

D4I Armenia promotes access and use of data on children in adversity by community social workers

Background

Armenia has a three-tiered child protection (CP) system that includes the community level, through guardianship-trusteeship bodies (GTB) and commissions (GTC); the regional level, through marzpetaran's (regional administration) Units of Family, Women and Child Rights Protection and Child and Social Protection Department at the Yerevan Municipality; and the national level, through the National Child Rights Commission. The Minister of Labor and Social Affairs is the chairperson of the National Commission, which has representatives from key ministries, civil society organizations, and the international donor community.

With the adoption of the Law on Local Self-Governance in 2002, Armenia defined the principles, bodies, obligations, and authority of local self-government bodies, and their legal and economic grounds, funding sources, and relationship with the national government. According to Article 12 of the Law on Local Self-Governance, the social protection of community members is the mandatory responsibility of the head of the community and the Community Council. Within the scope of Article 48 of the Law on Local Self-Governance, the head of the community is responsible for identifying the persons/families in difficult life situations; conducting home visits to support the persons/families and to identify their capabilities to overcome difficult life situations; or arranging for support based on targeted individual social recovery plans; and if the support needed is not possible to address at the community level, referring the persons/families to relevant service providers. To complete these tasks, the Law on Local Self-Governance defines that the heads of communities

should hire at least one social worker as a staff member per 5,000 residents. The law also assigns the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) to arrange for the proper training of these staff members in basic social work skills. However, a self-assessment of care reform conducted by MOLSA in early 2018, with support from the MEASURE Evaluation project, which was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), revealed that the community-based social protection services were very weak and that community social workers (CSWs) did not know where they fit in the three tiers of the CP system of Armenia. The self-assessment found significant overlapping of the CSWs' roles and responsibilities with those of the GTBs, GTCs, social case managers of Unified Social Services Centers,¹ and Child Protection Units (CPUs). In addition to the lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, the CSWs did not have access to any of the government's information systems to report data on children/families in adversity, track the provision of services, and generate summary data on the needs of and services provided to families. Moreover, the CSWs did not have access to the Manuk information system (IS), which is managed by MOLSA, for registration and tracking of children in adversity. To address these gaps, since October 2020 the USAID-funded Data for Impact (D4I) project initiated intensive work with MOLSA to facilitate access for CSWs and case managers to data on children in adversity in the Manuk IS.

Activities Implemented

The efforts of D4I to promote and advocate for CSWs to have access to the Manuk IS and their increased involvement in the CP system took two directions: (1) advocate for the use of CSWs to identify children who

¹ Forty-nine centers were established by MOLSA nationwide to provide one-stop social services to the population. The centers accept applications for all state-funded social protection services and arrange for the complex support provided to

families and individuals in difficult life situations, including job placement, disability assessment, assignment of benefits and other monetary support, and the provision of home or residential care.

were out of school following the deinstitutionalization of care institutions and special schools between 2018 and 2020; and (2) contribute to the working group established by MOLSA for clarifying the roles and responsibilities of CSWs by making relevant amendments to existing legislation.

Identifying Children Who Were Out of School

D4I's suggestion to use CSWs to identify children out of school following the deinstitutionalization of care institutions was welcomed by MOLSA Division on Children Related Issues of the Department for Equal Opportunities. MOLSA applied in writing to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MOESCS) requesting a list of children who were deinstitutionalized from special schools after their transformation into Regional Pedagogical-Psychological Support Centers (RPPSC).² The objective was to give the list of children to CSWs and to track the status of those children. However, the MOESCS officially responded to MOLSA that it did not have the ability to generate the list of these children from its IS.

To overcome this challenge, in consultation with D4I, MOLSA agreed to apply to the CPUs to obtain data on children who were removed from the special schools in their respective marzes (regions). In addition, MOLSA applied to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MOATI) for the list of CSWs who passed the training and were equipped to collect data on children in adversity. The D4I team then asked the World Vision Armenia (WVA) team to prepare a list of CSWs that it had trained under the USAID-funded Community Level Access to Social Services (CLASS) project. The MOTAI also helped assess the computer literacy of CSWs and the availability of computers to them. WVA provided MOLSA and D4I with the information on all trained CSWs. With the support of the CPUs, data on 599 children were received. With the responses from all three sources (CPUs, MOTAI, and WVA), and in collaboration with MOLSA, D4I developed a detailed list of children who were deinstitutionalized between 2018 and 2020, including information on their education status and their assigned CSWs.

