

MULTI-AGENCY WORKING IN CHILD PROTECTION

A review of South East Europe



March 2016

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Enkeledja (Kela) Bregu undertook the enormous task of gathering and synthesising information from various sources. This involved both the desk review and following up with countries to try and plug gaps in missing information.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiagency and inter-disciplinary collaboration, working both across and within sectors and teams, is critical to ensure that children are adequately protected. Research indicates that children are most effectively protected when agencies and stakeholders work together (Working Together, 2013). This is because it is almost impossible for a single agency to respond adequately to any allegation and the complex nature of child abuse. Multiagency collaboration is important to ensure the best interest of the child and such an approach is widely considered to bring better outcomes for safeguarding children and promoting their wellbeing.

The relative emphasis placed on developing national child protection systems, as advocated by UNICEF and others, and supported by numerous donors, is seen as a necessary element of comprehensive child protection. This, together with an appreciation of the benefits to children of multiagency working, which is often considered an essential dimension of the systems approach to child protection, has highlighted the need for a more formalised and proactive attitude towards collaboration between actors.

Since countries in South East Europe (SEE) are actively engaged in developing and refining their child protection systems and considerable efforts are placed on introducing and building the capacity of workers to respond to child abuse from a multiagency perspective, the ChildHub, itself a multiagency platform led by Terre des Hommes Regional Office in Hungary, embarked upon a review of multiagency working in the region. This is the report of that review.

Countries contributing to the review

The following countries from the region contributed to the review
(in alphabetical order):

Albania	The former Yugoslav Republic of
Bosnia – Herzegovina	Macedonia (tfYROM)
Bulgaria	Moldova
Croatia	Montenegro
Hungary	Serbia
Kosovo	

Sources of information

Information upon which the review was based was obtained from two sources – a selected literature review and from information gained from practitioners and academics, obtained via a desk review of documents; the ChildHub partner focal points in each country and an online forum (WIKI) established on the ChildHub (www.childhub.org). In addition, findings from the conference on Multi-Agency Collaboration held in Kosovo in November 2015, at which 13 countries came together to share experiences, was factored into the review.

It should be noted that information on multiagency working is often fragmented and reviews and evaluations are not routinely conducted. Where these are conducted they are often localised and not extensive. For this reason, some of the information upon which the review is based was anecdotal.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

While multiagency working seems a relatively straightforward and pragmatic way of approaching child protection and utilising the available resources and expertise, it rapidly becomes clear that one of the first challenges is defining what is meant by multiagency working both at a general level and also within a specific country.

This gives rise to difficulties in conducting any regional review or comparison because what is considered multiagency working and how this translates into actions to protect children varies widely. Partly this is to do with the conceptual framing of multiagency working within a country, but it is also a product of how multiagency working has developed within contexts, shaped by historical and cultural perspectives.

Issue 1: A question of terminology

Different terms are used both in the literature and in legal / policy and practice to express the multidimensional engagement of various professionals in working with issues of child abuse and protection. Common terms used include “multidisciplinary team (MDT)” and “multi or inter agency team (MAT)”, “multi sectorial team (MST)”, and “child protection team (CPT)”. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably. Lloyd et al (2001), has described this as a ‘terminological quagmire’ (p.3).

Within the practice of case management of individual cases, multiagency working has been described as a process *where ‘several professional groups, various knowledge and skill bases and different agencies are drawn together in a structure to provide services’* (Payne, 2000).

In its broadest terms, multiagency working incorporates the concepts of partnership, collaboration and co-operation and consists of a network of professionals from different agencies who work together to meet the needs of the client group (Balloch & Taylor, 2000). It involves more than one agency working together in a planned, joint and formal manner and it adopts a whole systems approach to service delivery which examines personal, social, educational and environmental aspects of life (McInnes, 2007).

Useful distinctions can be made between:

Multiagency / multidisciplinary working – Where more than one agency works with a child, family or project but not necessarily jointly. Often the terms multiagency and interagency are used interchangeably.

Interagency working – Where more than one agency works together in a planned and formal way. This can be at different levels, either strategic or operational and is normally framed within policy and practice (such as enshrined in law or articulated through shared Standard Operating Procedures and Protocols).

Joint working – Where professionals from more than one agency work together on a particular project or scheme. For example, speech and language therapists and early years’ workers together delivering group work to vulnerable children.

Partnership working - A broad term which refers to relationships between different groups at different levels: organisations and service users, different organisations and different professionals (Lloyd, 2001).

Throughout this review, to avoid confusion, the term 'multiagency working' is used to describe the overall process where different actors and stakeholders work together in order to protect children and respond to concerns. The term multiagency has been selected, rather than interagency, as multiagency or multidisciplinary is often used generically through the region. For clarity, where specific reference is being made to a particular model of working in a country the term used in the country is cited.

Issue 2: The question of remit and function

Often discussions regarding multiagency working imply that there is one way of working together to protect children. In fact, there is no single model for multiagency working, with models reflecting varying degrees of integration across the various elements of collaboration, and in particular the remit and expected function of the multiagency approach.

The desired degree of integration is dependent on the focus and goals of the work and on the purposes and length of case involvement. The variety of multiagency working approaches have several aspects which can be used to differentiate them from each other and which relate to:

- The purpose: such as assessment, planning intervention, investigation, decision making, advice and recommendation to justice, review of child death, etc. This relates to whether multiagency work is seen as a mechanism to be used in relation to the management and intervention of individual cases (typically using a case management approach) or whether multiagency working is seen as being integral to broader actions aimed at preventing abuse;

- The trigger criteria when multiagency working is stimulated, defined through threshold criteria for addressing needs of the case (for example if the child needs to go through court proceedings or is involved in a criminal case, or if there is a suspicion of significant harm or the child is 'at risk');
- The location where the multiagency working takes place (in social services, prosecutor office, hospital, centre etc.);
- The leadership and context (administrative functioning of different agencies). This also relates to the historical and cultural contexts over time and how changes and developments are undertaken and linked to the development of the broader systems of child welfare and child protection;
- The resources either available or planned.

Issue 3: The differing models

Irrespective of the remit and function, the strength of multiagency working is seen as lying in the diversity of opinions and ideas represented, rather than its ability to bring the opinions of participants to some common viewpoint.

While multiagency work has evolved over time, there is no prescription for a good or bad model; different promising practices established suggests that an effective model of multiagency work needs to consider a number of factors such as local context; resources available; availability of other services; capacities of human resources; and the development of trust and working relationships. Serving children and families should be the primary focus, but attention needs to be paid to the personnel that will work with the model and make it functional.

