

NATIONAL REPORT ON SUPERVISION

of social workers and other care workers working in integrated and multi-disciplinary teams setting in child protection in

ROMANIA





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The research has been produced in the framework of the Child Protection Hub project, supported by the Austrian Development Agency, Oak foundation and Terre des hommes. The research does not necessarily reflect the views of the donors



Introduction



This report provides the national-level findings in Romania from a mixed-methods study of supervision for professionals working in multidisciplinary child protection teams across a range of Central, Eastern and South-eastern European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, and Serbia). The scope of the project is to provide a snapshot of supervision in each of the seven participating countries, and a regional comparison.

Utilising existing services and professional connections within the Child Protection Hub network, this project aims to explore different understandings, standards, and challenges of supervision faced by social workers and other child protection professionals involved in multidisciplinary casework with children and families. The aims of the project were to:

- Provide a snapshot of supervision for child protection professionals working in multidisciplinary team settings across the region.
- Explore the attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of child protection professionals regarding supervision.
- Identify key factors that hinder and promote supervision practices in multidisciplinary team contexts.
- Provide a comparative analysis in the region.
- Identify good practices in supervision.
- Provide recommendations for strengthening supervision across the region and in specific countries.

This research was conducted by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), part of Cardiff University, and within the framework of the Child Protection Hub project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency, Oak Foundation and Terre des hommes. All views expressed in the report are that of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the above-mentioned donors. In Romania, the research was conducted by CONCORDIA Humanitarian Organization (the Romanian office of CONCORDIA Social Projects¹), represented by Irina Opincaru and Irina Adăscăliței.

¹ <https://www.concordia.org.ro/>

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Overview of country situation and purpose of the report

This study adopted an observational and exploratory design and used a mixture of different methods **to provide a snapshot of supervision in multidisciplinary child protection teams** across seven different countries in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe. The overall regional study was organised into four work packages, running concurrently to complete the research within the required timeframe (between the start of February and the end of March 2022). The study was led by the lead author of the regional report (David Wilkins), based in the UK, working with teams of local researchers and Country Associates in every targeted country. The local teams were responsible for recruitment and data collection, as well as for making a significant contribution to data analysis, writing the individual country reports, and having input into the regional report as well.

As mentioned before, the research in Romania was conducted by CONCORDIA Humanitarian Organization (the Romanian office of CONCORDIA Social Projects²), represented by Irina Opincaru (Quality Manager) and Irina Adăscăliței (Director of CONCORDIA Academia). Irina Opincaru a sociologist, currently a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Sociology at the University of Bucharest, she works on a permanent basis with CONCORDIA Humanitarian Organization as national Quality Manager and also runs a consulting and research enterprise. Irina has an ample research experience, both academic and applied, especially in the areas of common property institutions, cooperative practice, and social economy. Irina Adăscăliței is a psychologist specialized in organizational psychology, psychotherapist in trauma and a coach. With more than 15 years of experience in organizational development, Irina is the founder and the director of CONCORDIA Academia³, a regional centre of excellence, offering training programs and support services to professionals in social services, social-medical and social-educational fields, aiming to capacitate and sustain the increased quality of social intervention at systemic level.

CONCORDIA Humanitarian Organization was actively and significantly involved, back in 2016-2017, in the development of occupational standard for supervisor in social services, an effort initiated and conducted by FONPC – the Federation of

Non-Governmental Organizations for Children in Romania. Currently CONCORDIA Academia is a provider of accredited training programs in supervision, as well as individual and group/ team supervision services. The country associate, representative of Terre des hommes Romania, was Raluca Condrut, Programs and Migration Manager.

The study was conducted using four main methods: document analysis, interviews, survey, Q-method. Data collection was organised into four work streams, as follows:

1. A brief desktop analysis of supervision policies and procedures
2. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders
3. An online survey of managers and frontline workers in multidisciplinary child protection teams (both supervisors and supervised)
4. A q-study and follow-up interviews of managers and frontline workers in multidisciplinary child protection teams

For the **key stakeholder interviews**, local researchers aimed to involve a range of people from different professional backgrounds and different current roles and positions, to ensure variability in the data collected. As a result, the respondents were psychologists working in social protection services, social workers and experts in social work, representatives of public and private institutions, important key stakeholders, covering leadership as well as operational positions within the organisations they represent, supervisors or contributors to the development of reference standards and policies.

For the **online survey**, local researchers circulated repetitively an email invitation to take part as widely as possible within multidisciplinary teams. All the professionals, former and current participants in CONCORDIA Academia's programs and projects were invited to be respondents, as current supervisors or practitioners having access to supervision process.

For the **Q-sorts and follow-up interviews**, local researchers again aimed to involve a range of people, from different professional backgrounds and with different experiences of providing or receiving supervision. The main selection criteria referred to relevant opinion to contribute with.

Methodology and research design

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3.1 Document analysis

The analysis of supervision policies and procedures considered four main documents that either regulate supervision in some respects or refer to supervision in child protection. These documents are:

- **the Occupational Standard for Supervisor in Social Services - COR code 263513**, approved in 2017⁴
- **the Order No. 27/2019** on the approval of minimum quality standards for day-time social services for children⁵
- **the Order no. 25/2019** on the approval of minimum quality standards for residential social services for children in the special protection system⁶
- **the Order No. 288/2006** for the approval of the Mandatory Minimum Standards on case management in the field of child rights protection⁷

According to the Romanian **occupational standard for Supervisor in Social Services - COR code 263513**, the supervisor in social services makes an important positive contribution to the labour market, in the social services sector and beyond, by supporting professional development and a work environment in which social service professionals can dynamically integrate theoretical training with professional practice and the beneficiaries' interest with the legislation, as well as the working procedures and resources at their disposal. Given the presence of several categories of professionals involved in the social field, social workers or psychologists, professionals who in the training process experienced professional supervision from the perspective of their profession, it is necessary that, in the case of those liberal professions, the supervisor is in the same professional category as the professional benefiting of the supervision process (e.g.: psychologist supervisor for psychologist, social worker supervisor for social worker).

However, **considering supervision as a process requested by the quality standards in social work, offered to professionals that are part of multidisciplinary teams (so of different professions and occupational categories), the supervisor must have long-term studies in one of the fields: psychology, social work, or sociology, as well as additional preparation in supervision.** Additionally, he/she should have at least 5 years of work experience

⁴ <https://concordia-academia.ro/uploads/resurse/supervisor-in-servicii-sociale-pages-1-5.pdf>

⁵ https://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/2019/Ordine_standard/Ordin_27_2019.pdf

⁶ https://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Ordin_25_2019_Standarde_minime_calitate_serv_soc_tip_rezident.pdf

⁷ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/73764>

in the field of social services, in the public or private institutional environment, proven by documents regarding the employment relationship. To meet the requirements related to this occupation, applicants must have skills absolutely necessary for good practice: a good knowledge of the field of social services, a good capacity for empathy in relation to beneficiaries, good critical thinking, and analysis of situations specific to the field of social services, team spirit, fairness, adaptability, resistance to stressors.

