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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN KOSOVO

policy challenges and recommendations*

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**The results presented here are based on the project 'Support for better social services for the most vulnerable groups' in Kosovo, co-implemented with Save the Children Kosovo and financed by the European Union as well as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (<https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/202>).*

Merita Meçe, Driton Zeqiri, Besim Hoxha, As-trit Muhaxhiri, and Trim Kabashi contributed to the monitoring and evaluation work package, on which this Policy Brief is based. The opinions expressed in this Policy Brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the funding organisation. We are grateful for comments received from Sonila Danaj. We also want to thank Willem Stamatou for the editing and layout.

Monitoring and evaluation of social services in Kosovo-policy challenges and recommendations*

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Introduction

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This Policy Brief aims to provide a brief overview of the current monitoring and evaluation system of social services in Kosovo. The authors address the challenges of the current practice and provide policy and practice recommendations to make monitoring and evaluation fully operational to the benefit of the most vulnerable groups in the population.

Background: general provision for social and family service delivery

The Kosovo Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW) is responsible for organizing the provision and development of social and family services in the country¹. According to the 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between three Ministries (MLSW, the ministry of Finance and Local Government Administration), individual municipalities are fully responsible for social services delivery. This process is in line with the overall decentralization reform in the country as per provision of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo of 2008 that guarantees “high degree of local self-governance” (p. 46). The financial decentralization did not follow the decentralization of tasks and responsibilities for service provision in Kosovo. All social and family services are currently funded from the state budget². At the local level the Municipal Directorates for Health and Social Welfare (MDHSW) oversee the planning and development of services. The Centers of Social Work (CSW) are responsible for service delivery, and currently 40 CSW offer social services across 38 municipalities in Kosovo. CSWs deliver a range of social and family services in the community as well as institutions. Additional services are provided by the non-profit sector: about 20 licenced NGOs provide services funded mainly by private donors.

¹ Law no. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services, April 2005.

² Law no. 03/L-049 on Local Government Finance.

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M&E system of social services: institutional and regulatory background

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are crucial for Kosovo as they strive to support better management of public programs by tracking progress, and to ultimately demonstrate long-term impact of policies in addressing the needs of the citizens. The government currently implements the Strategy for Modernization of Public Administration 2015-2020, which aims to ensure accountable public administration and efficient and effective service delivery. Still, it is not clear to what extent the country registered progress in improving the delivery of public services, including social services and progress on developing the monitoring and evaluation systems at the central and local level.

At central level, the Kosovo Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW) is responsible for organizing the delivery and development of social and family services³ as well as ensuring an efficient monitoring and evaluation system. An M&E dedicated unit was created as part of the MLSW, the Social and Family Services Monitoring and Inspection Unit. The unit has some general monitoring functions which are stipulated in the functioning regulations⁴.

The M&E process of social and family services is regulated by the law no. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services. The law has no specific M&E provisions, most regulations on service monitoring and evaluation are part of the licensing of social and family services regulations, which are divided into regulations for public and private service providers⁵. At the same time, the M&E tasks are not explicitly articulated in the job description documents of the staff of the monitoring unit, therefore there is still limited progress at the execution level.

At local level, the M&E system is intended to support the planning and development of services processes. Development of social services is the tasks of the Municipal Directorate for Health and Social Welfare (MDHSW). Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, as well as lack of M&E instruments and procedures makes this process difficult at local level.

Centers for Social Work have a system in place to collect data on their beneficiaries and the services provided. The CSW use standardized forms prepared by MLSW and then report those in regular intervals (weekly to annually) to the MDHSW via the Social Services Information System (SSIS). The limited access to the SSIS by CSW and MDHSW staff as well as the missing quality control and accuracy of the data are among the biggest challenges to ensure high quality of data.

Keywords: M&E is the key tool to track progress of the public programs and to demonstrate long-term impact in addressing citizens' needs.

3 Law no. 02/L-17 On Social and Family Services, April 2005.

4 Regulation on functioning of the Social and Family Services Monitoring and Inspection Unit, May 2014.

5 Administrative instruction no. 17/2013 on Licensing of the legal entity/organization that provide social and family services; regulation no. 04/2017 on criteria, standards and procedures on public funding of NGOs.

