5. Social services

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

People are usually exposed to multiple economic and social risks, including discrimination, abuse, violence and social exclusion. While material support has a positive impact on the reduction of social risks and aspects of exclusion (WHO 2019), some situations require concrete, personal and guiding support on an individual basis. This type of service is commonly referred to as social services (Trukeschitz 2006).

Over the last decade or so, the debate around social services has gained momentum both in high- and low-income countries. High-income countries are facing extensive demographic changes, including a rapidly growing older population, longer life expectancy and higher rates of disability and morbidity (European Foundation 2009; European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2018; European Commission Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion n.d.; WHO 2019). As a consequence, demand for social services, in particular social care services, is rapidly increasing (e.g. WHO 2017). Globalization has created new social problems that social services need to address and which concern both high-, low- and middle-income countries, such as migration, environmental issues or the trafficking of people (Lombard 2019; Dominelli 2010). In middle- and low-income countries, profound socio-economic and demographic changes, including rising inequalities, chronic poverty, rural–urban migration and HIV/AIDS have equally increased the demand. The growing recognition that comprehensive and integrated approaches are needed in order to address the often multiple vulnerabilities people are facing has led to a new appreciation of social services as having a key role in social protection, complementing mainly cash-based social protection instruments and reinforcing and amplifying their impacts (e.g. UNICEF 2019b).

This chapter provides an overview of the major debates and developments around social services in high-, middle- and low-income countries. It argues that social services – though having received increased attention – continue to play a rather marginal role in the conceptual and policy debates around social protection. This concerns in particular (1) the perception of social services as largely fulfilling a merely protective function with only limited consideration related to their preventative, promotive and transformative role (Drolet 2016; Midgley 2017) and (2) the perception of social services and the social service workforce as primarily passive service providers as opposed to proactively shaping social protection policies.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows: Section 5.2 considers different notions of social services in relation to social protection. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 discuss some of the challenges of social services in high-, low- and middle-income countries. Section 5.5 is dedicated to the role of social services in integrated social protection approaches, while Section 5.6 concludes with some reflections on the future role of social services for social protection.

5.2   SOCIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

From a functional point of view, social services encompass a range of activities, including therapy and counselling, treatment, care and nursing services, community work as well as activation, employment and qualification services. They span across various sectors and policy areas, including social protection, health, education, employment, justice, policing, housing and migration. What distinguishes social services from other service areas is their socially supportive character, i.e. they specifically target disadvantaged people or groups of people with the explicit goal to improve their living conditions. This is also reflected in the way services are delivered, i.e. in direct contact with the clients, often on an individual basis. Their personal and individual character is further emphasized by what is commonly referred to as a 'case-management approach', i.e. solutions and options to address social vulnerabilities are developed in a dialogue with the client. This collaborative process is believed to enhance the opportunities of the client and lead to faster and more sustainable results (Trukeschitz 2006; IFSW 2012).

Focusing on the most vulnerable in society and supporting them in addressing structural causes of poverty, exclusion and inequalities, social services are intrinsically normative. A range of authors emphasize the role of social services in contributing to the realization of specific societal or developmental goals based on social justice, human rights and equity (e.g. Midgley and Conley 2010; Midgley et al. 2019; IFSW 2012). By supporting marginalized individuals, families and communities to (re)gain control over their livelihoods, living conditions, opportunities and social relations, social service workers are having a key role in these processes, positively contributing to inclusive development, social cohesion, empowerment and liberation of oppression and discrimination (IFSW 2012; GSSWA n.d.; Drolet 2016).

In the context of social protection, social services are usually understood as a set of measures delivered in complementarity with cash- or in-kind transfers. They support the implementation of social protection programmes providing direct support and care for people with disabilities, the elderly, children or other vulnerable groups such as poor families, people with mental health issues, and people with addictions or homeless people (Lethbridge 2017; UNICEF 2019b; Part IV). Social services have an important referral function. This also includes the provision of information on services and benefits, for example, information on access modalities to potentially eligible beneficiaries (UNICEF 2019b). It may also take on a more proactive character, for example by supporting people in applying for health insurance or cash transfer programmes (Bergthaller and Ebken 2017). Awareness and promotion is yet another, often neglected aspect of social services. Social service workers play an important role in mobilizing and facilitating community participation or integrating community perspectives in policy implementation processes (e.g. targeting processes or social auditing) (Sagala et al. 2016).