Distinctions can be made between five main approaches to multiagency work, which can individually or in combination depending on the country and choices made (either deliberately or organically), form the basis of the 'model' employed:

1. Decision-making - To provide a forum where professionals from different agencies can meet to discuss issues and to make decisions.
2. Consultation and training - The main purpose is sharing of experience and expertise through professionals from one agency enhancing the expertise of those of another by providing consultation and/or training.
3. Integrated response - Gathering a range of expertise together in one place in order to deliver a more coordinated and comprehensive service – in effect a ‘one stop shop’.
4. Coordinated response - The main aim being to draw together a number of agencies involved in the delivery of services so that a more coordinated and cohesive response to need can be adopted. This is typically achieved by the appointment of a coordinator with responsibility for pulling together previously disparate services.
5. Operational-team delivery - The aim being for professionals from different agencies to work together on a day-to-day basis and to form a cohesive multi-agency team that delivered services directly to clients.

Even though the individual model may differ, multiagency working approaches in addressing cases of children subject to abuse do have similarities. Such approaches have developed over time to tackle a number of issues in regard to responding to child abuse cases and include shared responsibilities in protecting and caring for children, addressing effectively the complex and dilemmatic nature of child abuse, and eliminating ‘the trauma of the system effects’ on children. These may be the result of redundant interviews, intrusive medical examinations, separation from support systems, intimidating courtroom procedures and tactics, and communication breakdowns (Ells, 2000).

Issue 4: Influencing factors and broader context

As mentioned in the introduction, the focus on developing comprehensive national child protection systems has led from ad hoc ways of working together – based largely on individual workers' preferences and beliefs – towards a more systematic approach to collaboration.

There are a number of factors which influence the development of models such as: context; resources; level of integration; availability of services; legislation framework; integration and recognition of community-based mechanisms; and approach to decentralisation vs. centralisation of social welfare systems.

Another important aspect to consider is the different typologies of national child protection systems as these relates to the conceptions about child abuse and the best way to protect children. For example, variations in the way child welfare / protection systems respond to concerns about child abuse and how much they are characterised by a child protection or a family service orientation will impact on the nature of multiagency working (Gilbert, 1997).

Related to this is the point at which multiagency working as a principle is introduced and where models are transplanted based on experiences from elsewhere or if an attempt has been made to strengthen what exists in country and design a model that is specific to, and reflects, the context. For example, while elaborate models of working together may function within a well-developed national child protection system, something more measured which can actually be put into practice may be a more pragmatic approach to take in countries where the development of both the system and services are more embryonic.

A wide range of factors determine the functioning of multi-agency working including:

- agency differences
- local authority structures and boundaries
- staffing arrangements and time investment
- individuals' and agencies' expectations and priorities
- agencies' aims and objectives
- budgets and finances
- confidentiality and information-sharing protocols
- development of a common language and shared understanding
- provision of joint training.

SITUATION IN THE REGION

Framework for review

In order to facilitate a comparative review of the development and operationalisation of multiagency working within the region, a number of dimensions were considered in order to compare the different approaches that exist: ¹

Law & Policy - The context which exists and which legitimises multiagency working. This also includes practice which may be considered as in place and widely adhered to, even if it is not yet formalised in law.

Mandate & Scope - The role or function of multiagency work. This includes situations in which multi agency work is applied and the purpose of its actions.

Composition & Leadership - How the agencies work together, who participates and who is responsible for coordination / leadership.

Capacity Building - How capacity building is undertaken, by whom, and which members of the multiagency teams are included.

Monitoring - What and how is monitoring of multiagency working undertaken?

Perceived effectiveness - To what extent are the various models of multiagency working considered effective in contributing to the protection of children?

These different dimensions are considered separately in order to facilitate a comparison and to contrast in approaches between countries, but it should be remembered that the dimensions are interlinked and interdependent.

In many countries the sources of information are limited or not widely available and anecdotal views from professionals have been included. This report contains a summary of salient information obtained from sources as detailed in Annex 1. Further information can be obtained from www.childhub.org

¹ Note, these same dimensions were used to share experience and learnings at the Regional Conference (Kosovo November 2015).

Law and policy

The embedding of the multiagency approach in legal and policy frameworks is essential, if it is to become institutionalised and adopted consistently. This also includes ensuring that the necessary resources are dedicated to support its operationalisation.

In **tfYROM**, while intensive work has been carried out in recent years regarding legal reform, no consolidated law on the protection of the rights of the child exists. However, a number of laws and by-laws aiming at protecting children against exploitation, abuse and other forms of violence have been adopted and different rights are regulated by different thematic and sectorial legislation, none of which specifically mention multiagency working, although this is mentioned

in the **Framework Protocol**. Recently, as a response to the European Migrant and Refugee Crisis tfYROM has developed shared protocols for working with unaccompanied minors and children in need of protection and it is anticipated that these may form the basis of mechanisms applied more widely for multiagency working. This is also the situation in **Serbia**.

Similarly, in **Serbia**, there is no single specific Child Protection Law. The proposal of a Law on Children Rights Ombudsman has been in the Assembly procedure since 2012, yet is not adopted. This law mentions multiagency cooperation very briefly, as it identifies the roles and responsibilities of the main institutions in regard to child protection. Even though specifying roles and duties of all major actors is of great importance for enabling their mutual cooperation, a more detailed framework for working together is not included.

Example from the region

The Framework Protocol for Taking Action concerning the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect that is currently under consideration by the Government of tfYROM sets as an objective;

“Establishing efficient operational procedures that in cases of abuse and neglect shall provide efficient, rapid and coordinated action by all agents in the process to ensure prevention of abuse and neglect and provide appropriate conditions for adequate assistance to the child. ”

² Prednacrt Zakona o pravima deteta, Ombudsperson in Serbia, 2012

However, Serbia has adopted the **General Protocol for Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect**, as a comprehensive multiagency mechanism for the protection of children and the prevention of violence, in accordance with Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This document was the basis for the development of special protocols that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and provide mechanisms for cooperation among institutions from different systems.

Despite this research suggests (Ignjatovic, 2011, p. 177) that multiagency (multispectral as it is referred to) cooperation is still in the phase of early development and cooperation among actors varies greatly from one part of the country to the other, depending on the local context within the municipality or city.

In **Bosnia – Herzegovina**, multi-agency work is more present in strategies as aspirations rather than legal provision. However, some of the new laws (such as all three laws on acting with minors in criminal proceedings) specify the tasks of different agencies in the work with juveniles in conflict with the law. Within the last several years various referral mechanisms (inter-agency protocols) have been established at local levels for different topics such as domestic violence and cases of child begging. At the national level there is also the Manual for the Work of Regional Monitoring Team members and their tasks and roles. These mechanisms are very fragmented and thematically oriented although more initiatives exist at local level that truly present the multi-agency working concept.

