Social Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Georgia

European Centre BBinars: Social Policies in Eastern Europe

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Social Impact of the Pandemic

• COVID-19 pandemic poses not only health, but also social, economic and other challenges to the societies

• Evidence indicates that the impact of the pandemic is disproportionately high on at-risk groups, including older persons, persons with disabilities, children deprived of parental care

• Provision of quality, context specific social services in one of the principle ways to address challenges posed by the Pandemic
Impact on Older Persons and Caregivers in Georgia

• During the “first wave” of the pandemic, Georgia managed to control the situation with a relatively low infection rate, but was not able to sustain this achievement

• The Covid-19 response has been led by the State Interagency Coordination Council chaired by the Prime Minister of Georgia

• A large proportion of older people received additional financial and in-kind support, from the national and local governments, NGOs and international organizations

• This included temporary governmental subsidies to cover utility bills, financial incentives to increase vaccination rates, etc.

• The Pandemic further deteriorated unmet needs of older persons and their caregivers
Impact of Covid-19 on Older Persons and Caregivers in Georgia

- **Income and expenses**: ability of older persons to cover basic expenses has decreased despite the uninterrupted provision of the retirement pension and social allowances
- **Health**: deteriorated as a secondary effect of COVID-19 on physical and mental health. Access to health care services became more limited due to the lock-down and a shift in focus of health care facilities
- **Social wellbeing and community based services**: Limited provision of social services (e.g. day centers) and weakened social support networks affected older people’s social and emotional state, especially in urban areas
- **Access to public services and infrastructure**: limited, often due to the existing digital divide between the young and older generations
- **Ageism and physical and financial violence**: present in all three countries of the region (taboo topic)
- **Residential care**: risks related to higher infection rates and mortality; increased physical and social isolation due to changes in the working regime
- **Home care**: highly aggravated pressures faced by informal caregivers of older persons, the majority of whom are women, posing risks to their physical and mental health and wellbeing

*International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2020). Impact Study of COVID-19 on Older People and Caregivers in the South Caucasus*
Social Services and Social Service Workforce (SSW)

• A well-supported, appropriately equipped, empowered, and protected social service workforce is essential to mitigating the damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

• SSW responding to COVID-19 includes government and non-government professionals and paraprofessionals, including community workers, who are carrying out a range of essential promotive, preventive, and responsive roles
## Essential Roles of the SSW during Covid-19

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROMOTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>PREVENTIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>RESPONSIVE FUNCTIONS</th>
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<td><strong>Advocating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identifying vulnerable individuals and households</strong> at high risk from COVID-19; ensure they receive support to help prevent illness, community food assistance and psychosocial support.</td>
<td>Providing protection and support for individuals and families affected by gender-based violence, violence against children or other forms of violence.</td>
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<td>Coordinating</td>
<td>Working with community leaders to identify community needs.</td>
<td>Identifying family-based alternative care options for children who are abused, separated, orphaned, or when required to leave residential care or detention centres.</td>
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<td>Educating</td>
<td>Providing remote psychosocial support, via phone/online, for at-risk individuals and families.</td>
<td>Carrying out case management processes of assessment, planning, service delivery and coordination of referrals.</td>
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<td>Training</td>
<td>Reinforcing gatekeeping mechanisms to support effective and exclusive targeting of services to specific end users.</td>
<td>Providing psychosocial support in cases of acute emotional distress.</td>
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<td>Managing</td>
<td>Identifying and responding to those at higher risk of violence (such as children, elderly, persons with disabilities and others) via hotlines.</td>
<td>Providing material support, food and medicines to impacted households and vulnerable individuals.</td>
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<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Carrying out contact tracing to identify individuals at risk of COVID-19.</td>
<td>Arranging alternative care for children who have lost family care.</td>
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*Source: Global Social Service Workforce Alliance*
Essential Roles of the SSW during Covid-19

• Providing direct assistance and psychosocial support to individuals, families and communities
• Enabling access to services and advocating for the most marginalized and vulnerable
• Supporting individuals and families, protecting children, especially during school closures
• Building resilience of individuals, families and communities
• Providing public information and raising awareness

• The qualified social workers and paraprofessional social service workforce has faced an increased workload and more complex cases (physical & mental health crisis, surge in family violence, loss support networks, and loss of family members)
# Recommendations of the State of the SSW

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<tr>
<th>GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:</th>
<th>ORGANISATIONS &amp; ASSOCIATIONS SHOULD:</th>
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<td>• Recognize the workforce as essential and prioritize access to PPE/vaccinations.</td>
<td>• Develop guidelines/tools for safe, ethical service delivery during COVID</td>
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<td>• Recognize, support, and develop policies to enable integration between the full range of social services that the workforce provides.</td>
<td>• Provide trainings on the covid-specific emergency response, use of new technologies, self-care…</td>
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<td>• Earmark funding and resources for capacity building of workforce in readiness for future emergencies.</td>
<td>• Strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration, networks, and partnerships.</td>
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<td>• Develop and provide technological infrastructure and cover costs.</td>
<td>• Monitor the well-being of workforce and volunteers, offer ongoing psychosocial support, and limit individual caseloads to manageable levels.</td>
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<td>• Leverage and build on existing technology.</td>
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<td>• Prepare for rapid surge in emergency response when needed (training, stipends, supervision, skill development).</td>
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<td>• Document and disseminate experiences.</td>
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*Source: Global Social Service Workforce Alliance*
Examples from Georgia on Supporting the State Social Workers during the Pandemic

- Special pass during the curfew
- Prioritized access to PPE/vaccination, free of charge PCR testing
- New guidelines and tools for the emergency response
- On-line training for all statutory social workers on social work in emergencies and during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Support on the use of the new technologies for teleworking
- Attempts to strengthen on-line professional supervision and staff support
- Ongoing strengthening of case management system
- Guidance on guidance note on the roles and responsibilities of social workers in responding to the life-threatening infection and self care tips
- Rapid assessment of the challenges and needs of social workers
- Online information hub (Georgian Association of Social Workers)

- Monitoring on the implementation of the Law of Social Work, 2019
References

• International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (2020). Impact Study of COVID-19 on Older People and Caregivers in the South Caucasus


• Global Social Survive Workforce and UNICEF (2021). Social Service Workforce Safety during the COVID-19 Response