D4I supported the analysis, which showed that 101 children (17%) of the 599 were either out of school or at risk of being out of school (Table 1).

Table 1. Data on children who were deinstitutionalized from special schools and care institutions between 2018 and 2020, by their schooling status

	Number	%
<i>Attend school</i>	496	82.8
<i>Do not attend school (1-9 grade students)</i>	39	6.5
<i>Completed basic school (1-9 grade only) and did not continue their education (it is required for every child in Armenia to complete 12 grades)</i>	25	4.2
<i>Moved to another marz</i>	3	0.5
<i>Home schooled</i>	34	5.7
<i>Unknown</i>	2	0.3
<i>Total (excluding unknown)</i>	599	100.0

(Source: reports of the CPUs to MOLSA as of February 2021)

This initiative showed that CSWs were able to gather data on children in adversity if they had received assignment and clear instructions.

As a next step, MOLSA submitted a list of children out of school, with the names and contact information of the relevant CSWs, to the MOESCS as part of the procedures required by the Government of Armenia Regulation of February 11, 2021. It is expected that the MOESCS will enter the data on these children in the special IS developed to identify and respond to children left out of school.

Amendments to the Family Code of Armenia

The D4I team was asked by MOLSA to join the working group coordinated by UNICEF Armenia to propose amendments to the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia and the Law on the Rights of a Child, with the aim of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all key players in the three-tiered CP system of Armenia. D4I agreed to join the working group, recognizing it as an opportunity to advocate for the ability of CSWs to start reporting directly to the Manuk IS on children in adversity. A series of meetings and discussions, both virtual and face-to-face, resulted in an expansive list of amendments (more than 90

² Between 2018 and 2020, six special schools were transformed into Pedagogical-Psychological Support Centers. The children were moved out of the special schools. Many children continued their education in the community

inclusive schools, whereas children with severe disabilities or social conditions who were staying overnight at the special schools were not able to find appropriate services and thus stayed at home.

points) to the Family Code. Following approval from the deputy minister, the Draft Law on Amendments to the Family Code was posted on the government's e-draft.am platform for public review. It is expected that in September 2021, MOLSA will submit the revised draft to the National Assembly for adoption.

The proposed structure of the CP system of Armenia, according to the proposed revised legislation and the distribution of roles, is presented in Figure 1.

Achievements to Date

D4I's advocacy to grant access to CSWs to report data to Manuk IS—and for their increased involvement in the data collection and reporting processes of the CP system—achieved the following:

- MOLSA agreed that all specialists who work with children in adversity at the community level should have access to the Manuk IS.
- MOLSA discussed with the MOTAI the required legal regulations for assigning CSWs as the primary source of information on children in adversity.
- MOLSA has included WVA and the MOTAI in discussions on amendments to the Family Code and the structure of the CP system, which were conducted in collaboration with UNICEF.
- The amendments to the Family Code clearly states the distribution of work and responsibilities among CSWs, case managers of the Unified Social Services Centers, and the CPUs.
- Proposed amendments to the Family Code emphasized the role of CSWs and suggested that the CSW be a secretary of the GTC.
- The GTC/secretary is now the primary level at which children left without parental care are registered, and they immediately inform the CPUs about their recommendations for the type of alternative care that should be offered.
- Given the growing role of the CSWs, a higher level of responsibility has been granted to them to support the CPUs to conduct supervision of adoptive and foster families.

- The GTC/secretary should enter information on children left without parental care directly into the IS (either the new Manuk case management information system [CMIS] for children in adversity or the family social needs assessment CMIS to be run by USSCs, which is also in development). The Government of Armenia has drafted clear criteria for the identification/registration of and cooperation mechanisms among various types of organizations dealing with a child in adversity.
- The ecosystem of the new Manuk CMIS presented in Figure 2 shows the workflows and information flows among key players in the CP system and the CSWs.