The situation in **Montenegro** also reflects a more thematic approach both to child protection issues and multiagency working. For example, there are a number of important documents that together create a framework for multidisciplinary teams` functioning including the National Action Plan for children 2013-2017 and the Law on protection against domestic violence. The current **Strategy on the Protection against Domestic Violence** set out goals and activities directly related to enhancing multi-agency cooperation and includes the development of multidisciplinary models of working on prevention and protection against domestic violence including enhancing cooperation of all stakeholders involved. However, the law does not establish a mandatory duty to create those teams, or regulate how teams should function.

In **Kosovo** national legislation, primarily the **Family Law of Kosovo**, recognises the importance of the family including children growing up in families³ and the responsibility of both parents for the growth and education of their children. There are a range of institutions who work towards securing children's rights as provided for in national legislation, and there is a distinction to be made between institutions that provide policies and national strategies with the aim of promoting children's rights and those institutions who deal with management of individual cases. The **Inter-Ministerial Committee for Children's Rights** formed in 2008, is chaired by the Prime Minister of Kosovo and brings together all Ministries and other stakeholders to ensure that children's rights are central to policies and actions.

The Family Law in Kosovo 32/2004 and the Law for Family and Social Services NR. 02/L-17, serves as the main legal framework to regulate family relationships and provision of support for families and individuals in need. The Centre for Social Work at local level is the main structure, which identifies and coordinates provision of services for children in need.

A more comprehensive approach to child protection and multiagency working has been embraced by **Bulgaria** through **The Child Protection Act** (CPA) adopted in 2000,⁵ which sets child protection at the centre of public policy. This regulates the rights, principles and measures for child protection authorities at state and municipal levels, as well as the latter's interaction in the process of child protection. The act also ensures the participation of non-profit organisations and individuals in provision of child protection services and activities. By adopting the CPA, Bulgaria introduced the concept of the systems approach where child protection measures are complemented and implemented with other state acts focused on children and families for example in the Education Act and Act to Combat Delinquency of Minors, as well as the relevant regulations for the implementation of the CPA, such as the **Ordinance criteria and standards for social services for children**.

³ Article 2, Family Law of Kosovo, Law No. 2004/32

⁴ Decision of the Prime Minister 07/46, 3 December 2008

⁵ State Gazette (SG) No. 48 dated 13 June 2000. Child Protection Act (CPA) adopted in 2000-
<http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/6203>

The national legislation connected with child protection includes a large number of regulations of various ranks - laws, regulations for the implementation of the laws, rules and others. For each law and regulation, there are texts that require and regulate multi-agency cooperation; both at the policy and implementation level, including individual cases. There are a wide variety of bodies dealing with the adoption of these and, given the complex processes related to the harmonisation of the Bulgarian legislation with the European Union laws and the implementation of common European legislation, this diversity poses questions about possible inconsistency in the application of the laws and the existence of contradictory regulations in practice.

As with Bulgaria, in **Romania** there have been a number of changes in the child protection system, initially required to allow the shift from much centralised child protection based institutional care, which have also included multiagency approaches to protection. The responsibility for all child protection services (including all types of institutions, support and prevention services) is that of the County authorities with the functioning of multiagency working being guided by a series of legal documents, i.e. laws, decisions of the Government and orders that can be found on the website of the Ministry of Labour and of the National Authority of Child Rights Protection

Law 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights - Chapter I Article 5 (4) - (4) sets out that the role of the State is to ensure child protection and to guarantee that all the rights through a specific activity are performed by state institutions and public authorities and Article 6 (e) e) regarding decentralisation of services for child protection intervention and multi-sectorial partnership between public institutions and authorised private bodies. Another important legislative provision is Government decision no. 49 of 19 January 2011 approving the **methodology framework on prevention and intervention in multidisciplinary teams and networks** in situations of violence against children and domestic violence and the methodology of multidisciplinary intervention.

The purpose of this document is to establish a common methodological framework for authorities in child protection and family violence, service providers and professionals who work directly with children, their families and the alleged perpetrators / offenders.

⁶ Child Pact. Guth.A. Reform Steps towards Child Protection Bulgaria- Romania, A Comparative Approach

This document brings together the main aspects of working methodologies and procedures complying with legislation and with the specifics of each institution involved in the prevention and intervention in cases of violence against children.

According to this decision, in each county it is obligatory to establish a 'local inter-sectoral team' (EIL) for preventing and combating violence and exploitation. A number of complimentary documents regulate the work of the multidisciplinary teams exist including minimum quality standards for the operation of these services.

Other countries in the region have also adopted a more comprehensive approach to multiagency working as in Bulgaria and Romania, although in a more simplified form. For example, in Croatia the **National Strategy for Rights of the Child in Croatia** (2014-2020) states several priorities, one of which is to: *'Promote children's position in the social care system by ensuring the consistent application of legal regulations, cooperation between various departments and coordination of activities of various systems on the local and national level'*.

In addition, in Croatia there are two pieces of legislation which outline the procedures for cooperation between different agencies: the **'Protocol of Procedure in Cases of Domestic Violence'** and the **'Protocol of Procedure in Cases of Violence Among Children'**. By these provisions, it is the obligation of competent bodies to take measures aimed at preventing and combatting violence through, among other things, holding regular meetings at the local and regional level so as to establish effective methods of cooperation and exchange relevant information. This includes both state actors and also other non-state actors such as religious organisations.

In Moldova, the Child Protection Strategy for 2014-2020 was developed in order to achieve the overall objective of preventing and combating violence, neglect and exploitation of children and to promote non-violent practices in raising and educating children. This strategy also underlines some specific actions which have been approved through a series of acts. Specifically, **Article 20, Law Number. 140 of 14.06.2013 on the special protection of children at risk and of children separated from their parents** (Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, 2013, no. 167-172, art.534) relates

to **‘inter-agency cooperation’** and the establishment of and the participation within multidisciplinary teams during the initial and complex assessment of the child’s situation and at the development and implementation of the individual care plan. Connected to this the **Guidelines on inter-agency cooperation mechanism for the identification, assessment, referral, assistance and monitoring of children victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking** were approved by Government Decision (GD no. 270 of 08.04.2014).

One example regarding the use of different terms, possibly leading to confusion, concerns the situation in **Albania** where the terms “multidisciplinary” and “multi agency” are introduced in various pieces of legislation and are used interchangeably. In addition, the concept is not always consistently mentioned. For example it is not always mentioned in the main law or in DCM (Decisions of the Council of Ministers) and it is variously referred to in Standards, Guidelines or Protocols (such as the **Working Protocol on Child Protection**). The one law which speaks explicitly about the approach of addressing the case of a child in need of protection through multiagency work is the **Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights, number 10347, 2010.**⁷

While multiagency work is not highly articulated in **Hungary, The Child Protection Law (1997 XXXI)** does set out a framework for cooperation (multiagency work is referred to and limited as the ‘referral mechanism’). The law obliges these institutions and individuals to cooperate and inform each other in order to promote the child’s upbringing in family and to prevent abuse. If the people or authorities are not reporting or are not cooperating with the other institutions the guardianship office has the power to inform the appropriate authority so that disciplinary action is initiated against the person. Of course, without significant guidance on roles and responsibilities cooperation runs the risk of being superficial even with the ultimate sanction of disciplinary action.

