other areas requiring social work professionals, urged introduction of the first social work classes at the University, followed by the development of a graduate program at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) in 2006. The program was developed in partnership with the California State

Uncivility and Columbia University and was later moved to the Ilia State University. During the same years, a successful collaboration between TSU, GASW, Sheffield Hallam University (UK) and Ljubljana Universities (Slovenia) supported by the EU Tempus Programme resulted in establishment of the social work academic programs at the certificate, undergraduate and graduate levels. During the second stage, the EU Tempus Programme was joint by the Universities in Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine as well. At this stage, TSU has development the doctoral program and worked on the regionalization of the certificate training (Doel et al, 2016). Currently academic training in social work is offered by the TSU and Ilia State University. During almost 15 years of their existence the programs graduated nearly 400 social workers with undergraduate and masters level diplomas. For a short period of time BA program in social work was offered by one private university as well. Founders of the Association have been invited as experts by the National Center of Education Quality Enhancement, the entity responsible for evaluating high education programs countrywide.

The academic programs being offered by TSU and Ilia State University were developed in line with the international standards and best practices. Despite mostly using the Western literature and methodologies, the programs were fully adapted to the national context and aligned with the national priorities in social protection and other relevant fields. Contextualization considered the prevalent social challenges and other characteristics of the Georgian context. For examples, the students receive information about the national legislation, programs and services relevant to the topics covered in the modules; in the frames of the practice teaching they get acquainted with the social service providers working in the country, etc.

The Georgian Law on High Education delineates the structure of academic faculties, through the requirements for accrediting social work academic programs are rather flexible and do not offer strict standards regarding the qualification of involved academic personnel. TSU and Ilia State University have been making major efforts in this direction. The Universities have prioritized hiring academic personnel with doctoral

degrees in social work and contracting invited lecturers with academic qualification and practical experience in social work field. Establishment of PhD program at TSU in 2010 was also supported this strategy. However, a limited number of practitioners currently teaching in social work programs can be seen as one of the challenges of social work education in the country. Even though almost all lectures have direct practice experience from the earlier stages of their career and are currently indirectly involved in working with various client groups, having larger numbers of practitioners engaged in the programs would have benefited the quality of teaching.

Making field practicum a mandatory part of formal training is a recommendation made by many key actors in the field (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, 2018; UNICEF, 2019, etc.). Hence, development of the practice component of the academic curricula was another important achievement of the programs offered by TSU and Ilia State University. Field practicum aims to link theory to practice and help student in developing relevant skills under the supervision of a practitioner (practice teacher). As required by the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (IASSW/IFSW, 2004), the practice teaching component in all three existing programs is estimated at 30 percent of the curricula. The Universities have developed a practice teaching manual, trained practice teachers, signed the Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with the relevant state and non-state service providers, established mechanisms of monitoring the placement, etc.

PRACTICE TEACHING

However, maintaining the high-quality practice learning experience is often challenged with limitations in social work practice in the agencies, caused by the scarce human and financial resources, limited numbers of qualified practitioners, etc. Opportunities for strengthening the practice teaching are to a large extent linked with the quality of professional supervision discussed below. This topic has been drawing attention of field experts in Georgia during the last decade. Professional groups are

promoting understanding of the decision makers and agencies about the importance of supervision for ensuring quality care and service delivery to the target groups served by the social workers. Suggested approaches to professional supervision emphasize the importance of distinguishing administrative and educational function, a need for case supervision and professional/individual support by the qualified supervisor.

The professional discourse about professional supervision is reflected in the Law on Social Work as well. The Law sets requirement for introducing supervision and continuous education, in order to ensure that all sectors and entities offer continuous education and professional supervision of its social worker staff. The following examples demonstrate an impetus of developing the quality assurance system in the public sector, however they also leave a huge space for further development. The Former Social Service Agency (currently the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking – AntiFund) has developed a system of professional supervision and mechanisms for evaluating the quality of the implemented work; The National Probation Agency had put in place a peer inspection system, evaluating performance of social workers, probationer officers, psychologist; the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institution under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia (MoE) is in the process of development of performance measurement system, providing supervision for all specialists of the Psycho-Social Service Center. However, none of these mechanisms are fully operational or sustainable so far (Namicheishvili and Rojers, 2018).

Development of additional academic programs through the country is considered as one the strategies for meeting another requirements of the new Law on Social Work on hiring additional social workers (for example, during 2020–2024 the MoE is required to employ 130 additional social workers; the Ministry of Justice – 100; the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) –130). Even though increasing physical accessibility to social work training can be seen as an advantage, the lack of the qualified professionals with the credentials in line with the requirement

of the Law on High Education is leaving this demand unmet. Besides, the experts are concerned that due to the lack of qualified social work educators, practice teachers and social service agencies in the regions of Georgia, the new programs might be at risk of not being able to offer quality education to the prospective students.