Perspectives on status quo: interview with central and local stakeholders

Box 1. Key informants' interviews, data collection method

On behalf of MLSW, the ECSWPR evaluation consultants Merita Meçe and Driton Zeqiri interviewed 13 stakeholders at the municipal, central and NGO level between March and May 2019. They developed interview guidelines to capture the stakeholders' perception of how the current M&E system has been implemented including: the structural capacity and institutional arrangement, data collection procedures, data quality, data storage and utilization, and involvement of stakeholders.

The stakeholders' perspectives are presented on the following topics: M&E knowledge, M&E implementation, data management and data use based on interviews with key stakeholders at central and local levels.

M&E knowledge: the interviews revealed a generally good understanding about the M&E components of social services. Although, the authorities at central level were aware of the M&E requirements stipulated in various national and sector documents/regulations, they were unclear about the M&E functions and were not aware of specific M&E tools/protocols.

Interviewees showed less understanding about evaluation than about monitoring. The central level authorities do not perceive the evaluation part as their task, they concentrate more on drafting regulations and quality standards. This perception might be supported also by regional practices, which show that evaluation tasks should be performed by an independent entity (ex. Social Inspection Agency, Evaluation Agency) and division of tasks should be clear to avoid conflicting tasks.

Keywords: M&E related challenges refer to limited understanding of roles and tasks division, lack of M&E tools and poor coordination of data collection and use.

M&E implementation: Stakeholders saw the monitoring visits of social and family service providers as part of the regular tasks of the M&E unit, at the same time there are no specific forms/templates to use for conclusions of these visits. Also, the M&E approaches differed for public and non-public providers as well as by type and the frequency of monitoring the providers. On average, about 14 monitoring visits are conducted yearly (from each 10 are planned and 3 to 4 ad-hoc). Stakeholders from both central and local level were unclear about how M&E responsibilities should be shared between various institutions and administrative levels. Another challenge is to ensure cooperation and data exchange between public and private providers, e.g. no possibility to detect cases when the beneficiary receives support from both systems.

Data management: As a critical component of the M&E system, data management should be considered at all stages of planning and delivery of social services. An online database has been developed with information about beneficiaries of social services, social assistance (cash benefits) and

the disability support scheme. Data is populated by the social services providers, mostly by the case workers in charge of the case management at local level. Recently, private providers have been connected to the circuit and can, in theory, enter data about their beneficiaries. The interviews revealed however that the data collection process was not well coordinated among various entities at local or central levels of administration or between the levels.

The data collection requirements bring additional pressure to the system, as workers of CSWs collect data on beneficiaries through various standardized forms. The information is paper-based and is introduced into an information system at a later stage. An additional tool for data collection is the case management which is also paper-based and transferred into the electronic system. During the interviews respondents also stressed the fact that the current forms were outdated. Due to limited capacities most of collected data was not transferred into the electronic system. There seems to be a disconnection between central and local levels on the data collection process, as there was no clarity what data is needed for policy planning and how this data should be collected.

Data use: The newly designed online database on social services seems to allow for response mechanisms, but these benefits are not seen yet. Limited entries do not offer enough information for evidence-based policy, and the providers are unwilling to put more effort into the exercise because they cannot use the collected information for local needs. Data quality assurance is an additional challenge, as respondents at all levels reported the absence of data quality check procedures.

Interviews showed that in Kosovo the institutional mechanisms are not efficient to support learning and transfer of M&E results into improved performance of services. Social services data collected through various instruments is not sufficiently informing the policy and budgeting process. Feedback still needs to be offered to the service provider (public or private) based on data collected through the monitoring process, but currently, the reports are centralized at the level of the Ministry.

National and regional support to enhance the M&E System in Kosovo: Municipal Action Planning

Keywords: efforts at municipal level are made to improve the planning process, including the M&E components.