⁷ Official Gazette. Republic of Albania. 2010. The Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights in the Republic of Albania, nr 10347/2010.

Approaches to both laws and policy relating to child protection generally and multiagency working specifically vary dramatically across the region – from those countries who have no unified laws on the protection of children, and instead address the protection of children through a series of thematic lenses (such as trafficking or domestic violence) to those with comprehensive and unified laws and policies.

This is reflected in the approach to the establishment and operationalisation of multiagency working. In some countries this is embedded in the law, including the development of protocols and operational guidelines, whereas in others it is mentioned in an ad hoc and seemingly overlapping or contradictory way.

Mandate & Scope

While multiagency working may be desired, and may present an effective way of working with children and families, the application of the approach can differ especially in terms of when it is applied.

An emerging trend, not just in South East Europe, is for case management and multiagency working to be seen as equivalent. However, they are two separate things. Although multiagency working is often a feature of case management, it does not have to be included as part of case management (since case management is merely an identified process for making sure cases are handled appropriately, consistently and timely). Similarly, multiagency working can be applied in child protection in the absence of a case management approach.

Decisions regarding mandate and scope are intricately linked to the introduction of the concept of multiagency working. Whether it is present may be the result of adopting a model from another context.

In **Bosnia-Herzegovina** the mandate for multidisciplinary working depends and varies from one mechanism to the other. For example, the role of the Council for Children is rather advisory while local referral mechanisms are more collaborative bodies that work on concrete cases and tasks. Local referral mechanisms are based on clear inter-agency protocols where the role of each member is clearly described. This includes obligations for timeframes for convening meetings such as once per month or once in the quarter and sooner if there is a need such as specific high-risk protection cases.

By contrast in **Albania** multiagency work is only referred to in general terms in the law and is mainly focused on coordination. Multiagency working is more elaborated in the Protocol of the Child Protection Workers, and in the DCM on the "Mechanism of Coordination of work for the referral of cases of victims of domestic violence". Multiagency working is carried out through multidisciplinary teams. These are supposed to have a proactive role in the coordination of actions and in the implementation and review of individual case plans for children at risk.

Law, number 10347/2010 defines a "child in risk" as a child whose rights and protection as defined by law are "denied or are not respected". According to this definition, every child that may be in need of a birth certificate or is not attending school can be considered as "child in risk". However, the Protocol permits that these cases are usually managed or addressed by the Child Protection Worker without the necessity to bring together the multidisciplinary team. The multiagency approach is reserved for cases of medium and high risk. In risk and emergency situations, where there is not always time to call together the full multidisciplinary team, the Child Protection Unit may hold a more limited meeting such as with the police or doctor (depending by the emergent need of the child).

Example from the region

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the City of Zagreb founded the **Child Protection Centre of Zagreb** in 2003 and part of its mandate is to collaborate with other institutions such as schools, day cares, child care homes, and other organisations for the benefit of children and their families. As such, it provides diagnoses and reviews of cases of abused and neglected children, offering them treatment and counselling, as well as collaborating with other organisations such as Brave Phone (Helpline).

The decision to not require multidisciplinary meetings for low risk cases is an example of how practice has shaped the implementation of policy. This was a change introduced during the revision of the Protocol in consultation with Child Protection Workers. The original requirement was that a multidisciplinary team meeting should be called for all cases but this was found to be unnecessary since often the required intervention only needed the assistance of one

organisation and was also an inefficient use of the limited resources.

Each Municipality in **Kosovo** through the relevant directorate (usually the Directorate of Health and Social Welfare - DHSW) is responsible for providing social and family services within its territory. The role of the DHSW is to identify the nature and extent of need for social and family services through annual plans and maintaining records and statistics, as well as to ensure the Centre for Social Work (CSW) is resourced according to the standards set by the Ministry. The actual delivery of such services is done by the Centre for Social Work (in Albania referred to as Child Protection Units) and through financial or other assistance provided to NGOs to deliver such services.

As the main service provider is CSW, each Municipality is under an obligation to establish one or more centre, which should be staffed by appropriately trained and qualified social service professionals. The CSW is under an obligation to conduct a professional assessment in respect of any individual or family residing, found in the area who refers themselves or comes to the attention of the CSW needing or appearing to be in need of social and family services.

Kosovo has been developing a model of multiagency working (called ‘Round Tables’) which requires the participation of different agencies and stakeholders, with the case manager from the Centre for Social Work undertaking the role of coordination. Towards the end of 2015 Kosovo developed a protocol to govern the functioning of the Round Tables. This is similar in terms of its operationalisation to the Protocol in Albania.

Croatia has a more flexible arrangement regarding the requirement for multiagency working. In high-risk situations, protocols describe the necessary obligatory cooperation (step by step) between different institutions (e.g. school, Centre for Social welfare and police in other CP cases). It is really individual when one organisation (for example, school) is dealing with child protection cases (for example, bullying) and every professional that works with children can decide to include other institutions as they feel appropriate.

The Ministry for Social Policy and Youth (MSPY) in Croatia coordinates and governs the bodies that implement child protection policies and procedures, and provides financial assistance for projects designed to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of children and families. More specifically, the Ministry oversees the Centres for Social Welfare and institutions responsible for child protection. It develops and implements comprehensive national strategies involving child protection as well as conducting, financing and monitoring projects aimed at child wellbeing (through partners, NGO’s).

Although protocols exist in **Montenegro** regarding multiagency working, these are limited to cooperation in prevention and protection against domestic violence. A national protocol has been developed and signed by all relevant institutions, to establish and enhance multi-agency cooperation and regulating the duties and responsibilities of all institutions involved.

Example from the region

A central tenet of Moldova’s child welfare approach is the coordination of community social workers with other professionals in making decisions, making referrals, and mobilising community resources to solve social problems. The community social worker or case manager is an important actor coordinating cases at the local level (MSPFC, 2009b).

In **Hungary**, too, the need for multiagency working is more limited. The Child Protection Service is responsible for the coordination of the referral mechanism and for organising case discussions where necessary. Although all members are legally bound and obliged to report cases, the Child Protection Service is responsible for developing the care plan, for informing the members of the action taken (and their role in implementing plans) and for follow-up. The Child Protection Services can call together a multiagency meeting in any case where they deem it necessary, but this is not necessarily dependent on the kind of risk to the child.