Despite the fact that they are highly complementary, social services are not always explicitly included in definitions of social protection (e.g. Carter et al. 2019; ILO 1952, 2012). This is slowly changing. National governments engaged in social protection reform processes and international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly emphasize the role of social services and benefits in kind as two sides of the same coin and, thus, the need for a stronger and more meaningful integration of social services into social protection approaches (e.g. UNICEF 2019a, 2019b; Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030 2012).

5.3   SOCIAL SERVICES IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

Notions of what encompasses social services vary across different country contexts. This is related to differences in vulnerabilities that countries or groups of people in countries are facing and that are considered to require support, but also relates to countries' social protection or welfare regime approach and the role they attribute to social services in addressing vulnerabilities (as opposed to material support). It is further accentuated by the role ascribed to public institutions in providing these services as opposed to the private or non-profit sector (Lethbridge 2017; Drolet 2016; IFSW 2012; Schönig n.d.).

The typology of advanced welfare states developed by Esping-Andersen (1990) provides useful insights with regard to the role attributed to social services provision across welfare states: in liberal welfare states, such as the United Kingdom or Ireland social services are considered as having a marginal role. While in liberal welfare states (United Kingdom or Ireland) social services are considered as having a negative impact on the work ethics and are thus few and provided in a highly selective and often stigmatizing way, highly universal and egalitarian welfare states like Norway, Sweden, Finland or the Netherlands are found on the opposite end of the spectrum: they put a strong emphasis on social services in addressing poverty, inequality and exclusion. Also, social services are highly institutionalized with the state being the primary provider. The conservative model, including most of continental Europe, is somewhere in-between: social protection is strongly employment-related with social assistance measures to a large extent means tested and based on a strong subsidiary notion.[1] This also holds for social service provision, in particular long-term care services provided to elderly, children or people with disabilities, of which the major burden lies on the non-government sector, including NGOs, religious associations and the family (Lethbridge 2017; Midgley 1997). In contrast to low-income countries, informal care and support systems in high-income countries tend to be complemented by formal services funded by taxation, social insurance and/or private insurance (Lethbridge 2017).

This formal/informal welfare mix in the provision of social services has experienced a significant shift over the last two decades. A rapidly ageing population together with an increasing life expectancy, as well as significant social changes such as rising inequalities, migration and climate-induced challenges, have dramatically increased the demand for social services (WHO 2017; European Foundation 2009; European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion 2018). This concerns in particular long-term care services which historically have been mainly provided by the informal care economy through the family and in particular women. With the female participation in the labour market, the rise in single-headed households and the increasingly complex requirements for caring activities, family support systems require increasingly professional support in order to complement informal care arrangements (Lethbridge 2017).

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[1]   Social support provided by the state can only be turned to if the means for support are otherwise exhausted (own workforce, support by the family or any other organization, including NGOs, churches, etc.). This usually implies that social support measures are means tested, and family resources are considered for eligibility. From a provider point of view it refers to the fact that the responsibility of social support and services is as much as possible delegated to the lower levels of government and the non-government sector, including NGOs, religious associations, etc. (e.g. Talos and Fink 2001).

Austerity measures and cuts in public welfare, in particular in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial and economic crisis, have reduced public spending on social services. Many governments are increasingly contracting out social services to non-profit and for-profit NGOs, resulting in an increased competition among service providers (European Commission 2011; see Chapter 10). While this had a positive impact on professionalization in some service sectors, with regards to the social care economy a mixed picture emerges, in particular with regards to the quality of services (e.g. Lethbridge 2017). The downward pressure of public expenditure towards social service providers has had a negative impact on the quality of jobs created and the attractiveness of the sector which ultimately negatively impacts on the quality of services provided. While the social service sector has become one of the fastest growing sectors in the European Union (EU),[2] it is also considered one of the worst sectors with regards to working conditions, including wage levels, working hours, training opportunities and career paths (Lethbridge 2017). EU public procurement law makes matters worse. While at national level social service contracts are awarded based on specific rules and regulations, at EU level they are defined as an economic activity as any other and have to operate under EU rules on competition and internal markets. This means that contracts are awarded on the basis of 'lowest cost' without considering quality, innovation and sustainability (SSE 2018).