The current legislation which approves **the minimum quality standards for day-time social services for children**⁸ stipulate that supervision is performed by specialists with higher socio-human education and with training in supervision, that have at least 5 years of experience and professional experience of at least two years in child and family services in addition to the persons to whom that supervision is provided. Also, the standard provides that supervision meetings are to be held individually and in teams.

The documents analysed within the research process considered also the **minimum quality standards for residential social services for children in the special protection system (2019)**, which stipulate that supervision meetings, which can be held individually and/or in teams, are carried out by specialists with higher socio-human education with training in supervision and experience of at least two years in child and family services, in addition to the persons to whom that supervision is provided. Also, **the mandatory minimum standards on case management in the field of child rights protection (2006)**, refer to external supervision as requested to be as well performed by specialists with higher socio-human or medical education with at least 5 years of experience in child and family services, training in supervision and at least two years of experience in child and family services in addition to the experience of those who receive that supervision.

The current applicable legislation underlines the importance of supervision for the qualitative, ethical, and impactful social work, but overlooks several very important aspects. First of all, there is no regulation that specifically explains the recommended setup for this process or any other requirement for supervision to take place. Secondly, the legislation available doesn't make the distinction between different forms of supervision – functional or professional – and doesn't include any conceptual delimitation what so ever. Last but not least, the available legal framework in Romania makes absolutely no reference to the fact that supervision cannot be performed by the manager, a case in which the confusion of roles cannot be avoided. The lack of this clarification fosters perceptions of supervision as control or mentoring, or as a manager's role, in comparison to professional supervision, a process put at the disposal of a practitioner, to support his professional and technical development, but also to support him/herself dealing with emotional workload.

⁸ These quality standards are applicable to all social services providers of day-time social services for children, e.g. day-care centres for children and family, day-care centres for children with disabilities etc, which include both aspects of organisation and functioning and aspects related to the professional conduct of their employees, valid in Romania starting with 2019

3.2 Key informant interview findings

This stage of the study included one-hour interviews with 5 key professionals (KP) involved on the one side in the social protection services in Romania and on the other having relevant experience in supervision, from different perspectives. The key informants chosen for the study in Romania were as follows:

KP1, male - Supervisor and doctor in psychoanalysis, associate professor in psychology, trainer in supervision program, contributor to the occupational standard, as well as to the officially approved curricula for the supervision training program

KP2, female - Supervisor and social worker (principal level), expert in social work, executive director of a national private social services provider

KP3, female - Supervisor, organizational development specialist, international HR&OD director of a relevant international NGO, trainer in supervision

KP4, female - Social worker (principal level), expert in social work, representative of a relevant national professional association and governance representative of a national private social organization

KP5, female - Social worker (principal level) and supervisor, representative of a public institution, provider of social services at local and regional level

Several themes and sub-themes were defined or emerged from the Recursive Abstraction analysis of the key informant interviews, including 1) a snapshot of supervision for social workers and others in child protection MDTs, 2) attitudes, behaviours, perceptions of social workers and others regarding supervision, 3) factors that hinder and promote supervision and 4) recommendations for strengthening supervision. Each of these themes will be discussed in the following.

Snapshot of supervision for social workers and others in child protection MDTs

This first theme is the one mostly addressed by the professionals interviewed and the one that had the most developed interventions. Starting from the working definition and a general description of supervision used in this research⁹, several important points defining the process in Romania, had been discussed. First and foremost, **most respondents emphasised the conceptual differences between functional supervision and professional supervision**, as a needed distinction to differentiate the two processes, as they are understood and integrated within the local organizational cultures and practices, and their goals.

Thus, **professional supervision** is to be offered only by the social worker (expert, higher rank, superior level) only to other social workers and is a process focused on facilitation of professional growth and assuring the professional key competences (targeting the personal and professional development of the social

⁹ Supervision is commonly used in social work and other child protection settings, and usually involves a supervisor meeting regularly with a worker (or with a group of workers). During these meetings, the supervisor and worker will talk about what the worker has been doing and whether they are working to agreed standards (accountability), about whether the worker has the skills they need to do their job effectively (development) and will attempt to maintain a positive relationship between the worker and the supervisor (support). Supervision has been described as: "A process which aims to support, assure and develop the knowledge, skills and values of the person being supervised (the supervisee). It provides accountability for both the supervisor and supervisee in exploring practice and performance. It sits alongside an organisation's performance management process with a particular focus on developing people in a way that is centred on achieving better outcomes for people who use services and their careers."

worker). On the other side, functional supervision is a tool put at the disposal of the professionals that are part of multidisciplinary teams (thus, not necessary only social workers). It is a process conducted and facilitated by a supervisor (a dedicated professional trained in supervision), with the main goal of allowing the practitioners to efficiently deal with the emotional load of their work – personal emotional balance, self-care and self-management within a professional context.

Several main conclusions are related to this subject, based on the collected answers. In Romania, **supervision as a process**, not even the professional supervision, is not sufficiently understood and integrated in professional practice and daily work, even though its importance is not a matter of discussion. Without being officially named, recognized, and promoted as such, functional supervision offers a broader range of action and integrates, or at least functions complementary in relationship with professional supervision, which is offered only to social workers, exclusively by other social workers.

In this conceptual discussion, the intention is not to promote supervision under a different name (functional supervision, as different to professional supervision), but only to underline the importance of considering all the other professions (additional to social workers), as part of multidisciplinary teams in social work. Moreover, there is the need for professionals, practitioners and decision makers to acknowledge the fact that every practitioner in social work needs guidance, professional development, space for growth, emotional balance, and to nurture functional relationships within the team (s)he is part of.

To this end, supervision is seen as *“an open, participatory, confidential, professionally guided and non-directive process”* (KP2) which helps the professionals to *“be able to tolerate uncertainty and non-negotiable situations”* (KP1). In a complete approach of supervision, related to its needs and expected results, “the emphasis falls on knowledge, skills and values, but also on support and open reflection” (KP5). Clearly, the common opinion points out that **the main goal of supervision as such is to increase the quality of the social intervention and to increase the satisfaction of the final beneficiaries.**

The supervisor, as an ideal type discussed during the interview, was also differentiated according to the two conceptual perspectives. Exclusively from the perspective of professional supervision of social workers, as here is only about the professional competences and quality standards in social work, the supervisor is clearly stipulated to be a senior social worker. From a broader perspective, considering the multidisciplinary teams and the integrative approach in social intervention, the supervisor has to be an experienced professional, with mandatory master's degree in social work, psychology or sociology, as it is foreseen in the occupational standard. The common recommendation is that the supervisor is an external professional, not part of the organization he/she offers supervision to.