In **Moldova** the mandate of the multiagency working is more regulated. The law requires that a multidisciplinary team is convened in situations of children at risk and children separated from their parents. Through the law various authorities, structures, institutions and specialists with expertise in child protection are obliged to apply the **Guidelines on inter-agency cooperation mechanism for the identification, assessment, referral, assistance and monitoring of children victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking**. The guidelines mention the importance of the involvement of all specialists in the fields of social assistance, education, healthcare and law enforcement at all stages of the case management including the identification and evaluation of the case, the development and implementation of the individual care plan and the monitoring of the implementation of actions within the plan and at the time of the case's closure.

While in **Serbia** multiagency working is mentioned as an effective and desirable tool in the child protection field, for example in the National Plan of Action (NPA), it is stated the goal of the document is to enhance multiagency cooperation. The main problem is a lack of the clear division of roles and responsibilities, so that each institution knows what its duty and responsibilities are in this mutual cooperation. Therefore, each institution is supposed to adopt specific protocols and specify its role in this process. These specific protocols are adopted and even though it was of great importance to refine each institution's role and task division, no more detailed framework on their further cooperation is provided.

However, a number of bodies have been created in efforts to enhance cooperation and make it more effective. These include the National Council for Child Rights and Child Rights Assembly Committee. The **National Council for Child Rights** is a body for coordination and has a number of functions related to improving collaboration including providing support for development of Local Action Plans and cooperating with experts, academic and other institutions regarding child rights violations.

tfYROM is one example from the region regarding how multiagency work has been developed through practice. There is a legal basis for multiagency collaboration and Centre for Social Case Management Procedures and Standards, which oblige all agency representatives to come together in cases of children exposed to violence, abuse or exploitation.

Supported by UNICEF, in 2014, a pilot model of ad hoc multi-agency teams to respond to child victims and witnesses was established in several municipalities. As a result of the training the recommendation to participants was to organise local planning groups in their municipalities to ***establish a local ad hoc multi-agency team*** to respond to allegations of violence and abuse.

Based on the Multi-agency model piloted in 2014, the first step of collaboration in cases of a suspected offence against a child or where a child is a witness to an alleged offence involving violence, abuse or exploitation, is that the matter will be reported simultaneously to both the Centre for Social Work and the police. Collaboration between these two agencies is crucial to ensure their complementary roles to prevent or investigate a crime (police) and intervene directly to protect and care for the child (Centre of Social Work).

Both **Romania and Bulgaria** have complex structures and systems regarding multiagency working including those at national level.

Bulgaria has administrative organisations that deal with the implementation of child protection policies, including multiagency working, including two main bodies: The State Agency for Child protection (SACP) and the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA). The ASA is subordinate to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The main functions and the implementation of child protection are in the mandate of the Child Protection Departments (CPD). These are managed by the regional directorates of Social Assistance.

The mission of the Agency for Social Assistance is to ‘implement the state policy of social assistance’. A crucial part of the child protection policies in general is the social assistance of vulnerable children and disadvantaged children and families. It should be noted that the policy on child protection goes beyond social assistance. However, the main focus of the current policy for child protection is indeed the social support and the work with children at risk or disadvantaged children. As a result, this leaves children outside the scope of the common child protection policies.

According to the Child Protection Law, the Director of the State Agency for Child Protection manages, coordinates and supervises the implementation of the policy for child protection. This includes the licensing and the control of the activities of the Bulgarian and foreign legal entities, which is to say the social services providers. The Director of the State Agency for Child Protection does not work independently but in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The specific responsibility of the State Agency for Child Protection overlaps with the responsibilities of the public/ state committees which are assigned the functions of control regarding the laws launched by the Council of Ministers.

Notwithstanding some of the complications of the system in Bulgaria, bringing the coordination of child welfare and protection policies under the responsibility of one single structure at national level was an extremely important step for ensuring a more coherent strategy and implementation of reforms.⁸

⁸ Child Pact Coalition. Guth A. (2014) Reform Steps toward Child Protection Bulgaria – Romania- a comparative approach.

In **Romania**, local multidisciplinary teams have a proactive role during the case management process. The case manager with the multidisciplinary team develops the individualised protection plan or, where appropriate, other plans according to the legislation within 30 days of the case being identified. The case manager, with the multidisciplinary team performs a re-evaluation of the child's situation every three months or whenever necessary and reviews the plan as appropriate.

In addition, local cross sectorial teams (EIL/LCST) are made up of designated persons from institutions representing the devolved structures of the local public administration and the autonomous administrative authorities and non-governmental organisations engaged in the prevention, monitoring and combating of violence and exploitation. EILs are set up at the county level and at the level of each of the districts of Bucharest. Agencies which must be represented include a wide range of sectors and services such as: the labour inspectorate, police, education, public health and NGOs.

The specific EIL responsibilities are listed in the job description of each member which ensures accountability to each professional. Monthly meetings are organised, according to the internal procedures of each team approved by each institution. The EIL is not a team of direct intervention for child victims of labour exploitation but instead members act as resource persons throughout the county.

In terms of mandate and scope of multiagency working across the region, this tends to coalesce around two main issues: advisory and monitoring bodies which often operate at national and country regional / district level and bodies which work at local level on specific cases.

These local level bodies tend to be more action orientated, for example participating in decision making, planning and implementation of responses using a case management approach. In some cases, these local level bodies are highly regulated through shared protocols, guidance and procedures which may or may not be mandatory.

Structure, Composition and Leadership

The make-up and membership of multiagency approaches, and who is responsible for 'leading' is a reflection of mandate and scope of the aspirations for multiagency working, and the way in which it is embedded (or not) in legal and policy frameworks.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the involvement of NGOs in the region, and in many cases a reliance on NGOs to provide essential services, sometimes the roles of NGOs are almost indistinguishable from state structures in term of the composition and leadership of the multiagency working mechanism.

For example, in **Bosnia – Herzegovina**, the leads of the local referral mechanisms composed of different institutional, ministerial and non-governmental members, differ according to the situation and location. Sometimes the NGO leads the referral, and sometimes the Centre for Social Work.

In **Bulgaria**, normally, the body in whose domain is a given policy acts as the leading authority. There are procedures for national collaboration with the different public and non-governmental actors. The latter are represented in the councils and committees on development and coordination of policies, but their real power for influence is limited.

Example from the region

IPA program of cross border cooperation Serbia – Montenegro, Municipality Bijelo Polje

JU Support Centre for children and families in municipality Bijelo Polje, is the first public service in Montenegro. It provides comprehensive protection and shelter for child victims of violence.

