

An approach to collectively design a strengthened social service workforce



This case study was developed by an external evaluation team as part of the Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) initiative's five-year evaluation. In addition to looking at CTWWC's work overall, the evaluation created cases around five select approaches which the initiative used to influence change in order to understand their effectiveness in supporting care reform and wider care sector collaboration. The information presented in this case comes from the evaluation team's analysis of key documents, monitoring data, two key informant interviews, and a workshop with key stakeholders in Moldova. The findings from this analysis are presented here to inform CTWWC's future plans and to inform wider work within the care sector. Find the additional case studies part of this evaluation and more resources on care reform from CTWWC on [CTWWC's website](#) and [Better Care Network](#).

Approach Summary: Moldova Social Service Workforce Strengthening Working Group

To address ongoing training and sustainability of the social service workforce, Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) and the Moldovan Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) initiated the Workforce Strengthening Working Group (WG) in March, 2022. Facilitated with CTWWC's partner Keystone Moldova, the WG implemented CTWWC Moldova's Collective Impact Approach, a participatory and inclusive process whereby all relevant stakeholders are brought together to collaborate.

With an aim to develop cross-sector solutions, the WG convened national and local government officials, civil society organizations, people with lived experience (PWLE), local communities, faith leaders, donors, and academia.

The specific goals of the WG were defined as follows:

1. Establish continuous training of social workers and upskill case management practices.
2. Shift the paradigm of professional supervision, ensuring its functional professionalization and standardization as well as emphasizing prevention of professional burnout, toward sustainable care infrastructure.
3. Strengthen partnerships between government regulatory agencies creating policy and the universities responsible for training social service workers to carry out policy.

Relevance of this approach

Based on the evaluation team's analysis, the approach in this case study might be relevant for learning, adaptation, and application in contexts...

With these characteristics:

- Existing social work academic institutions or formal training programs.
- Existing social service workforce employed within the care system.
- Presence of cross-sector actors who are motivated to collaboratively develop solutions to strengthen the social service workforce.

Where the goal is to:

- Improve provision of alternative care and family support through continuous training of social workers.
- Strengthen national capacity through the convening and joint work of diverse stakeholders in the care reform sector.
- Leverage partnerships to streamline and strengthen social service training and professional development.
- Support inclusion through the contribution of multiple partners, versus creation and direction from a single organization/entity.

Why CTWWC took this approach

The situational analysis assessment conducted by CTWWC and partners in 2021 identified constraints and challenges to training the social service workforce in child and family protection within Moldova. Missing was continuous training in the fundamentals of care reform and, often, evidence of training reflected within the social service workforce, both necessary for strengthening gatekeeping and family preservation.

Working groups are a common structure for accomplishing work in Moldova and are typically approved and convened by a government ministry. Participants of these traditional working groups are assigned by the convening ministry, and while the requirement to participate in the working group may initially facilitate an easier flow of and participation in the work, the structure may miss important perspectives. This particular WG holds a distinct approach, with participation being voluntary and, thereby, promoting a sense of inclusion by widening the invitation to participate to key actors across multiple sectors.

In this case, WG participants participate of their own accord, feeling they have something meaningful to contribute and understanding how their expertise intersects with strengthening the social service workforce. The WG approach is used here to collectively analyze and provide feedback on subject-matter documents before they are submitted for public feedback and, eventually, adoption. The aim is to develop, test, measure, and fund solutions in consortium in order to ensure that policies and services are effective, relevant to needs, adequately resourced, and accessible to all.



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| The approach in practice

Based on documentation and input from stakeholders involved, the significant junctures on the journey of implementing the WG in Moldova included:

1 Advocacy and formalization of the initiative

A significant factor that impacted CTWWC's ability to contribute to the WG was the response to Moldova's change to a new ruling party in 2021. CTWWC invested in advocacy activities directed at uplifting the need for and benefits of prioritizing the care of children, targeting interim ministers and State secretaries. Also in 2021, the MLSP signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) allowing CTWWC to officially begin implementation of the initiative.