Austerity and public-sector cuts together with the fact that services are increasingly defined by market principles are also influencing the type of services provided. Rather than taking on a preventative approach by looking at the root causes of social distress, including poverty racism, unemployment, social exclusion or housing, there is a shift discernible towards service-driven models of provision that is 'heading into the direction of a minimalist, crisis and reactive system' oriented towards maintenance rather than social change (Lombard 2019, 405; Walker 2012).

Over the last three decades, social services have increasingly come to be understood as having a key role in the delivering of what is usually referred to as 'activating' social policy (Dingeldey 2006; Dahme and Wohlfahrt 2003; Malo 2018). Active labour market programmes (ALMPs) (see Chapter 4) that – through individualized counselling – link unemployment or social assistance benefits to job-seeking measures to improve employability, such as training and job placement measures, experienced a huge expansion in many high-income countries in the course of the 1990s, indicating a general shift in the understanding of the welfare state and social protection as having primarily protective and passive functions to playing a more promotive and activating role (Jessop 1995). The case management approach commonly used in the delivery of ALMPs assumes that a personalized approach to job seeking will enhance opportunities and lead to a faster and more sustainable reintegration into the labour market (European Commission 2011).

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[2]   According to Lethbridge, the sector generates 7 per cent of total economic output in the EU 28. This rate has remained stable even after the financial crisis in 2008. Since then the sector has experienced an increase of 1.7 million jobs (2017, 1).

5.4   SOCIAL SERVICES IN MIDDLE- AND LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES: DIFFERENT REALITIES AND DIFFERENT NEEDS

While in high-income countries the demand for social services is rapidly rising, mainly due to demographic changes, in middle- and low low-income countries profound socio-economic changes are increasingly challenging traditional values of family and community support, which for centuries has been the main pillar of social protection and social service provision (see Chapter 10). HIV/AIDS, migration, disaster and violent conflicts are further compounding factors that undermine the ability of families and communities to provide support (Rohregger 2006; Midgley 2017). Although informal support networks continue to be the mainstay of social protection and services in most countries, the expansion of formal social protection programmes and policies as a reaction to rising poverty and inequality has also increased the demand for social services.[3] This concerns in particular so-called integrated approaches that link social transfers to a range of social services, e.g. conditional cash transfers, public works programmes, graduation and cash plus programmes (see Chapter 14) or child protection (UNICEF 2019a). The implementation of these programmes has led to a significant expansion of public social services and its workforce in a range of countries (see for example, for Brazil's conditional cash transfer programme Bolsa Familia; Silva e Silva 2016).

In most low-income countries, however, the rising demand for social services is addressed to a large extent by the non-government sector. Although in many countries the number of the public service workforce has increased over the years, a huge gap in human resources persists across all sectors. This concerns in particular the lower-government levels, i.e. district and local levels where many posts remain vacant (see for example for Tanzania UNDP 2018; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare 2012). The 2019 global report on the social service workforce (GSSWA 2019) also indicates a general imbalance in the distribution of social services workforce across different ministries and sectors: ministries of social affairs, followed by ministries of health and ministries of law or justice are the most common employers of social service workers while 'emerging' sectors, such as social protection, gender or labour, are hugely underserved. This gap is largely filled by the non-government sector.