ALTERNATIVE TO ACADEMIC EDUCATION

A temporary alternative to academic training of social workers in Georgia has been a certificate training of social work practitioners. The first certificate training offered by the University and recognized by the Government was developed in the frames of the Tempus Programme in 2005 through a close collaboration between the international partners, TSU and GASW. The training was tailored to the needs of the practitioners employed as social workers without having academic degree in social work. The actors engaged in the development of the training clearly identified a need of maintaining employment of these workers, though as the same supporting their capacity building and standardization of qualifications of non-academically qualified workers across the sectors. Granting 60 ECTS, the program lasted for two semesters and was offered for several years as a weekend course by TSY and later on, by Batumi University as well. The certificate training was considered as a minimum requirement for the state social workers and is now legally recognized as an acceptable qualification for practicing social work in Georgia (2018 Georgian Law on Social Work, Section 42). The new Law discussed in more details below defines the certificate training as a minimum qualification requirement for social workers not having academic degrees in social work. In the future the certificate training program ordered by the Law can be undertaken by the individuals already employed as social workers or having one-year experience of working as social workers (Law on Social Work, 2018).

As a result of a strong advocacy from GASW and other experts in the field, aiming at professionalization of social work practice, the Law limited the possibility of qualifying as social worker through certificate

training with January 1, 2021, allowing practicing social workers to maintain their privilege of serving as social workers during the transitional period.

A need of allowing for the transitional period is well-justified with the lack of qualified professionals in the country. Even though Georgia does not have a national register of social workers employed in the state and non-state sectors, nor does it have a register of the graduates of social work program, administrative data from the ministries, as well as information from GASW suggests that in 2018 the country had around 800 social workers working in the state and non-state agencies. State agencies employed 55 percent of these workers, 23 percent of which has social work academic degrees and 19 percent was trained through the certificate training (OPM, 2018).

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PLANNING, SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSION

Professional literature places strong emphasis on the importance of human resources information management systems and/or mapping of the social service workforce. Up-to-date, consolidated human resource data, largely lacking in Georgia and other countries of the region are of a key importance for appropriately planning, developing and supporting the workforce (GSSWA, 2019). Data is required for making informed decisions required for developing legislation (e.g. will cut-off date for certificate training set in the Law on Social Work for 2021 be achievable for the country?), employment (e.g. how up to 60 qualified but currently unemployed social workers can be better used by different sectors?), development of training opportunities (e.g. can the country afford establishing quality social work academic programs in the regions, or should the emphases be made on extending the existing programs and providing distance education opportunities to the students?), strengthening professional supervision system (e.g. what is the qualification of social work staff currently employed by the state and non-state entities

and how qualified personnel can be better used for developing modern mechanisms for supervising?), etc.

As a result of long-lasting advocacy efforts, in 2018 the Government of Georgia succeeded in adopting the Law on Social Work. Main achievement of the new Law is that it regulates the profession, introduces directions for development of the new or less advanced domains of social work and targets development of the profession at local level. Social work was originally introduced in child welfare and it is mainly operated on central level at the given moment, law states that child welfare as well as other social work services will be administered on municipal level as well. The Law distinguishes several directions of social work. These directions are: child welfare, educational system, justice and health. Currently social work is developed in all these areas, though disproportionally. The development of social work profession in other domains is not restricted by the law, but currently the main focus is on the advancement of those four areas that has already informed curriculum review at the high education level.

One of the area of social work services, highlighted in the law is child welfare social work. Current the field faces problems in several respects, though the most painful both for the service receivers and profession is its reactive response to the need and challenges in acting beyond the assessment stage. The system employs around 260 social workers. The main challenge will be to develop proactive child welfare oriented social work with the continuum of service delivery system and robust coordination mechanism between local and central level to avoid repeating of the flaws of current system. Another drawback of the system is misuse of the social work practice in child welfare system. Child welfare policy is not sufficiently informed by practice, “policy-practice loop” is weak (Shatberashvili, 2011). Front-line workers have access to data that can form an evidence necessary for the setting of clearer targets. Therefore organizational culture of the social work employers has to be changed towards the recognition of importance of evidence informed practice leading to more meaningful policy development.