2 Establishment of the Workforce Strengthening Working Group and Technical Groups

In the early days of implementation, meetings were held with relevant stakeholders to discuss the intention and purpose of the WG. The WG officially began in March 2022 and in the first

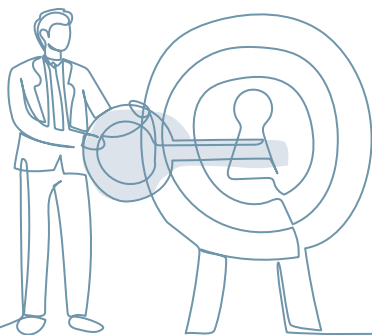
few months doubled in size from 15 to 30 members. Since this time, the WG has reoriented activities to align with a new government reform of the structure of agencies delivering children's care, supported the MLSP in developing the package of documents regarding training and insertion into work, and approved the child protection program. The WG provides input and feedback for consultants who are drafting continuous training regulations and costs and outlining mechanisms to encourage continued motivation.

The WG created four technical groups (TG) to encourage collaboration and provide opportunities to maximize interest and expertise areas of relevant stakeholders. These TGs include: 1) Developing mechanisms for initial and continuous training of the social service workforce; 2) Strengthening the partnership between MLSP and academic institutions; 3) Improving mechanisms for the professional

supervision of social assistance; and, 4) Developing evidence-based training courses in the field of child protection. Each TG had a defined set of deliverables that acted both as a list of outputs and measurement for progress.

3 Strengthening partnerships with universities

Since the WG's inception, representatives of universities educating social workers actively contributed to WG meetings, displaying motivation and ongoing involvement. To further solidify this partnership, a MoU was signed between MLSP and four leading universities nine months after the first WG. The MoU outlined mechanisms for training and supporting the social services workforce and developed action plans for the next three years of work.



Effectiveness of this approach

Each defined goal of the WG approach has made progress and has areas for continued growth. The formalization of the initiative, the establishment of the WG, and the partnership developed with universities have demonstrated numerous evidence points of effectiveness. Also critical to ascertaining effectiveness is gaining understanding of the ways in which framework development is dependent on other moving pieces such as shifts in national policy or government personnel.




Recognizing that the timeline for systems change is long and high-level objectives are not likely yet to be met in totality, in this case 'effectiveness' is used as the extent to which the approach has been successful in achieving progress toward its stated goals. Each goal and the associated accomplishments are outlined in the table to the right. This list was generated via document review and amended and validated with CTWWC staff and stakeholders in Moldova.

Goal	Evidence of effectiveness toward this goal
Establish continuous training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress towards defining content to be taught and development of evidenced based curriculums for use by the government, academia, and civil society to strengthen and further professionalize social workers. Responding to the needs of communities and Social Assistance Workforce Training providers, the MoU partnership developed a total of 66 training programs in child and family protection.
Ensuring functionality of profession and preventing burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of specialist qualification rankings, allowing workers to confirm skills and knowledge and in doing so, be eligible for salary increases. Positive shift in recognizing the social role and value of the social service workforce. Resources allocated to creation of document packages on supervisor training, enhancing the supervisor training system, and emphasizing prevention of burnout.
Partnerships with academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MoU between MLSP and four universities created opportunities for academia involvement to build a quality-focused training system, including internship opportunities for social work students that connect academic study with real-life experience. University members actively participate in the WG. Ongoing consultation of teachers during the development of public policies related to social work. Academic involvement in evaluation of public policies supporting social work and workers.

Needed resources

The experience in Moldova demonstrated the investment needed in the areas of relationships, time, and expertise. While members of the WGs and TGs volunteer their time, resourcing was needed for implementation, infrastructuring and operations, and cultivating relationships and partnerships that contribute to the goals of the WG.

This case study takes an approach of identifying lessons on what resources are needed for implementation with the aim of providing information on the affordability of this approach. Resources needed are likely to change over time, and the cost of transitioning to a new approach or system may be much different than what is needed to sustain that approach.

Relationships	Time	Expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship building is critical in creating buy-in and credibility for the approach and is composed of such activities as formalizing working agreements with government entities, one-on-one conversations with stakeholders, partnership building (with universities, for example), and onboarding and equipping trainers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A designated lead organization (in this case, Keystone Moldova) to invest time in coordinating communication, logistics and guidance on structure of the WG. Time for one-on-one conversations with various actors to understand individual needs, areas of expertise, vision for change, and to promote inclusive feedback. Time for the shared leadership tasks needed to convene the WG and for developing motivators for engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise is needed in the development of a framework for implementation, as well as the content that directly addresses upskill and training of the social service workforce, both highly skilled professional services and areas of expertise. An experienced, paid facilitator and leadership body is needed to convene and support the logistics of the WG, maximizing the collaboration between labor department, universities, professionals in the social service workforce, and people with lived experience. Here, positionality is important to create legitimacy of the WG and to motivate participants in joint decision making and development. 