In practice, supervision in Romania doesn't necessarily follow the ideal picture made by our respondents. Even if legally stipulated to maintain the licensing of the services, most of the time supervision is not carried out. The common understanding of supervision is mostly as an activity of control by the boss or as an activity to be carried out only "on paper". This also due to a significant

lack of self-care culture within the social organizations in Romania, either private or public. Besides the occupational standard in supervision, the present legal requirements are very interpretable and vague, and it is easily understood that the manager can also do the supervision.

A relevant point to make at this stage, in terms of patterns, is to underline the fact that professionals and experts in social work involved in policies and professional standards, also representing public institutions, are much more preoccupied with professional supervision from the social worker's perspective. While the organizational leaders and professionals, part of a multidisciplinary team, in which case the bigger picture is the reference point, emphasise on the supervision as being addressed to all categories and professions of the social services' staff, in a systemic, integrative approach.

It is clearly concluded that the supervision in social services facilitates the professional development, the accomplishment of professional objectives at an expected desirable quality standard and also the self-care culture and personal development, within the professional context. So, the main key question that has arisen is: to whom is the supervision addressed?

Attitudes, behaviours, perceptions of social workers and others regarding supervision

This theme targeted subjects such as the topics of discussion during supervision sessions, occurrence of supervision, the feelings of the supervisor, the importance of supervision, the effectiveness of supervision and the results or achievements of such a process. The most often encountered topics to discuss during supervision sessions are communication, limited resources, conflicts, burn-out, working together and collaboration and boundaries in the relationship with the team, concrete cases with beneficiaries and families, conflicts, responsibilities, motivation.

Regarding the importance and effectiveness of supervision, the common conclusion is that where and when supervision is correctly done, it is very effective and has a crucial functional role, enhancing balanced transformations between personal and professional life. The professionals become more resilient and successfully deal with situations that generate a rather high level of discomfort, which can later lead to burnout if not professionally approached. Through supervision, *"professionals regain the energy they seemed to have lost, are trained to listen and hold a mirror up to them, understand why they sometimes can't handle things or get stuck."* (KP1). **All these positive changes are reflected in an increased quality of social intervention and ultimately directly impact the final beneficiaries, the children and families that receive the social services.**

Despite many challenges outlined so far, the key informants we interviewed also identified some clear examples of good practice in supervision and how good supervision had made a difference for workers, in relation to their emotional well-being and their ability to provide a good service for children and families. In some cases, this included being able to exercise good professional judgement, and the way in which supervision allows workers to think through their decisions in a more considered and reflective way.

Factors that hinder and promote supervision

Related to the ways of hindering and promoting supervision, the findings resulted from the interview highlight that the respondents are confronted with significant challenges. Several of these challenges are contextual, regarding the pandemic period, having too small or too large groups attending supervision sessions or the lack of available funds to allow supervision to be offered. A range of challenges presented are however conceptual and cultural, and refer to the facts that the practice of supervision does not exist in most cases (especially in rural contexts), that the professionals are also very resistant and reticent and the culture of self-care is facing its incipient stages in Romanian social work.

One of the respondents expressed clearly this state of things: “[There is] very little awareness of the concept of supervision. People don't know what they want to address and what they are looking for” (KP1), especially in public organizations. It becomes mandatory that the applicable legislation clearly defines the process and the frame of the supervision, in order to dilute the confusion and to increase awareness. Besides the psychoeducation which should be more present, as a significant component of the professionalization process of the human resources within the social services national system, it is important that supervision is complemented by correct managerial actions and decisions, in other words to be reinforced by a proper social management practice.

Recommendations for strengthening supervision

The strongest conclusion related to recommendations for strengthening supervision points out the need of social services to have a functional supervision part, in the perspective of the next 5 to 10 years from now. The legislation makes clear the process, the setup, and the means, so every specialist in the field should benefit from individual and team supervision. The Romanian National Association of Supervisors plays an important role in raising awareness, but also in clarifying the quality standards and the ethical requirements.

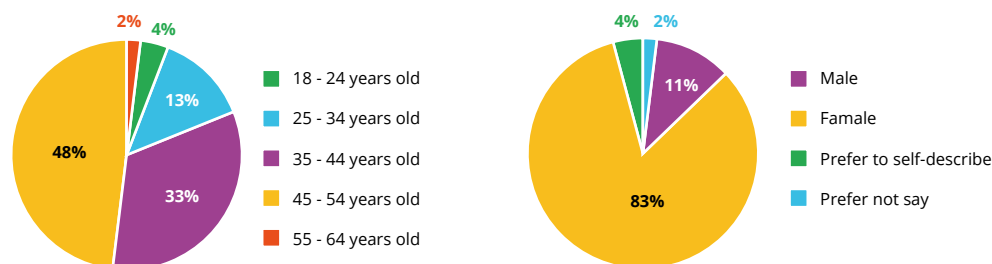
Survey results

3.3

Typology of the respondents in the obtained sample in Romania

The online survey of managers and frontline workers in multidisciplinary child protection teams in Romania was completed by 56 professionals. These workers are members of social work multidisciplinary teams, accessing individual or team supervision or being supervisors or at least trained as supervisors themselves. Out of them, the greatest percentage, 48%, were between 45 and 54 years old, and another significant number, 33%, between 35 and 44 years old. This indicator shows the fact that the respondents were mostly middle aged, so experienced professionals, in full professional advance, with significant emotional load (Figure 1). Also, 83% out of the total number of respondents are women. This element appears as a specificity in East European social work, where we observe female predominance in human resources.

Figure 1. Distribution of Romanian respondents according to age group and gender

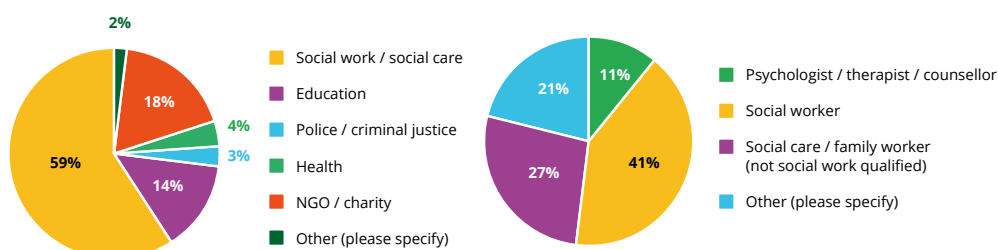


that, no matter the leadership model followed, the person you report to cannot ever be the person in front of whom you expose yourself, your vulnerability, communication blockages, doubts and distress.