Another flaw of the child care system remains to be limited outreach services maintaining invisible children and problems. Social workers are more reactive workforce rather than proactive. New Law is promising in this direction by stating the requirement about the development of social work on the municipal level. The theme is pursued further towards the end of the paper.

Newly introduced Child Rights Code (2019) also sets new functions for social workers. It requires that decision regarding the separation of children from their biological families should be taken by the Court as opposed to the current administrative procedure when in charge of such decision was the Regional Council of Guardianship and Child Care where respective social worker was raising the issue. The decisions by the judge is informed by the conclusion prepared by social workers. This responsibility necessitates strengthening of social workers competences about the specifics of work with the judiciary system.

Collaboration with the court system is not novelty for social work community in Georgia. They are already connected with the court within the justice system. Soon after the development of the social work in the child welfare system, the introduction of social workers has been on and off the boil for several years in the justice system. The first social workers in limited numbers appeared in the system during the first wave since 2008, followed by increase in numbers during the second wave of the justice reform since 2012. Though for the system tasked with handling transition between the penitentiary system and increasingly complex social conditions of the released inmates, the reaction of the system appeared overdue. The lawyer dominated system was not properly aware of the role of supportive professionals, especially of social workers. This appeared to be a great pressure for social workers employed by the system that time.

The restricted understanding of forensic social work as sheltered in the justice system limited its potential at the start point. The knowledge of ex child welfare system workers was leaving space for “identity formation” in quite different system within the architecture of this institutional environment. However due to educated, self-development

oriented graduates of academic social work programs who stepped in the system “professional identity” did not remain peripheral to justice system. The system, especially in its penitentiary part, expelled another pressure on the social work, viewed as extremely clinical profession and underused its activities aiming at social integration of the client while being in the system or pre lease period. System struggled to recognize influence of an ecological perspective on social work profession appropriating social workers to direct their skills towards the social integration of their clients in social environment. Social Workers of the penitentiary system were not allowed to work with the families of inmates neither while their imprisonment not pre or after release.

In parallel, ongoing rehabilitation and socialization services proved effective therefore coherently advanced between the first and second waves of the justice reform. The effective development of social service workforce under the Division of Rehabilitation Service Unit of the National Probation Agency appeared a promising experience to advance services provided by the supportive specialists in justice system overall. Currently the profession has a legitimate say in the non-custodial penalties and probation system with its lasting applicability to all fractions of the system.

Presently there are up to 200 social workers under the Ministry of Justice:132 in penitentiary, 40 in probation and 14 in crime prevention part of the system. The system aims to hire additional social workers to develop services for children below the age of criminal liability embedding children under 14 years old. This way system is responding to crime prevention and becomes more focused on the cases which are currently scatted in the hands of either several other agencies or no one at all.

Social workers of the (then named) National Probation Agency serve the inmates referred to as” guests of the system” via the full pledged service design for juveniles as well as adults: intake, assessment, intervention and monitoring. Their additional duties are: preparation of the pretrial assessment, assessment for the review of presentence release committee, management of the transitional work (when a client is moves from penitentiary system to probation). Social Workers are also the

members of the multidisciplinary team work in the system. Social Workers of the Crime Prevention Center are providing services for released inmates and diverted.

Day by day justice system is becoming more loyal. Its humanization is considered to be a result of embedding supportive professionals in the system, social worker especially. Hopefully step in step of advancing the vision about the social work as a profession the system will underpin fulfillment of the grand aim of the profession.

Another domain where social workers exist is educational system. Despite the ongoing education reform in the country the need for undertaking more effective preventive and response measures to support schools to become formative educational spaces is obvious. Up to now nonacademic precursors of school quality such as school climate, social competence learning, attendance, leave huge space for enhancement.

The only institutional space with social workers under the MoE is the Office of Resource officers of Educational Institution. The office is responsible for the safety and security of the school children within the school premise and provision of psycho-social services to children referred from schools or self-referred. Psycho-social services center operates since 2013 (named as psychological center in past), and mainly was providing psychological services to children. Since 2019 the center modified service provision format, given that work in therapeutic rooms was not sufficiently effective leaving space for intervention on family and mezzo level. The need for activation of social work component exhibit itself and the office imminently declared the refocus of the mission. Newly adopted order on "Rules on Service Provision by and Referral to the Psycho-Social Service Center of the Office of Resource Officer of Education Institution" defining roles and responsibilities of social workers obligates the involvement of social workers in case work, even more, imposes case management role of social workers, their participation in crisis management situations at school.