This centre is an example of a partnership where effective cooperation and multidisciplinary approach resulted in fast and effective protection for children.

Children have access to a range of services including preventive consultations, psychological support and help in dealing with traumatic experiences from a team consisting of a pedagogue, social worker, school psychologist, police officer, and with the involvement of parents too.

At the municipal level, the local Directorates for Social Assistance, the Child Protection Department is responsible for the creation of a multidisciplinary team. The mechanisms of interaction are specified for each different case, with varying participants.

In **Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Romania** and **Hungary** the leadership function for multiagency working relating to specific cases is also the responsibility of state Child Protection services (including Centres for Social Work, Child Protection Units etc.). These multiagency groups meet according to agreed timescales and have a varied membership normally dependent upon the nature of the case. A significant difference relates to countries such as Hungary where the requirement for multiagency working is more limited and depends upon the Child Protection professional's decision regarding who to include.

Example from the region

A good example from Bulgaria of promoting and strengthening cross-sectorial linkages and synergies, is in the area of Early Childhood Development.

This includes a health visiting service programme for expectant parents and children under three years, and is supported by UNICEF Bulgaria as part of the health care system. It is an integrated intervention to improve growth, health, nutrition, social-emotional and the cognitive development of children.

One of its main objectives, along with the more traditional focus on health and nutrition, is early identification of children at risk of abuse, neglect and abandonment and early intervention in collaboration with child protection systems. Families identified as being in need of additional assistance are referred to Family Centres which provide support and social counselling for disadvantaged families and family members, help with family planning and the development of parenting skills, provide health and legal information and facilitate access to mainstream services (e.g. housing services, health care, education, social benefits, and employment).

The Case Management Roundtables (CMR) is a model used in **Kosovo** as a coordinating mechanism for child protection, and is typical of the model used. Through monthly meetings where a range of professionals from different institutions and organisations attend such as the CSW, the Directorate of Education, psychologists, police, Victim's Advocates, the Probation Service, anti-trafficking police among others manage cases of concern. The CMR is led by the social worker who is managing the case that is being discussed. The aim of the CMR is to bring together a multidisciplinary team of professionals, all of whom have responsibilities to protect children and through this mechanism to manage those cases that are at medium or high risk of neglect, abuse, exploitation, trafficking and delinquency. The professionals invited to the meetings varies depending on the needs of each case and, through joint management, each professional takes on specific responsibilities in managing the case and reports back as the case is monitored.

As in many other countries, in **Montenegro** the Centres for Social Work creates teams of professionals in order to provide help to victims, but other bodies can create these teams too. Teams should consist of the representatives of the Centres for Social Work, local authorities, police, non-governmental organisations, experts in the domestic violence field. However, there is not much data available on who should lead this cooperation, mandatory membership (or not) and other factors such as timescales for meeting.

Across the region, the structure and composition of the various mechanisms for multiagency working varies according to the mandate and scope of the mechanism and whether this is codified in law / policy. Much of the multiagency working that exists in the region is associated with supporting individual cases.

In general, where it exists, multiagency working is primarily lead by Social Services / Child Protection Agency. This is especially true for dealing with individual cases of child abuse, particularly where a case management approach is adopted.

Capacity building

The issue of capacity building when considering multiagency working is complex. Professionals, and those stakeholders participating need at least two kinds of capacity building: the first, related to the 'technical aspects' of child protection and child wellbeing, including issues such as child rights and child abuse; and the second in relation to the roles and responsibilities of members of the multiagency team and the process of working together. This also includes essential skills for leaders on how to coordinate and facilitate co-working and should ideally be conducted with multiagency groups to support the concept of collaboration from the outset.

In addition, coaching and mentoring is necessary to support the implementation of the multiagency approach and to embed this into practice.

Example from the region

The Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina School of Social Work, World Vision, and USAID developed various training curricula for use in Romania.

The Curriculum for Case Management in Child Welfare consists of eight modules: basics of case management; community collaboration and resource development; communication in case management; strengths-based assessment; self-care for case managers; ongoing services and support; cultural competency; and planning with families.

The Foundation Curriculum for Child Welfare Supervisors training consists of eight modules: overview of social work supervision; the five roles of supervision and program management; adult learning principles and individual learning styles; stages of group development and team building; meeting with groups; time, stress management, and delegation skills; developing and affirming your program's mission; and hiring new employees.

The Curriculum for Experienced Child Welfare Supervisors and Managers provides more advanced training on child welfare supervision. It consists of six modules: coaching and motivating your employees; managing employee performance; conflict management skills; managing change and making ethical decisions; building community through community dialogues; and launching new programs and partnerships.

However, it should be noted that this training is for child welfare staff only and is not multiagency training. This is a similar approach which has been taken in other countries introducing more formalised training.

It is difficult to track how capacity building can be successfully undertaken in a meaningful and sustainable way, without the development of a comprehensive plan.

As an example, an evaluation study in **Albania** (WVA, 2013) highlighted the attempts to increase the capacities of Child Protection Workers by INGOs, NGOs, and the State Agency for Children, UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. However, the study concluded that the training (including in some cases mentoring) is patchy and appears to be largely reliant on the activities of interested stakeholders, including the level of commitment to Child Protection, who also need permission from their supervisor and / or the head of commune / mayor to attend.

Like other countries in the region, **Bosnia** and **Montenegro** have implemented many different trainings around thematic issues such as trafficking, domestic violence, as well as training for the application of the new laws on juvenile justice that gather all relevant court and out-of-court professionals.

Regarding specific training for multiagency working there is some evidence of this taking place. For example, both **Moldova** and **Kosovo** have dedicated resources to this activity. The government in partnership with different NGOs carry out training activities dedicated to the members of the multidisciplinary team with regard to inter-agency cooperation. The trainings carried out by NGOs are generally participative and continuous, with emphasis made on the interactive approach, involving discussions of concrete cases from the practice of participants. In addition, in Moldova, the Department of Family and Child Protection within the districts around the country have annual training plans that include multiagency working although these trainings are most often informative in nature rather than formative or participatory.

Unfortunately, however in some places there is little opportunity for capacity building, either informal or formal. For example, in **Hungary** while the child protection professionals are given training, there is no / title training provided for others who are involved with the multiagency work. In **Bulgaria** training is provided more widely, but this is done locally and usually by NGOs within projects, and as result it is not sustained in the longer term. To a certain extent this illustrates the

gap between the aspirations of countries to develop comprehensive approaches to child protection, including multiagency working, and the availability of resources and efforts necessary for its implementation.

Another example of this exists in **Serbia**, where the National Plan of Action emphasises the need for more training for professionals from different institutions that would help them work more efficiently together but little data is available regarding whether training is provided, who organises it, for whom, how often and with what results.