Considering the level of education as a distinctive criterion of differentiation among the respondents, most of them (30 persons, 54%) are master's graduates, which is a valuable indicator for the superior level of education they hold and for the interest they have for professional preparation and personal development. Their capacity of increased awareness related to the need, respectively the benefits of supervision, is implied by their educational background. The next 29% of the respondents are university alumni, as they own bachelor's degree from university (3 or 4 years), meaning that more than 80% of participants in the survey are highly educated, express strong opinions, well-argued and offer the premises of increased awareness related to the importance of personal and professional development.

Considering the area of work, the figure below presents the distribution of respondents, which indicates that almost 60% of survey contributors come from social work, while another 18% have chosen the charity/NGO domain. As we know the complete list of respondents, it is important here to highlight the possibility that they are actually all together here professionals in social work (social services) and the percentage of only 18% does not exclusively refer to private social organizations. Having this said, around 77% out of the total number of participants are involved in social work, part of them (more than 18%) coming from private organizations that act as providers of social services for vulnerable groups. Education is the immediate relevant professional area of work, followed by medical services, the interest in supervision in these related fields being well proven.

Figure 2. Distribution of Romanian respondents according to their area of work and profession



Considering the legal requirements currently valid in Romania, as well as the most spread understanding of professional supervision (offered by a senior social worker to another social worker, the latter involved in his professional growth and having his technical competences under evaluation), a large number of social workers (41% of respondents) expressed their opinion related to professional supervision. Another important percentage, 27%, were contributing with their answers related to professional supervision without being social workers and an extra percentage of 11%, as psychologists. This is an important fact, which underlines the multidisciplinary dimension of current social work in Romania and the relevance of supervision as functional process with an adjuvant role in capacitation of the staff, at systemic level.

68% of the total number of respondents declared that they work with and for children, while the rest of the participants are involved in social work dedicated to different vulnerable categories or they are part of support departments and teams. Almost the same percentage, 67%, are involved in the child protection domain of social work.

A very relevant indicator is the fact that 78% of the participants in the survey are part of a multidisciplinary team and we connect this information with the fact that, as already pointed out above, only 41% out of them are social workers. So, it is important to highlight that, since all respondents accessed supervision services (at individual or team level) or are supervisors themselves, that supervision started to be integrated as practice. As resulted as highly recommended from this study, 70% (39 individuals) received supervision, while 30% didn't, and 23 persons (41%) provided supervision. So, out of the total number of 56 respondents, 23 were supervisors, but there is no indicator to help us know, out of those 23, how many of them are trained as such, according to the Romanian occupational standard, or how many are senior social workers who provided supervision not to multidisciplinary teams, but to other social workers. Again, the analysed context and its figures raises the need of clarifying the process and, especially, the supervisor profile, needed capacity and working frame. 23 persons, representing 41% of the respondents, answered that they've supervised others and an equal number of respondents declared that they were supervised by others.

Workers in the social field that do not receive or offer supervision

The analysis of the responses of those who didn't received or offered supervision revealed three main reasons for not accessing the supervision process one way or another: 1) the lack of information related to the existence of the concept within the Romanian social (also social-legal) system, 2) the formal character of supervision, as it is reflected in the current legislation and internal protocols and regulations, which makes the process itself ignored or overlooked - this is translated in lack of awareness related to the functions and objectives addressed by supervision and last, but not least 3) the lack of correspondent needed professional preparation. Being asked "Do people in your field generally get or give supervision?", only 10 persons answered, out of whom 80% clearly deny this practice among their networks.

Being questioned in terms of their own willingness and desire to access supervision, to be provided or to provide supervision to others in the professional

domain they are part of, only very few of them answered, max 10 persons: half of them answered positively, but a third abstained, fact which underlines the need of proper information and dissemination and conceptual clarifications related to supervision (how it should happen, by whom and why).

Supervision in Romania – practice, attitudes, perceptions

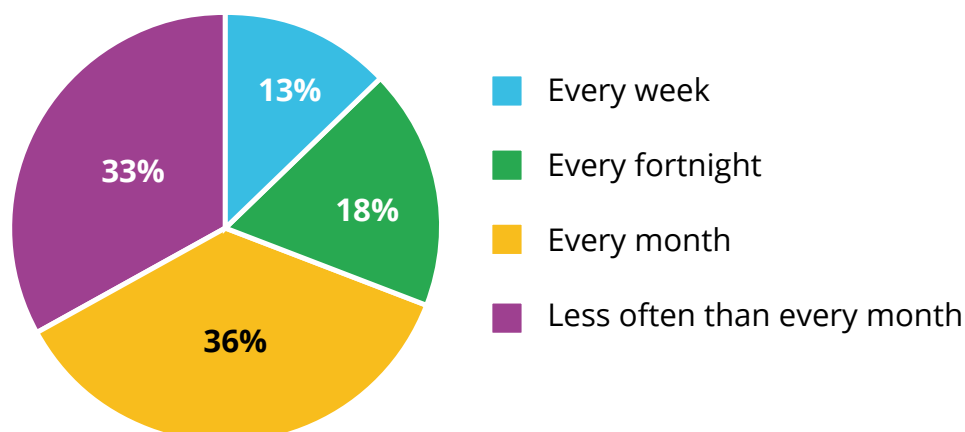
One of the very applicable questions explored the number of supervision meetings in the last 6 months (see table below): 16 persons (36%) answered that they have attended 1-2 meetings within the last half of the year, 11 persons (24%) attended 3-4 such meetings, 9 persons (20%) referred to more meetings (5-6), 4 individuals (9%) declared a record number of 13 meetings (or even more). So, in terms of frequency, there was a split in the sample – respondents either received a small number of sessions over a period of six months (one to four sessions) or a large number (more than 3, up to 6/13). This clearly indicates a lack of common understanding related to the recommended frequency, but also related to the process of supervision itself and respective methodology. The references to frequency are also reflected in the table below: opinions are spread and the majority (14 persons, meaning 32%) answered that the last supervision session happened more than one month ago.