While some NGOs are sub-contracted by the government, most NGOs work in parallel to the public sector. Despite the fact that in many countries clear formal procedures for the registration of NGOs exist, in general, there is little coordination between NGOs and government services, especially at sub-national level (e.g. UNDP 2018). This together with the fact that many countries lack comprehensive data-gathering mechanisms is also the reason why no reliable data on the extent of non-government service providers exist (GSSWA 2019). However, it is generally recognized that in many middle- and low-income countries NGOs, civil society and community-based organizations, as well as faith-based organizations, play a critical role in the provision of social services and outnumber by far the workers employed in the government sector (e.g. GSSWA 2015, 2019). They are mainly engaged in direct service

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[3]   See also the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development adopted in 2012 by the International Associations of Schools of Social Work, the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Council on Social Welfare which emphasizes the role of social work in protecting and promoting social and economic equalities and contributing to the realization of the right to social protection.

provision using community-based care approaches carried out by volunteers or so-called para social workers and cover a range of different policy areas, including child protection and child labour, gender-based violence, protection of refugees and migrants, youth counselling, ALMPs, post-disaster support, community justice committees or gender and children desks (GSSWA 2015, 2019). Whereas all these initiatives undeniably have an important impact and compensate for a significant gap in human resources and services in the public sector, the strong dependency on donors and NGOs for the provision of social services in many low-income countries also merits critical attention: financing, planning and implementation are often based on the organizations' thematic, geographic and target group priorities rather than government priorities or overall population needs. Many of them are implemented on a pilot basis or cover a few districts or regions only. All this introduces a potential bias and inequality in the quantity and quality of services provided.

The significant role of the non-government sector in the provision of social services also raises questions concerning the quality management and monitoring of these services. Many countries lack regulation, supervision and quality control and even where protocols exist, they are often not implemented. As a consequence quality of services varies considerably. This concerns in particular the quality and quantity of training of social workers and volunteers at community level, where huge variations exist, ranging from a few days to various months (GSSWA 2019). The myriad of professional titles in the non-government social service sector identified by a study carried out by the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance gives an indication of the unregulated nature of the sector. For South Asia 127 unique titles have been identified across eight countries, 39 across five countries in the East Asia-Pacific region, 58 titles among four countries in the Middle East and North Africa and 17 titles among four countries in Europe and Central Asia (GSSWA 2019).

Many countries offer institutionalized care services, such as orphanages, homes for orphans and child victims of abuse and violence (often with a boarding school character), homes for people with disabilities, vulnerable women such as widows or women exposed to violence and abuse, elderly or homeless people. However their services are very limited in terms of scope and coverage and often confined to urban or semi-urban areas.

Acknowledging the constrained reality of social service provision and the particular role of non-government service providers in low- and middle-income countries, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance supports countries in developing more integrated social service approaches that allow for better coordination across service providers irrespective of their background with the aim to deliver more efficient and effective services. The development of integrated human resource information systems encompassing government and non-government providers in order to allow for evidence-informed workforce planning is a key concern. Improving education and training options for social service workers and the development of effective regulatory frameworks, including definitions of mandates and functions, minimum qualifications, training and practice requirements, as well as quality standards, are also on the agenda (GSSWA 2019; Midgley 2017).

Social vulnerabilities and ways to address them vary across different contexts and countries. This also concerns social services. The need for contextualization or 'culturally relevant social work education and practice' (Gray and Hetherington 2013, 2) is of particular relevance in low- and middle-income countries where social service education and practices are largely based on Western theories, concepts and training curricula, and norms and values of local cultures in dealing with social problems are often ignored (Midgley 2008; Walker 2012; Mwansa 2012;

Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie 2011). This reduces the effectiveness of social service work and limits its role to maintenance rather than proactively addressing structural challenges related to inequalities, social injustice, corruption or poverty which are often highly contextualized (Mwansa 2012). For practices to be sufficiently localized, this also means taking account of the important role of informal service provision through the community and the family and – rather than perceiving formal and informal systems as separate – approaching them as a comprehensive and integrated system (Lombard 2019). Taking an integrated approach also includes the development of hybrid practices that mix different approaches by blending new and old ideas or making new ideas work in a culturally relevant way, always provided of course that the latter does not inflict harm on people (Lombard 2019; Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2008). Examples include the family group conference mentioned by Walker (2012). The approach in child and family support originates from the Maori people in New Zealand and was later adapted to the British and other local contexts. In many countries, particularly in rural areas, public social workers commonly closely coordinate with traditional 'social work institutions' based on the family and the community. In fact, they are perceived as an extension of public service provision. It is common practice that social workers refer clients back to their communities which – through using collective efforts and resources – play an important role in solving individual and community problems, i.e. to help poor individuals settle disputes, correct behaviour and care for the elderly, widows and vulnerable children. Only if these problem-solving mechanisms fail are clients allowed to access the public service domain (e.g. Mabeyo and Kiwelu 2019; Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2008).