In **Romania** trainings are available for the EIL members, and importantly every member has their own professional development plan outlined by their institutions. However, most of training is provided by NGOs and donors rather than being institutionalised. Training has also been undertaken in **tfYROM**, mainly supported by UNICEF, and as yet this has not been adopted by the Inspectorate and Training Department of the Ministry of Social Services. By a twist of fate, the recent migrant / refugee crisis has galvanised all partners through the Child Protection Working Group in tfYROM to develop more comprehensive capacity building plans. This also embraces the wider child protection system and concerns regarding domestic children. This is also planned for Serbia.

While most training and capacity building activities remain informal, there are efforts to establish more formalised training. UNICEF, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and various NGOs, coordinated by Terre des hommes in **Albania** has developed an in-service training programme being run by the University of Tirana which is under accreditation. Romania has also developed a standard training programme. Save the Children plan to develop a similar course in **Bosnia-Herzegovina**.

The development of comprehensive and accredited training, where this includes multiagency working, is an important step in creating a sustained platform for capacity building. This is further enhanced when counties include specific requirements for training. For example, in **Bosnia – Herzegovina**, the Ministries of Justice required the development of official training programmes and placed an obligation for all professionals that work with minors in contact with the law to attend these course and obtain official certificates.

In many cases, the main driving force and providers of capacity building are NGOs and UNICEF as government agencies lack the resources. This includes both initial training and in some cases ongoing coaching / supervision regarding case management (but not functioning of the multiagency teams). As this training is often linked to the interests of participating agencies, it is not necessarily comprehensive nor is it sustainable in the longer term as it is not institutionalised.

Maximising the effectiveness of capacity building is limited by the high turnover of staff and the lack of resources.

Monitoring

Despite the emphasis placed upon multiagency working in child protection and considerable resources devoted across the region to establishing the multiagency approach, very little systematic (or even sporadic) monitoring is carried out. In part this mirrors a general lack of comprehensive standards and monitoring frameworks. For example, **Moldova** lacks any monitoring system, while service standards and inspection and monitoring frameworks are still under development in **Romania** and **Albania**.

Of course many countries have carried out evaluations of programmes and also of the child protection system itself (such as **Kosovo** and **Albania**), and, depending on how the evaluation is conducted, this may consider multiagency working as one feature. However, these assessments often consider the critical outcomes for children rather than *the process and effectiveness of multiagency working*.

In addition, as mentioned in earlier sections many countries do have – at least in theory – bodies which have a part of their remit monitoring child protection services. These can be agencies under the state or independent bodies including Ombudsmen's Offices, such as established in **Montenegro**.

One attempt to review the process of multiagency working was undertaken in **Croatia**. The NGO Step by Step conducted a comprehensive study on the perception of cooperation between institutions involved in child protection. The participants included parents, teachers and other professionals. When assessing the institutions' compliance to policy, urgency in acting and cooperation and sharing between institutions, the average mark was 3 out of 5, with cooperation and sharing being the lowest scoring. 40% of respondents considered the cooperation between professionals in different institutions to be almost or entirely non-existent. Lack of coordination and joint strategy was identified as the main reason for problems in cooperation. They also identified lack of finance, as well as personal motivation and relationships among professionals as reasons for poor cooperation.

Numerous evaluations have been undertaken across the region regarding child protection, however few studies have specifically considered multiagency working and its effectiveness. Where this is studied it has been through the lens of examining the functioning of child protective services as a whole, and in particular applying the case management approach.

The lack of standards and frameworks for practice further hinder the monitoring of multiagency working. Even where protocols exist without standards and inspection frameworks it is likely that there will be a lack of consistency because the interpretation of the protocol, and its application, is left to individuals. This also limits the extent to which learnings from practice can be fed into future policy development.

Perceived effectiveness

Despite the lack of robust frameworks to monitor the operationalisation of multiagency working, it is possible to gain some appreciation of its effectiveness through the perceptions of those who come into contact with and are involved in multiagency

working. In many places multiagency working was seen as being at least partially effective, such as Moldova, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, if not without challenges, while in some countries such as Hungary and Bulgaria significant problems were identified in making multiagency working a reality.

Example from the region

In Hungary Anthropolis Association - in cooperation with other NGOs (the Red Cross, NaNe, Blue Line child helpline) has organised a series of multi-disciplinary roundtables on modern-day slavery.

Feedback from professionals involved in Miskolc, Nyiregyháza and Kecskemét, highlighted some of the challenges with multiagency working. These included the fact that case discussions are not systematically arranged, and that training provided was focussed more on conferences with formal presentations, rather than actual, practical discussion of cases and sharing of experiences.

Professionals noted that cooperation depends on personal relationships - but in absence of opportunities for joint meetings, this is not facilitated. Health care professionals, teachers, judges and prosecutors often do not attend meetings and often refuse cooperation - without any repercussions. Mental health and health care professionals often cite their ethical guidelines of privacy for not providing information.

While all these issues have been addressed in a **Methodological Guidance** issued by the Ministry of Human Resources (2014) different professionals are not aware of this guidance document and thus it has had relatively little impact.

A number of common themes emerge from all countries including:

- **Time** is needed in order to establish and develop multiagency working. As noted in **Montenegro** where multiagency working is first introduced, it takes time and effort for the teams to learn to effectively work together.

- **Coordination and collaboration** is challenged by a complex array of behavioural, technical and structural aspects and their reciprocal interaction. This relates both to the way organisations are structured and services delivered in reality and the extent to which this is congruent with law / policy. For example, in **Albania**, despite a long standing protocol requiring multiagency working in cases of child protection, since there was no formalised requirement for other agencies to follow the protocol, the participation of other actors was limited. By contrast according to a review carried out by the Ombudsmen, judicial staff in **Montenegro** consider that their working with social workers improved especially in relation to the handling of cases of child sexual exploitation.
- **Overly complex and parallel systems** which are constructed on multidisciplinary intervention involving different categories of beneficiaries such as children in need of protection, victims of human trafficking, street children etc. and which may exist in multiple levels of administration and structures create duplication and confusion. For example, the same persons are members of several groups. In addition many structures are created not as a response to community problems or to facilitate decision-making at community level, but because some normative acts enable the creation of these structures, without any feasibility study on their appropriateness and necessity.
- **Personal relationships** are considered intrinsic to effective multiagency working. In particular **Bosnia-Herzegovina** noted that where professionals know each other, often cooperation and collaboration is much higher, and therefore the team considered more effective, than in areas where professionals do not know each other. Working together does not always occur as a consequence of a management approach, but also depends on the individual initiative of the concerned actors in regards to isolated issues, situations and cases.
- **Culture and mind-set** need to be adaptable. Multiagency work is a horizontal collaboration and as such challenges traditional hierarchy structures and professional status. Regionally multiagency working is a relatively new concept and is not very much part of the culture and as a result it poses challenges to the mentality of professionals in working together and sharing power.