Table 1. Frequency of supervision meetings & the time since the last meeting in Romania

No. of supervision meetings in the past 6 months	N	%	How long ago was your last supervision meeting?	N	%
None	2	4%	Today	1	2%
One or two	16	36%	Within the past few days	4	9%
Three or four	11	24%	Within the last week	2	5%
Five or six	9	20%	Within the last fortnight	9	20%
Seven or eight	1	2%	Within the last month	6	14%
Nine to twelve	2	4%	More than one month ago	14	32%
Thirteen or more	4	9%	Not sure	8	18%

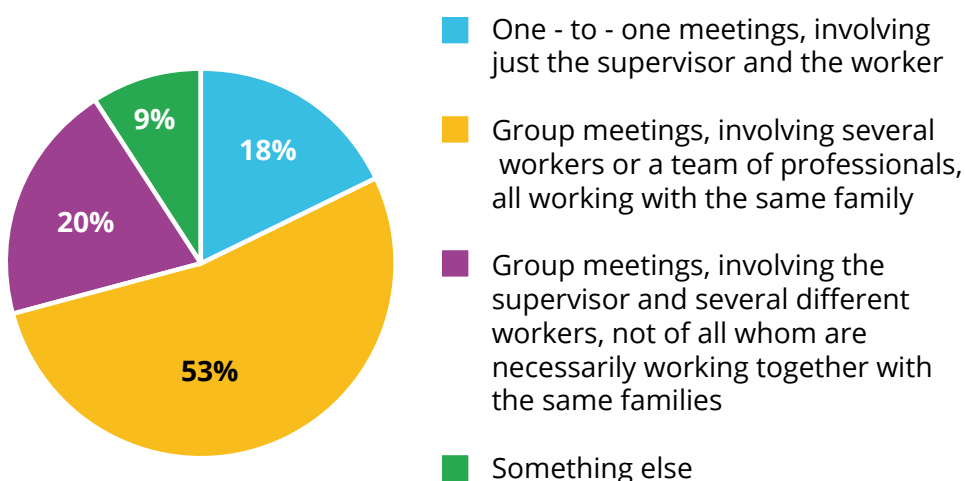
The following figure reflects the frequency that the respondents consider suitable, recommended for supervision: 36% suggest monthly meetings, while 33% would prefer to meet with the supervisor and the team less often than a month. Only very few respondents (7, 13%) consider that supervision meetings should be conducted every week, as reflected in the figure below.

Figure 3. Frequency of supervision meetings considered suitable by Romanian respondents



Referring to the model of supervision provided in Romania (see figure below), more concretely to the way the supervision sessions are usually organized, more than a half of the respondents (29, 53%) declare that the preferred and usually organized supervision sessions are in group (so group or team supervision), but all members of the team are working with the same family (beneficiaries). This fact opens the mental association done by the practitioner involved in supervision with the case management, as if the communality in terms of case also define the utility and success of supervision sessions. Only 20 % of the respondents (11 persons) accept the supervision independently to the cases the professionals are assigned to, while 18% discuss about individual supervision.

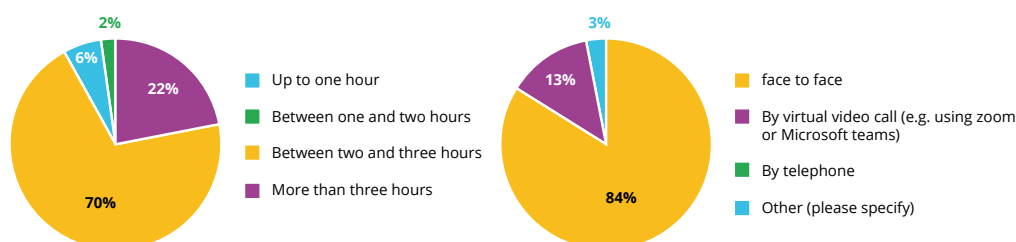
Figure 4. The model of supervision sessions organised in Romania



In addition to this perspective on the supervision model, respondents were also invited to share their perception on what is the main objective of supervision and who should offer supervision. Regarding the main objectives, these include obtaining clarity on the work, increasing the capacity for reflection of the supervisees in the relation with the work he/she carries out, reaching professional potential, preventing burnout and maintaining an equilibrium between professional and personal life. Supervision aims to support social professionals in their work, by creating a space for reflection, active listening and by facilitating the finding of solutions. The supervisor should be a professional with special training in supervision and experience in social field (a fact also acknowledged by the key professionals interviewed), since supervision is a reflexive process with the accent on the professional activity and also on personal development. Nevertheless, according to the survey respondents, supervision is about managing, in a safe environment, all the emotional and moral load.

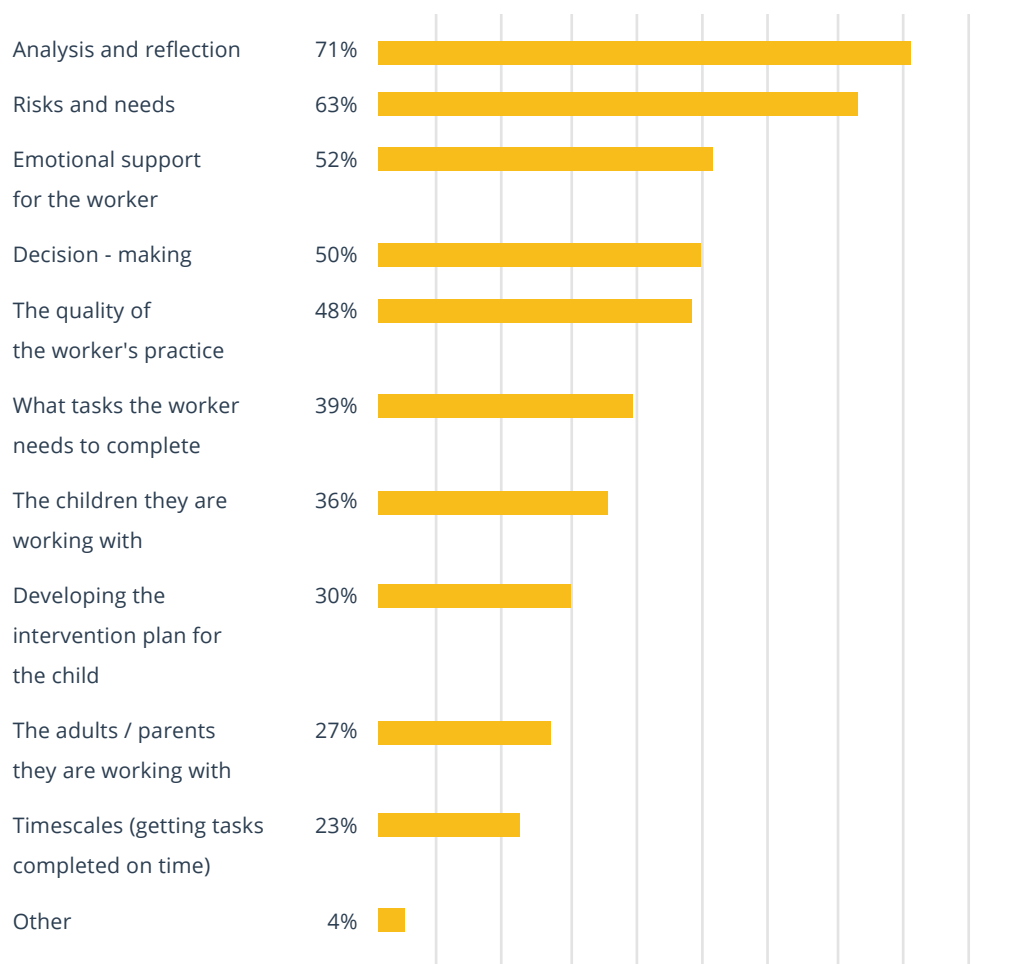
Related to the duration of a supervision meeting (see figure below), the impressive majority of 70% (38 respondents) voted for 1-2 hours lasting sessions, followed by 22% who selected a duration of up to one hour. The remark is related to the fact that there were no differentiations done based on the type of supervision (individual or group), so the duration is not clearly connected to the type of supervision happening. Moreover, 84% of respondents prefer the face-to-face setup for the supervision session, which for sure significantly reduced the possibility of accessing supervision during the pandemic.