The reorientation of the functions revealed the need for intensification of school interventions in addition to in-house therapeutic service provision. Given this statement, avenue for the development of school

social work model widened. The system started the pilot project to support schools in the strengthening of its nonacademic function and demonstrating the role of supportive professionals in the educational institutions. Within the pilot phase social workers together with their colleagues – psychologists aim to strengthen school personnel to enable them to address the needs internally and refer children after the exhausting internal resources. They are also in the role to ensure fidelity for intervention. The results of the pilot will dictate how to cascade the intervention across the whole educational system.

Currently, 10 Psycho-social Service Centers are operating across the country. The center employs 55 supportive professionals: 40 psychologists, 12 social workers and 2 psychiatrists. Social workers are located in 2 centers in the capital and 6 regional centers of the country. They actively collaborate with other state entities in charge of child welfare service development, Guardianship and Care body of the AntiFund under the MoLHSA. Due to division of Child Care functions and representation of social workers in and among various state agencies, it is important to form rigorous collaboration procedures among systems in the best interest of children. Recent studies and reports (the Special Report of the Public Defender of Georgia “Violence Against Children in General Educational Institutions 2017”, OSI supported report “Problems of Bullying in Diverse School Environment”, “Research on Risk and Defensive Factors for Substance Use and Other Problematic Behavior in Youth and Adolescents in Georgia” 2019) demonstrate the risk factors and behaviors in school age children asking for addressing. Level of parent involvement in school life is low. Given situation prepares the rich soil for the introduction of effective school intervention services. School transformation into supportive environment requires exclusive knowledge that school community lacks.

Without proper approach and methods of intervention effective service provision is not feasible, therefore social workers in educational system need to strengthen their professional competencies, acquire specific work methods for effective practice delivery. As mentioned earlier high educational settings in Georgia are not providing particular

courses about the role of social work in educational system, school social work among them, therefore graduates need support to acquiring their knowledge in this specific concentration that will enable them to strengthen for work with the children with emotional and behavioral problems, their parents and teachers and school community in general, serve to the social well-being of children and their parents therein of the whole society. As mentioned above universities are focused to respond to this need.

Another sphere when profession thrives to develop is health system. Social workers role in health system is not yet grasped aptly. The potential of the social work profession is not recognized in many spheres where it can influence the well-being of clients. The most developed by the social work service is the mental health part of it. It hires overall 26 social workers represented not in all mental health centers. Among these only 12 have diploma in social work. The ratio between the social worker and client is 1:53 respectively. According to Mental Health Coalition in 2014 amount of social workers per 100 000 population was 3.75 (GASW, 2018).

Over-representation of doctors in the mental health centres does not appear hindering factor for the social work profession. Vice versa, on the one hand, the profession seemed attractive for re-qualification of medical personnel into social workers, which might appear both: a) quite appealing for doctors and nurses at risk of losing their job in the peak of unemployment in the country; and b) plausible factor for transformation of purely medical perspective into socio-medical one. On the other hand, health system met the pertaining recommendations of the international organizations to have social workers on board.

However, it undervalued social work due to its professional role ambiguity in health system and appeared as hindering factor for identification of clear-cut standpoint on when a monodisciplinary solution is not enough and when a multidisciplinary approach may be more effective; therefore quite often shrinking autonomy of social workers in decision making and action. In parallel educated social workers started to enter the system with the explicit desire to acquaint themselves to the

colleagues with medical background. For them it took quite a while until they succeeded to reflect on the relevance of social work perspective to mental health practice.

Mere development exists on municipal level. There are only 6 social workers on municipal level employed by housing project. Their role is to support clients in the municipal shelter premises. However social workers have been involved in the assessment of potential clients among those willing to receive living in municipal shelters. Hopefully with the enforcement of the law social work role will strengthen and number of social workers increase in this sphere.

FOR CONCLUSIONS

The developments in social work discussed above can be seen as major advancements in the field not existing in the country two decades ago. They also demonstrate application of the promising practices and recommendations for advancement of social work education and practice, generated in the countries with stronger social work history. The social work professional community in Georgia takes pride in its achievements and ongoing urge for further progression. At the same time, this community is well-aware of planning, development and support needs of social work and is active in advocating and supporting required progress.