Next Steps

Once amendments to the Family Code are adopted by the National Assembly, CSWs will have access to data from the social protection and education systems at the local level. D4I will support MOLSA to train CSWs to use the new Manuk CMIS and to enter data directly in the system.

D4I's work will be carried out in coordination with USAID Armenia and its implementing partner WVA, for the Community Level Access to Social Services project.



Figure 1. Proposed structure of the new CP system in Armenia (arrows indicate the information flow)

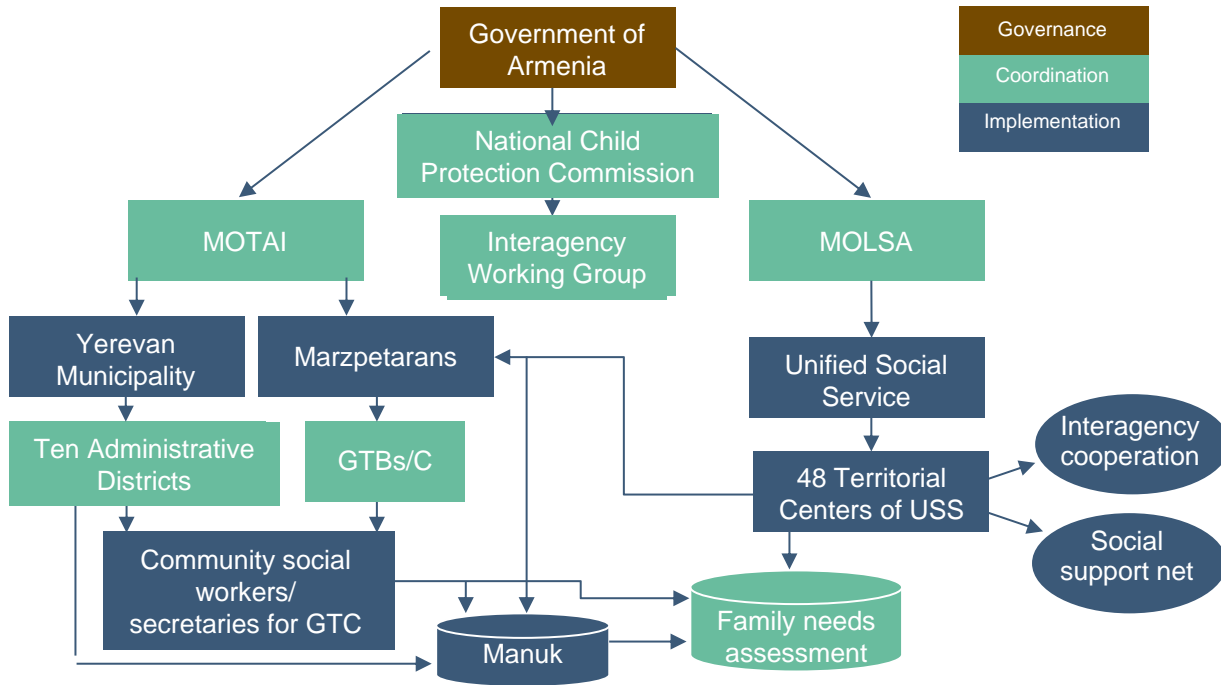


Figure 2. Ecosystem of the new Manuk CMIS

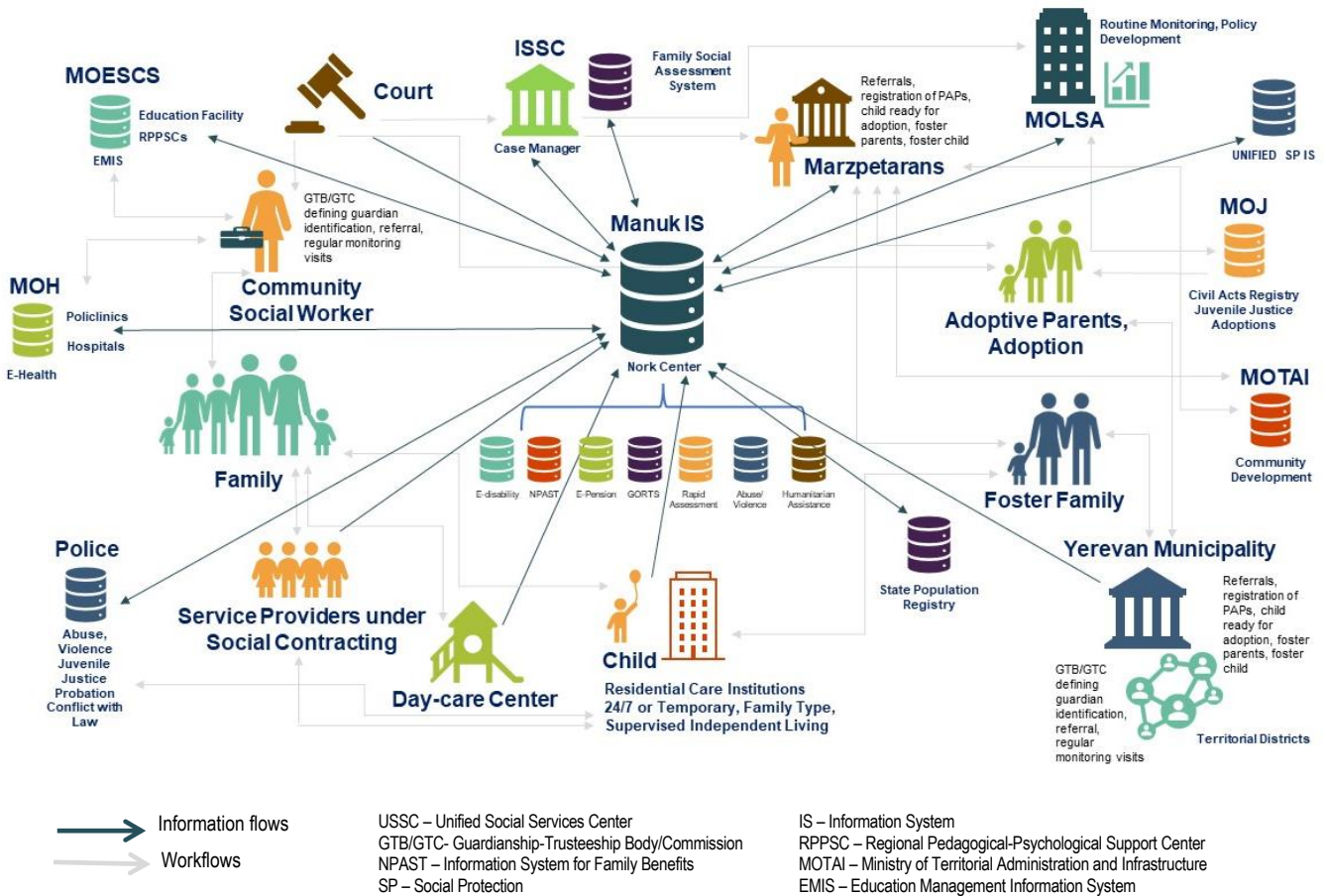


Table 2. Log of meetings for promoting the role of community social workers

	Date	Topic of discussion	Participants	Discussion brief	Main outcome	Next steps
1	September 2020	Possible access for CSWs to the Manuk IS	D4I-MOLSA	Discussion was initiated around the draft memorandum of understanding between D4I and MOLSA; it was agreed to follow up on the possibility for providing access for CSWs to the Manuk IS after MOLSA has clarity with Integrated Social Services Centers (ISSC) and their staff responsibilities are agreed.	Outline of long-term strategy to improve the role of CSWs	Wait for final Charter of ISSC
2			D4I-Yerevan Municipality	Discussions occurred about the recent reforms in the structural composition and staff responsibilities of Yerevan Municipality. The plan is to have 54 CSWs who, with the GTBs and Yerevan District authorities, will regulate services to people in difficult life situations, including children. They will communicate information to the Child Protection Units of the Children and Social Protection Department of the Municipality. The draft structural change is pending approval with more clearly defined role distributions.	Possible solution for Yerevan can be replicated in other marzes	Discuss the suggested structure with the Yerevan Municipality and MOLSA, with participation of WVA