- **Synergies and linkages between actors** which either enhance or frustrate multiagency working. Sometimes this is connected to the law, and at other times to attitudes of staff. For example, there is a reported tendency among social workers of public institutions to consider themselves as the only officials competent and responsible for the protection and care of children. At the same time a belief among practitioners of social work within NGOs that public institutions are incompetent, with outdated knowledge and lack of skills.
- **Composition** of multiagency teams which may be limited only to professionals and specific agencies, or organisations which provide support and services. This effectively limits multiagency working to the formal systems of protection and excludes or negates the valuable contribution that non-formal actors and families can play in protecting children.
- **Lack of knowledge and clarity** about both the need to work together, and roles and responsibilities. This is compounded by a **lack of training / capacity building**. Although several countries have developed training for child protection / welfare staff, typically the training offered to other professionals involved in multiagency work is limited.
- **Lack of accountability** and sanctions for non-compliance. This also includes a **lack of standards / guidance** or where these exist a lack of resources to make them a reality. At a very practical level convening meetings of multiagency teams requires space for meeting and transport. It was also noted in **Bulgaria** that now the pressure is removed regarding achieving EU accession, resources have been transferred to other priorities.
- **High turnovers of staff** which make it difficult for multiagency teams to reach their maximum operating capacity as new members are joining who may lack the required knowledge and skills. In addition, many countries face challenges relating to staff overload / high levels of cases.

- **Varying service levels** and working arrangements including geographical differences. For example, in **Croatia** and **Serbia** better collaboration exists in the capital than in other areas.
- Where **understanding and capacities** on issues related to the protection of the child and general children's rights in practice is still limited this directly impacts upon the effectiveness of multiagency working.

While considerable effort has been placed in introducing multiagency working, considerable challenges exist in ensuring that it is effective as a vehicle for contributing to the protection of children.

Although there are promising examples and experiences, considerable barriers exist which need to be overcome. These include issues such as a lack of resources, creating a shared understanding and accountability and developing a spirit of collaboration between actors.



SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW UP

Multiagency working has been widely adopted across the region as an approach for child protection. This has been done both generally, targeting all situations of abuse, as in Kosovo and Albania, and also more specifically for particular manifestations of abuse such as domestic violence, as is the case in Montenegro. In many cases considerable efforts and resources have been invested into developing true models of multiagency working (for example in Romania and Bulgaria), while in others the model of multiagency working remains limited, such as in Hungary. These resemble more partnership and co-working arrangements where multiagency working is understood to mean referrals between agencies as opposed to working together.

Efforts to support multiagency working include frameworks to facilitate and legitimise multiagency working, for example through legislation and policy reform and the development of protocols and standards, coupled with capacity building initiatives. Many of these initiatives have been supported by NGOs, UNICEF and donors, although the government is an integral partner to ensure sustainability in the longer term.

However, despite these efforts the extent to which multiagency working is realised in practice varies across the region. In addition, all countries face considerable challenges in ensuring that multiagency working as envisaged is actually translated into action. Barriers to effective multiagency working include; systems which are not designed or are overly complex for the reality of the context; lack of training and resources; long standing and entrenched attitudes towards other professionals and co-working; and a lack of accountability and ownership.

Despite a number of evaluations and assessments of the functioning / appropriateness of child protection programmes and systems within countries, the lack of monitoring frameworks for multiagency working hinders attempts to measure the effectiveness of the approach in terms of its contribution to protecting children. There is a wide scale belief that multiagency working is 'best' and an ideal to aim for, however the functioning of multiagency working as a process and its comparative benefits verses effort and resources needed is not measured.

⁹ This may be in part as a result of experiences from outside the region and also because of the interest from donors and other stakeholders.

One significant feature of multiagency working in the region is the timing of its introduction. In countries outside the region where multiagency working has been established for some time it has largely been introduced where a relatively well functioning and resourced child protection system already existed, for example in other countries in Western Europe. By contrast, within South East Europe the introduction of multiagency working has been carried out in parallel to systems development or in advance of the development of services and structures. To this extent, one useful by product of the introduction of multiagency working can be in supporting attempts to develop more comprehensive child protection systems

Since it is generally accepted that multiagency working is an appropriate approach to child protection, a number of recommendations emerge from the experiences of introducing and sustaining multiagency working from the countries in the region.

Please note that these recommendations are specifically in relation to multiagency working, not related to improving child protection / national child protection systems:

1. **Harmonise approaches** within countries to reduce duplication. Where several procedures and protocols apply to a particular child, the approach should be 'One Plan for One Child' so that resources and time are used effectively.¹⁰
2. **Review existing multiagency procedures / policies / laws** within countries to identify gaps and overlaps and realignment of these based upon the experiences of those working within the system to ensure that practice influences change. This includes a consideration and clarifications of the roles and responsibilities of the relative team members.
3. **Develop standards and quality measures** to provide greater clarity regarding multiagency working (i.e. scope, roles etc.), which can be used as a basis for monitoring.

¹⁰ This follows the same approach adopted in the Netherlands as part of their child protection system reform.

4. **Foster greater cooperation** between agencies and professionals through creating opportunities for professionals to network formally and informally, for example through joint training.
5. **Increase and enhance capacity building** through more sustained and formalised training, including training of professionals from different disciplines together. This also includes recognising the need for ongoing development / coaching to ensure practice is embedded and sustained and specific training of key skills for those involved in multiagency working in terms of their roles, i.e. as members, as facilitators etc.
6. **Develop greater ownership across agencies** through the development, introduction and signoff of protocols etc. by all agencies they relate to. This also promotes accountability.
7. **Ensure greater accountability and commitment** to multiagency working. For example, through the development of shared guidelines and standards and the inclusion of multiagency tasks within job roles and agency mandates. In addition, sanctions should be identified at agency and individual level for non-compliance.
8. **Identify and sustain resources** to support the functioning of multiagency working as envisaged. This includes human resources and other practical necessities such as locations, transport etc. If this is not possible, then the review of multiagency practice needs to design the approach around what is achievable within the context. The failure to do this will lead to multiagency work being seen as not achievable and demotivate actors.
9. **Increase scope of multiagency working** to also include members of both formal and informal protection structures and ensure that children and families are seen as key participants.

10. Develop a framework for monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of multiagency working as a process and its contribution to child protection, and ensure this is implemented. This could include external oversight by an independent agency. Since this might take considerable resources, this could be a regional framework which could be adapted by individual countries.

11. Undertake research to identify good practice and promising models and approaches. This could be a project that could be executed at a regional level, perhaps through the ChildHub.

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ANNEX: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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