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SOCIALINIO DARBO RAIDOS SAKARTVELE ISTORIJA

SANTRAUKA

1991 m. atgavęs nepriklausomybę, Sakartvelas ėmėsi įvairių reformų iniciatyvų, kuriomis buvo siekiama įveikti socialistinį palikimą. Ratifikavus Jungtinių Tautų Vaiko teisių konvenciją ir vis geriau suvokiant neigiamą esamos sistemos, kuri daugiausia priklausė nuo institucinės globos, poveikį, pirmenybė buvo teikiama reformoms vaikų apsaugos srityje. Kadangi daugumoje regiono šalių vienas iš pagrindinių funkcinės vaikų priežiūros

sistemos komponentų – socialinio darbo profesija neegzistavo, socialinio darbo profesijos įvedimas tapo žingsniu į šios ir daugelio kitų reformų, reikalaujančių socialinio darbo intervencijų, sėkmę.¹

Pirmieji socialinio darbo įvedimo žingsniai šalyje buvo pradėti devintojo dešimtmečio pabaigoje, kai UNICEF ir „EveryChild“ įdarbino ir apmokė 18 asmenų, atstovaujančių skirtingoms profesijoms. Laipsnio nesuteikiantis kursas buvo skirtas šių darbuotojų žinioms ir įgūdžiams ugdyti, kad būtų palaikomas deinstitucionalizavimo procesas².

Socialinio darbo plėtrą profesiniu lygmeniu rėmė Atviros visuomenės fondas (OSF), kuris nuo 2000 m. įvedė socialinio darbo stipendiją kelioms šalims, įskaitant Sakartvelą. Aistringai plėtodama šiuolaikines socialines paslaugas ir pristatydama socialinio darbo profesiją, pagrindinė atsidavusių Sakartvelo absolventų grupė vadovavo ir palaikė daugumą vėlesnių pokyčių socialinės apsaugos srityje šalyje. Sakartvelo socialinių darbuotojų asociacijos (GASW) įkūrimas 2004 m. buvo vienas pagrindinių žingsnių didinant informuotumą ir žinomumą apie socialinį darbą šalyje.

Intensyvūs pokyčiai socialinių paslaugų srityje paskatino pirmąsias socialinio darbo studijas. 2006 m. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisio valstybiniame universitete (TSU) buvo sukurta magistrantūros programa. Tais pačiais metais sėkminga TSU, GASW, Sheffield Hallam (JK) ir Liublijanos universitetų (Slovėnija) dvynių bendradarbiavimo projektų programa lėmė socialinio darbo studijų sukūrimą visais lygmenimis – sertifikata, bakalauro ir magistrantūros studijas. Pirmiau minėtų iniciatyvų sėkmė ir tvarumas padėjo pagrindą stiprinti profesinę bendruomenę, po to sekė kiti svarbūs pokyčiai šioje srityje.

2018 m. Seimas priėmė socialinio darbo įstatymą, reglamentuojantį tiesioginę socialinio darbo praktiką. Įstatymas įteisino keturias pagrindines profesijos sritis: vaiko gerovės, teisėtvarkos, sveikatos ir švietimo socialinį darbuotoją, taip apsaugodamas socialinio darbuotojo vaidmenį šiose srityse. Taip pat akcentuojamas socialinio darbuotojo vaidmuo savivaldybių

- 1 Greenberg, A., and Partskhaladze, N. (2014). How the Republic of Georgia has nearly Eliminated the Use of Institutional Care for Children. *Infant Mental Health Journal* 35(2), 185–191.
- 2 Doel, M., Kachkachishvili, I., Lucas J., Namicheishvili, S., and Partskhaladze, N. (2016). *Book Chapter in Routledge International Handbook of Social Work Education – Creating Social Work Education in the Republic of Georgia.*

lygmeniu, teisiškai išplečiant socialinio darbo atsakomybę už centrinio lygmens statutinių paslaugų ribų, kurių pagalbos teikimo funkcijos yra ribotos. Paralelinis socialinio darbo raidos procesas nevyriausybiniam sektoriuje, aiškiai atskleidžiantis aktyvaus visuomeninio lygmens darbo naudą, turėjo įtakos socialinio darbo prevencinių funkcijų teisiniam pripažinimui.

Naujai išvystytai socialinio darbo profesijai buvo sunku rasti tvirtą vietą tarp gerai pripažintų profesijų, turinčių ilgą istoriją, ypač teisingumo, medicinos ir pedagogikos srityse. Tačiau teigiama profesinio tobulėjimo ir pripažinimo patirtis įgyvendinant teisingumo reformą, kuri buvo vykdoma po pirminių pasiekimų vaiko gerovės srityje, dar labiau parodė šios profesijos ir jai atstovaujančiųjų gebėjimus. Tikimasi, kad naujai priimtas socialinio darbo įstatymas lems socialinio darbo sėkmę sudėtingoje institucinėje ir socialinėje sveikatos priežiūros ir švietimo sistemų aplinkoje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *socialinis darbas, švietimas, teisė, profesinis tobulėjimas.*