3			D4I MOLSA Division on children related issues	Discussion on the roles and responsibilities of CSWs and their access to or use of information from the Manuk IS, at least in some cases. It has been agreed that CSWs can handle the cases for monitoring of prevention and family reunification, and registration of kinship care.	Outlined roles of CSWs: monitoring for prevention and family reunification, and registration of kinship care	Discuss the role of CSWs with Yerevan Municipality and WVA
4	November 2020	Structure of the CP system in Armenia	MOLSA Working Group (WG) with UNICEF on CP structure	Active participation in MOLSA/UNICEF WG activities on the CP system	UNICEF agreed to develop two options based on WG discussions	Participate in follow-up discussions; develop matrix of key players in the CP system according to the system components
5	December 2020	Advocacy for CSWs serving as the primary level for CP-related issues in the communities	MOLSA WG with UNICEF on CP structure	Comments on proposed CP structure options developed by UNICEF based on WG discussions	D4I provided the matrix on roles distribution for data flow on children in adversity to the WG	Participate in follow-up discussions

	Date	Topic of discussion	Participants	Discussion brief	Main outcome	Next steps
6	November 2020 – February 2021	Using CSWs for tracing children who were deinstitutionalized from special schools between 2018 and 2020	D4I, MOLSA, MOESCS, MOTAI	With D4I support, MOLSA has started collecting data on children from special schools who were deinstitutionalized during 2018-2020. The data collected by MOLSA will pass to CSWs to track the children's well-being, their reasons for not attending school, and the services that they need or receive.	With agreement between MOLSA and the MOTAI, data on the availability of computers and access to the Internet, and the possibility of CSWs entering data in the Manuk IS were collected. The summary results helped the two ministries discuss next steps for using CSWs for collecting regular data on these children and reporting in the Manuk IS.	D4I provided MOLSA with a report on the availability of CSWs and their access to computers and the Internet. MOLSA will discuss the possibility of training these community CSWs on using the Manuk IS.