5.5   INTEGRATED SOCIAL PROTECTION: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SERVICES

With the move towards more integrated social protection approaches in low- and middle-income countries are attributed as having a pivotal role to social services across sectors bridging different services through coaching, mentoring, counselling and referral (e.g. Soares and Orton 2017; Arevalo et al. 2018). Various approaches can be distinguished ranging from models that already provide ready-made integrated solutions with a predefined pathway out of poverty, while others simply represent referral services that enable potential beneficiaries at a single entry point to gain access to information about a range of services and support in accessing them.

One model which has gained particular attention is graduation and cash plus (see Chapter 14). The 'graduation into sustainable livelihoods approach' (Arevalo et al. 2018, 1) typically links cash transfer programmes – often in a sequenced and time-bound way – to measures related to livelihoods training, including technical skills training, coaching/mentoring and counselling services and, as a third component, financial services such as credit and saving schemes provided by banks or micro-finance organizations (Montesquieu and Hashemi 2018). Coaching encompasses a wide range of activities, including (1) monitoring of participants' economic activities, (2) refresher courses on financial education or technical skills, (3) training on health and nutrition, hygiene or child well-being and (4) emotional support to boost people's self-confidence. It may also include psychosocial support or legal counselling, for example when dealing with migration or in emergency contexts (Arevalo et al. 2018). A systematic review of 99 graduation programmes worldwide revealed that 93 per cent of all programmes offer mentoring or 'life skills' coaching highlighting the key role of social

services for the successful graduation of poor people (Arevalo et al. 2018). Impact evaluations of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's Ultra Poor Graduation programmes implemented across several countries have revealed their particular relevance in overcoming social and emotional barriers which often constrain the marginalized and poor to improve their livelihoods (e.g. BRAC 2016; Arevalo et al. 2018).

Some programmes adopt a specific gender lens focusing on women's empowerment through economic development, but also measures to enhance women's voice and agency, for example their political representation or raising awareness on reproductive or education rights (Arevalo et al. 2018). Integrated service approaches play a role in post-disaster contexts facilitating the links between social protection measures and post-disaster recovery: evidence from Indonesia shows that social workers played an important role in accelerating recovery processes by encouraging communities hit by disaster to use their own structures and resources, such as social support networks and social norms, to rebuild houses and infrastructure (Sagala et al. 2016).

A more demand side-oriented integrated service model is the single-window service (SWS) approach. SWS centres are physical contact points at local level where (potential) beneficiaries of social protection programmes and services are provided with support in accessing different schemes, usually at community, municipal, district or sub-district levels. In this way challenges related to the accessibility of social protection and other social services, including physical distance, lack of awareness and information, as well as issues around transparency and corruption are overcome and services can be brought closer to the poor. In contrast to graduation and cash plus models which are usually based on a predefined set of measures and programmes, SWS is based on a more individualized approach. This allows for a more comprehensive and tailor-made service approach leading to potentially better poverty reduction outcomes (Bergthaller and Ebken 2017).

Based on the depth of services provided, different types of SWS are distinguished: (1) single referral points, such as that currently implemented in Bangladesh, provide information on existing programmes, assess clients' eligibility and if positively assessed refer them to the respective service providers for application; (2) single entry points go further also allowing clients to apply for different social protection programmes directly on site (for example Brazil, Chile or Tajikistan) (Bergthaller and Ebken 2017); (3) one-stop shops represent the most comprehensive SWS approach, allowing citizens to access services on the spot. In Mongolia, different social protection service providers and other institutions, including civil registration authorities, notary and banking services, are located in a single facility. In this way, citizens can be assessed, obtain required documentation and enrol in schemes at the same time (ILO 2016). Sometimes different types of SWS may be offered in one place. In Indonesia, for example the Integrated Services Unit for Poverty Reduction is a one-stop shop for district-level social protection programmes, but also provides referral services for national programmes (Bergthaller and Ebken 2017).