Figure 5. The duration of one supervision session and the preferred format in Romania



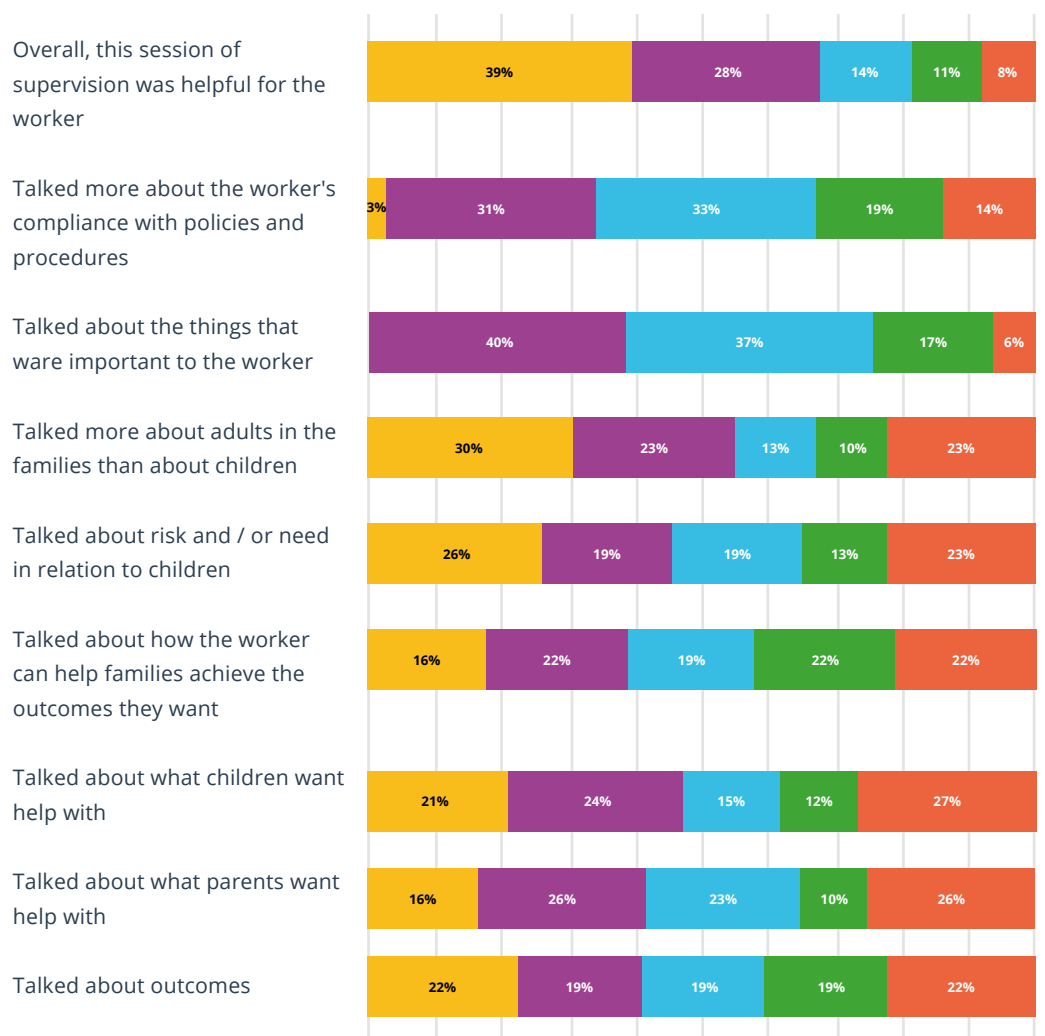
Regarding the topics normally discussed during a typical supervision session, the registered answers provided a wide variation, as reflected in the graph below. The top five topics addressed during supervision meetings by our respondents were 1) analysis and reflection (71%), 2) risks and needs (63%), 3) emotional support for the worker (52%), 4) decision-making (50%) and 5) the quality of the worker's practice (48%). Lower percentages are registered regarding the tasks that the worker needs to compete, discussions on particular cases and time management.

Figure 6. Topics addressed during a typical supervision meeting in Romania



The specific subjects addressed during supervision in Romania, as reflected in the figure below, are in accordance with the previously presented results. Thus, during their last supervision meeting, the majority of respondents talked about the things that were important to the worker (77%) and this led to an overall feeling that the session was helpful (67%). The adults in the families that the workers help is the subject of discussion in a greater extent than the children that benefit from the social services (53%). The particular needs and wants of the beneficiaries are addressed in lesser extend (42% and 45%). The least addressed topics are the worker's compliance with policies and procedures (33%) and how the worker can help families achieve the outcomes they want (38%).