7	January 2021	Clarification from WVA on how many CSWs were trained and had computers	D4I, MOLSA, WVA, MOTAI	We received data from two sources on the number of CSWs, names of communities, and availability of computers for CSWs, as well as who had been trained by WVA.	Summary of two sources and plans for next steps were shared with MOLSA to develop a letter to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MOESCS)	
8	March 2021	Role of CSWs in the new system of Unified Social Services Centers	UNICEF, MOLSA, D4I, WVA, FAR	The purpose of the discussion was to understand whether the CSWs were part of the new Unified Social Services Centers, and how and when they reported data. The discussion did not show any special division of tasks between case managers from the Centers and CSWs, nor on how the CP system will function under new developments. Additional discussions are needed.	All agree that CSWs should be a primary source for prevention services and when identifying a child in adversity, in general.	Additional discussion is needed.
9	May – June 2021	Training of CSWs	WVA	D4I presented recent developments in MOLSA regarding digitization of information on children in adversity using the new Manuk CMIS and roles of CSWs to the trainees.	New CSWs learned about recent developments in modifications to the Manuk IS.	N,A
10	February – June 2021	Clarifying roles and responsibilities of CSWs, case managers, and CPUs for the identification, referral, and monitoring of children in adversity	MOLSA, UNICEF, D4I, WVA	A series of meetings and discussions were held on making amendments to the Family code. Roles and responsibilities of CSWs, case managers, and CPUs were clarified and regulated.	Draft amendments were posted on the government's e-draft portal for public review.	The final package will be sent by MOLSA to the government and the National Assembly for adoption.



For more information

D4I supports countries to realize the power of data as actionable evidence that can improve programs, policies, and—ultimately—health outcomes. We strengthen the technical and organizational capacity of local partners to collect, analyze, and use data to support their move to self-reliance. For more information, visit <https://www.data4impactproject.org/>