Challenges and Tips

The following were challenges noted by stakeholders involved in the implementation of this approach, as well as the actions they took or would recommend taking to help overcome these obstacles.

Challenge: Maintaining WG engagement

- Maintaining motivation and engagement of volunteer stakeholders with limited time, considering the most effective ways to delegate responsibilities and present information when there is not always capacity for members to do requested pre-work

Tips:

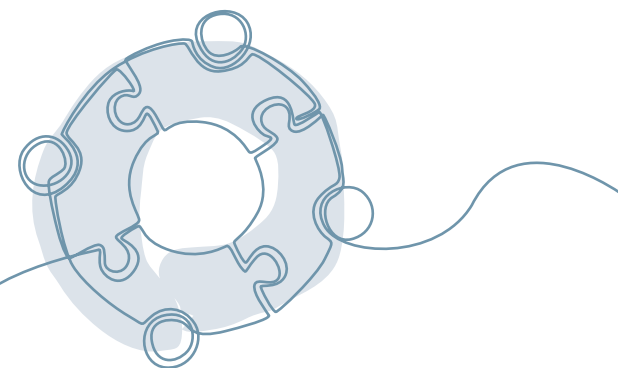
- **Outline clear division of labor and encourage mutual contribution:** The WG found it useful to break into smaller groups with very clear tasks when technical documents needed drafting. These smaller groups would bring back work to the larger group for feedback and comment. This format promoted engagement across stakeholders with demonstrated willingness to contribute. Additionally, when it was safe to do so, moving meetings back to an in-person format helped to further build working relationships.
- **Provide opportunities for distributed leadership and collective ownership:** As leadership roles were delegated across members of the WG, accountability to and stake in the WG outcomes rose. This model of distributed leadership diffused the possibility of a singular organization's ownership, instead promoting a more inclusive endeavor.
- **Don't expect work outside of the time spent as a group:** Busy stakeholders who are voluntarily participating due to their passion for the work are unlikely to have additional time to review documents in advance of meetings. Be sure to include time to bring participants along synchronously, rather than relying on significant outside effort.

Challenge: Adapting to shifts in government policy

- The vision for implementation guidance for social assistance reform in Moldova changed in the midst of the WG. Thus, certain aspects the WG had put effort towards needed to be reshaped.

Tips:

- **Prioritize communication with key stakeholders:** Policy changes are more easily adapted to when they are not a complete surprise. Though change was still a challenge, positive government relations between the WG and MLSP helped minimize the effect of policy changes to past efforts. Good communication with government stakeholders also ensures they approve and have buy-in to collectively developed plans.



Lessons learned

This case offers the following key points for consideration in future replication or adaptation:

- A change in government officials or in an administration's priorities as well as a crisis (such as COVID-19, the energy crisis, or the influx of refugee arrivals from Ukraine) can lead to substantial shifts in national priorities that greatly impact the work of a task force or working group, putting at risk or leveraging the work done. Approaches are encouraged to consider the impact of these factors and how the factors can be integrated to prepare for effective response when needed.
- To best promote an inclusive working group model, a collaborative, relationship-oriented leader who is respected in the field of care reform is best suited to lead. Further, ensuring there is a dedicated team ("backbone support") to coordinate activities is necessary to maintain motivation and engagement.
- Anchoring in a common agenda and shared measurements, while lifting up diverse perspectives allows the group to collectively understand, define, and own needs and priorities.
- Providing incentives to working group members who are attending and contributing to the mandate outside of their regular working hours might help to recognize and encourage their key contributions.
- Multi-sectoral and academic cooperation adds depth to the training of new generations of specialists, encouraging greater levels of competency and confidence and having a direct impact on children involved in the care reform system.



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Need to know more?

Contact Changing the Way We Care at info@ctwwc.org
Or visit changingthewaywecare.org

Data Sources

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