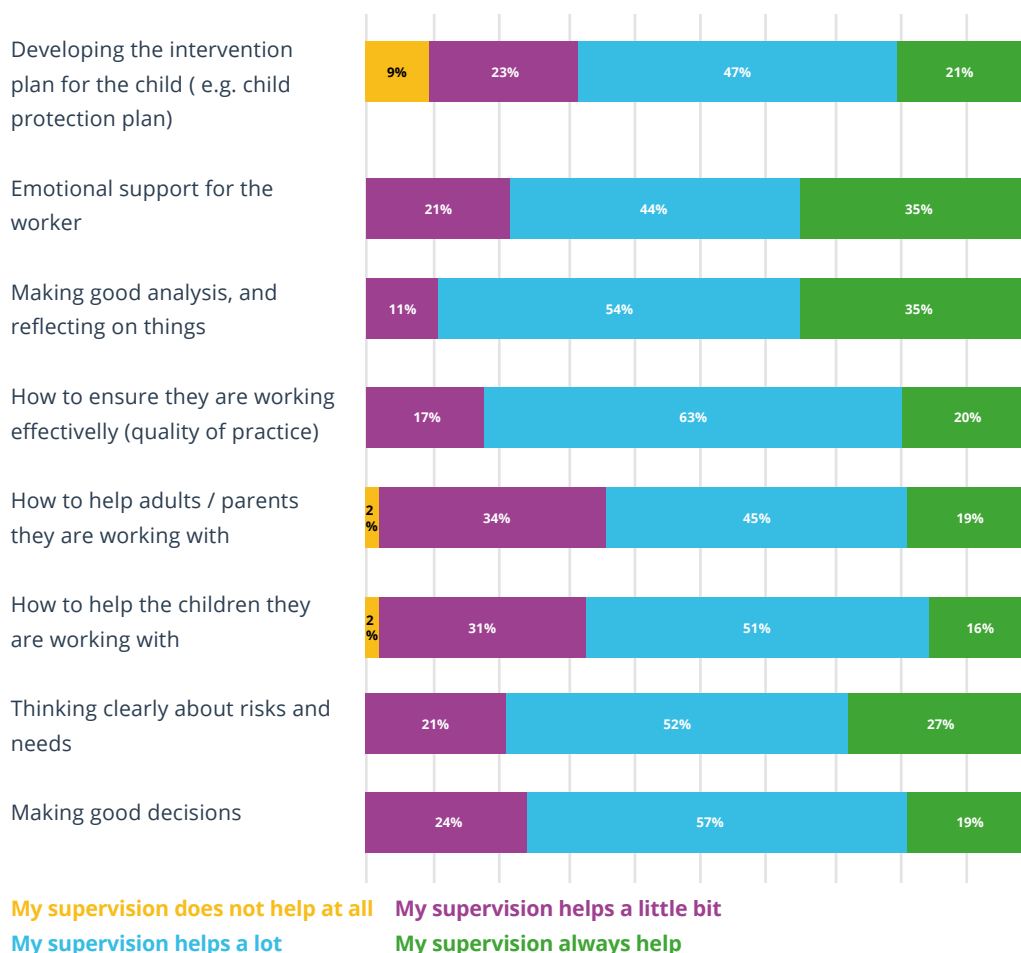
Figure 7. Specific subjects addressed during supervision meetings in Romania



Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree

When asked with what supervision helped always or most of the time (see figure below), the registered answers usually point towards an important contribution in making a good analysis, and reflecting on things (89%), ensuring that the practitioners are working effectively (quality of practice, 83%), thinking clearly about risks and needs (79%) and for the emotional support for the worker (79%). Lower percentages (but however, still relatively high), are registered regarding the contribution in providing tools of how to help the children or adults/parents that the workers are working with and in making better decisions and developing interventions plans.

Figure 7. Specific subjects addressed during supervision meetings in Romania



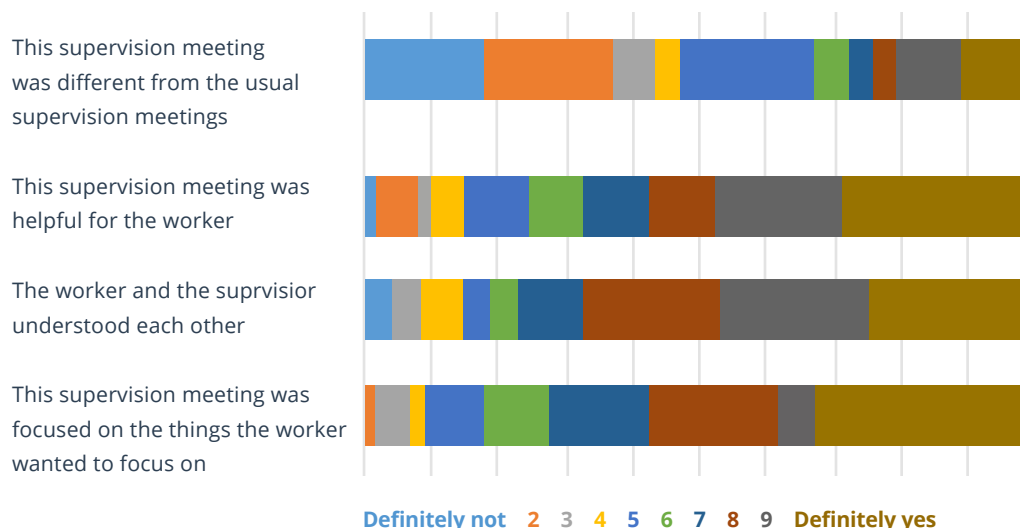
Some of the open-ended questions aimed nuance the answers regarding the supervisions' contribution for the wellbeing of the worker and the ways in which supervision is able to make a difference. Thus, the most helpful characteristics of the supervision sessions mentioned by the respondents were the empathy and emotional support, non-judgemental attitude from the supervisor and the rest of the participants, the fact that the process provides a safe space to express ideas, opinions and learn about/from other colleagues, the opportunity for reflection and looking at the cases from a new perspective and the discussions on specific cases and finding solutions/resources or at least acknowledge the fact that the same challenge is faced by other professionals too.

Supervision helps the workers to manage the emotional load and create clearer delimitations between personal and professional life. Moreover, practising reflection and a solution-oriented approach contributes to increased work quality, and the professional gains certainty regarding his/her decisions and/or choices within the cases. In addition, team-work and collaborative work style gets improved, people know each other better, understand their colleague's activity and know how they can combine their resources, knowledge and professional experience to better meet the need of their beneficiaries.

One of the final questions with predefined answers to choose from targeted the evaluation of the overall perception of the last supervision session in which the respondents participated, either as supervisors or as supervisees. To a very great extent, as reflected in the graph below, the last supervision meeting was not

different from the usual supervision meetings. Moreover, for the great majority, the meeting was focused on the things the worker wanted to focus on and was a helpful meeting for the worker. In addition, most respondents perceived that the worker and the supervisor understood each other.