Evidence from across different countries (e.g. Taieb and Schmitt 2012) shows that SWS approaches are enhancing access to services, increasing awareness and improving transparency. Through their single-entry structure SWS approaches positively impact on the coordination and streamlining of services, programmes and operational processes across different institutions (horizontal coordination) and government layers (vertical coordination) while at the same time reduce duplications and inefficiencies (see Chapters 12 and 13).

Integrated service approaches have raised a lot of attention as a more efficient and effective way of addressing poverty and inequality, and as a means towards building more comprehensive social protection schemes. This concerns in particular their positive impact on the institutional and administrative capacity of various sectors as well as on inter-sectorial coordination. However, while in a limited pilot context this may function well, it turns out to be the weak spot of programmes and services when they are scaled up. Integrated service provision is costly. Specifically with regards to graduation programmes, the intensive use of social workers for training and case management components is increasingly questioned and programmes test different options towards cost reduction. This includes reducing the frequency of coaching visits from weekly to a bi-monthly or monthly basis, as well as shifting from individual to group and community-based coaching. Increasingly, programmes train volunteers from communities as frontline coaches in order to assist their neighbours and peers throughout graduation (Arevalo et al. 2018). Digital coaching, i.e. mentoring support that is delivered via phones, tablets or other technology-enabled channels, is another cost-efficient alternative that is being tested. The Mobile Connections to Promote Women's Economic Development Programme in India provides women living in extreme poverty with a smartphone which they can use to access information about government schemes and market prices, along with training materials and other resources on demand (Arevalo et al. 2018).

5.6 OUTLOOK: TOWARDS A MORE SOCIAL SERVICES-CENTRED SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social services play an important role in realizing social protection goals. This is the case both in high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries, where greater attention is paid towards integrating social services. From a social protection perspective three findings emanate from this review.

First, there is a need to take social services out of their corner and recognize them as a set of social protection instruments on equal footing with social transfers and other material support. Both are needed if universal and inclusive social protection for all is going to be achieved. Recent developments towards integrated service approaches and an increased professionalization and valorization of social services and the workforce delivering them at the global level appear to be good starting points (GSSWA n.d.). This needs to be complemented by a stronger research focus on social protection services and their workforce in order to fill existing knowledge gaps and to be able to better integrate them into social protection services development and planning.

Second, and closely related to this, is the need to recognize the role of social services in their full potential, i.e. moving away from a mere provider perspective and implementing role towards a stronger recognition of the proactive role social services play in addressing structural issues of poverty reduction, inequality and social development. In their current form, social services are too often reduced to a reactive and supportive role complementing benefits in-kind, often in a demand-based and selective manner. This also concerns the crucial role of the social service workers in proactively addressing structural dimensions of inequality, poverty and exploitation and supporting the most marginalized in realizing their rights to social protection.

Third, while there is an increasing recognition on part of policy makers of the importance of social services providers towards realizing inclusive and equitable social protection policies (e.g. Bergthaller and Ebken 2017; ILO 2016; Arevalo et al. 2018), there is still less recognition on their role as policy planners and developers and the need to better integrate their know-how into macro-level policy processes and planning efforts (Drolet 2016). Policy planners and practitioners in social protection need to realize the potential of social service workers in actively shaping social protection policies and strategies: their micro-level perspective allows them better than many others to understand the multiple and ever changing vulnerabilities and risks people are facing and which require innovative approaches in tackling them. Their unique position at the interface of different sectors and service providers and their ability to transcend the micro- and macro-level divide creates a unique know-how and expertise that need to be brought into central policy planning processes in order to better address structural dimensions of poverty and inequality and develop meaningful social protection measures that fit local contexts.

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