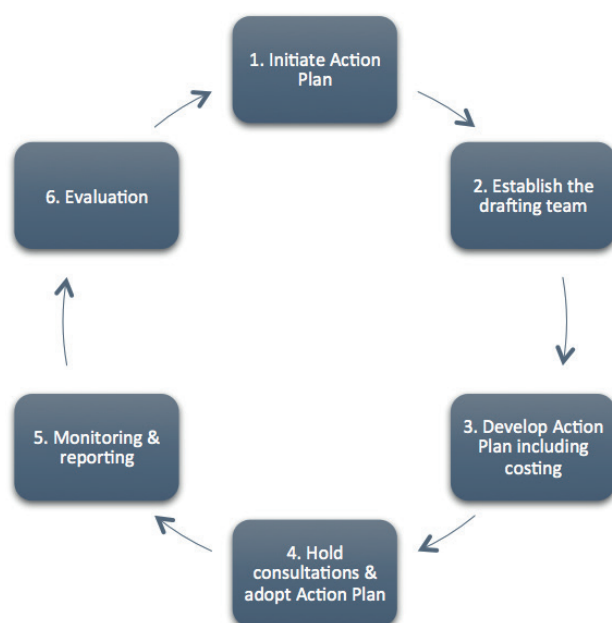
To address the above-mentioned challenges, the current project offered assistance to the local authorities with the strategic planning process as a channel for including the M&E components. A short guide on Developing Municipal Action Plans (MAP) for Social Services was developed. The aim of the guide is to help the MDHSW in the process of planning the development of the social services network. The guide was developed in accordance with the country's planning regulations (The Manual for Planning, Developing and Monitoring Strategic Documents and their Action Plans⁶). The guide was developed in cooperation with local authorities and discussed with central level authorities.

The M&E process was integrated into the MAP and relates to the last two steps of the strategic planning process at the municipal level (figure 1). The M&E plan outlines the monitoring and reporting system in the country and relates to the existing protocols and data collection methodologies necessary to measure and evaluate the results of implementing the Municipal Action Plan.

Between December 2018 and July 2019, the municipalities have been trained⁷ and offered on the job support in elaborating the MAP as well as have a better understanding of the M&E component. As a result of the planning support, all municipalities initiated the MAP drafting process with an integrated M&E component.

6 Manual for planning, developing and monitoring strategic documents and their action plans, Kosovo Government, January 2019.

7 The training in strategic planning of social services at municipal level were delivered by the local consultants Besim Hoxha, Astrit Muhaxhiri.

Figure 1. Key steps in strategic planning

Note. This graph is modelled by the authors after the Manual for planning, developing and monitoring strategic documents and their action plans (January 2019) and tailored to municipal action planning for social services.

Policy recommendations and implications

Based on interviews with stakeholders at the central, local and NGO level, the project team makes the following recommendations regarding advancing M&E of social services in Kosovo:

Selected recommendations to the MLSW:

- Provide a clear definition of evaluation in the legal acts related to M&E of social services. Better define the role of the SFSMIU as the sole unit in charge of monitoring of social service.
- Improve the data collection forms to better reflect the system's needs, update the forms regularly and ensure data disaggregation.
- Improve the existing SSI system, integrated the monitoring of social services component into the SSI, make the system accessible to staff at different levels.
- Harmonize the M&E system in social services with other M&E systems that operate in the country to find synergy and avoid duplication of information (e.g. data of the ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Internal Affairs, civil registration data based etc.).

Keywords: measures to advance the M&E systems should be taken at national and local levels, as well as at the level of individual service provider.

- Offer access to the SSI system to all licensed social service providers to improve data collection. The access to personal data should be regulated by MLSW through an administrative instruction, followed by database modifications to ensure compliance.

Selected recommendations to the Municipalities:

- Encourage a culture of self-evaluation of service providers, design and institutionalize self-evaluation forms and procedures.
- Adjust the municipal regulations to mainstream the process of engaging the CSW in municipal budget planning for MDHSW. In order to create uniform practices among all Kosovo municipalities we recommend that MDHSWs cooperate with Association of Kosovo Municipalities-Collegium of Health and Social Welfare.
- Encourage all service providers to have MoUs with the CSWs in the municipality they operate.
- Plan internship programs for students of sociology, psychology and law, in order to support CSWs in their daily tasks. This should be done in order to create space for CSWs senior staff to be engaged in planning and improvement of the monitoring and evaluation of social service system.

Selected recommendations for the social services providers, public and private:

- Improve data collection of social services for internal and external planning.
- Adapt a culture of self-evaluation, design and institutionalize self-evaluation forms and procedures.
- Ensure transition from paper data collection to computer assisted data collection.

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List of acronyms

CSW	Center for Social Work
DSPF	Department of Social Policy and Family
ECSWPR	European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAP	Municipal Action Plan
MDHSW	Municipal Directorate for Health and Social Welfare
MLSW	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SFSMIU	The Social and Family Services Monitoring and Inspection Unit
SSIS	Social Services Information System



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