Figure 9. Romanian respondents' overall perception of the last supervision session



Lastly, several ideas were also collected regarding potential improvements in the provision of supervision. These included the availability of a friendly space for the supervision session, ensuring the confidentiality and intimacy regarding the topics discussed, the availability of the team members to have regular meetings, a proper understanding of what supervision really is and its benefits, communication based on empathy, understanding and respect and building a functional relation between the supervisor and the supervised person/group. For the institutions and organisations, a great improvement would be to have financial resources dedicated to this support service.

3.4 Q-method findings at regional level¹⁰

In total, thirty-eight Q-method interviews were completed at regional level, in the countries conducting the research, with thirty-seven included in the final dataset (one had been incorrectly completed and could not be used), out of which 7 were Romanian respondents. Each participant was presented with a list of thirty-seven statements and asked to sort them into a pre-defined grid. The statements were re-used from a previous study of supervision in the UK (Pitt, 2021), and covered a variety of supervision-related areas, including the benefits of supervision for the worker, and for children and families, the ways in which supervision may help support good practice, and potential limitations. The Q-sorting procedure was treated as an interview and completed face-to-face (6 out of 7 interviews in Romania) or via Zoom (1 interview). After completion of the sort, participants

¹⁰ This section reproduces the correspondent section included in the Regional Report available at <https://childhub.org/ro/library-solr>.

were also asked six follow-up questions, whose analysis in Romania was included in the key professionals' interviews' analysis. Given that the analysis provided no national particularities this section reproduces the regional analysis made by the lead researcher in the Regional Report.

The table below provides a list of the Romanian participants in the Q-method data collection, including their professional role(s). This indicates the diversity and range of the sample for this element of the study. The regional report includes a list of all 37 participants involved in the study.

Table 2. Romanian participants in the Q-sort method

	Participant role
1	NGO director, and supervisor
2	NGO director
3	Supervisor
4	Supervisee
5	Supervisor
6	Regional director, supervisee
7	Supervisor

Principal Component analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in three distinct factors, each with an Eigenvalue of >1.0 and with at least three significant factor loadings. These factor loadings indicate the degree to which each Q-sort (and therefore each participant) is associated with each factor (table x). Correlations between the factors were moderate, falling between 0.5 and 0.6 (Dancey and Reidy, 2007). The full list of statements and the factor arrays (how they were sorted within each factor) are available in the Regional Report.

Factor analysis (what each factor represents) is based on the overall configuration of the statements, distinguishing statements, and consensus statements. Distinguishing statements are significantly unique for specific factor, while consensus statements reveal commonalities between participants irrespective of which factor they are associated with.

Consensus

Across the three factors, which between them explain around two-thirds of the variance in the data (63%), there was consensus about nine of the statements. Taken together, these indicate a shared view between participants from across the region that supervision helps with professional development, provides emotional support, and helps members of multi-disciplinary teams to reach a common understanding about families they are jointly working with. In addition, there is a consensus that supervision does not involve examining a worker's personal biases, and that it helps provide workers with solutions (addressing their questions in relation to their work).

Factor A – Helping workers identify more clearly what to do in practice

Factor A is labelled “*Helping workers identify more clearly what to do in practice*”. Participants highly associated with this factor seemed to consider supervision an important forum for thinking - especially in relation to what has gone well (and why), and about what could have gone better in practice with families. It also includes thinking about feelings in relation to how they affect the worker’s practice, more so than to provide emotional support per se. As one participant from Serbia commented, in her supervision they discuss “*what could have been different, about what to do in the future, how, [and] in what way*”. As a result, workers think more clearly, having been helped to discuss ethical issues and dilemmas and to reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions. One of the participants from Albania said that the main goals of supervision for her included “*offering a more complete panorama to see things more clearly*”, while another participant, from Bulgaria, said that supervision helps her to be “*more purposeful*”. Another, from Romania, said that supervision “brings more clarity to the work” because their supervisor is “*a specialist who is clear about what they have to do*”.

This type of supervision has its most significant impact on the worker’s decision-making (although not directly on outcomes for children and families), and the more supervision the worker receives the better. Supervision also helps workers to learn from practice, and this aids their professional development. Yet while supervision helps workers to think clearly, and requires the worker to be very self-aware, it is not always or necessarily a space for reflecting on what went wrong, for thinking curiously, for applying theory or research to practice, or for exploring multiple ways of approaching the same issue. Supervision is not primarily intended to provide a space for broader reflections on the worker’s values, anti-discriminatory practice, or relationship-based practice. It is relatively important for workers in multi-disciplinary teams, but no more so than for workers in other types of teams.

Overall, this suggests a model of supervision in which the worker is helped to think about and learn the right things to do in practice (while also being supported emotionally and to develop professionally). Factor A accounts for nearly one-third (29%) the total variance, with 15 participants significantly associated with it (5 from Kosovo, 3 from Bulgaria, 2 each from Croatia and Serbia, and 1 each from Albania, Moldova, and Romania). Thus, participants from all seven countries were associated with this factor. It is notable that all five participants from Kosovo were social workers, which might explain their very high degree of consensus about this factor. The participants from the other countries were more varied, including a university lecturer, several supervisors, a supervisee, a private practice psychologist and an NGO program coordinator. This diversity suggests that the conception of supervision represented by this factor is relatively common across the region, including between different professional groups and those in different roles as well. It may be the closest representation of the model of functional supervision referred to by several of the key interview informants, as noted to above.

Factor B – Helping workers to manage their emotions to improve outcomes for families

Factor B is labelled “Helping workers to manage their emotions to improve outcomes for families”. Participants highly associated with this factor seemed to consider supervision to be an important forum for emotional support and as a way of improving outcomes for families. One participant from Albania said that the best thing about her supervision was how it left her *“feeling good in terms of psycho-emotionally”* and how this helped her to *“offer a better and safer service”* for children and families.

This type of supervision also includes some focus on anti-discriminatory practice and more relational ways of working, as well as helping workers to apply theory to practice, and to identify what has gone well (but not why). Supervision thus provides emotional support for workers, requiring self-awareness, as well as making a difference for their decision-making. Supervision is especially important for workers in multi-disciplinary teams. One participant from Romania said that *“in group supervision as a multi-disciplinary team, it is important that all members participate”* and this demonstrates *“the value of each colleague [as] so many ideas come out, you think out loud and find a better way to approach [your work]”*. However, it is not necessarily a space for analysing the worker’s thoughts, or their values or for thinking about power imbalances between workers and families – yet it could be improved by being a more reflective space than it often is.

Overall, this suggests a model of supervision in which the primary aim is emotional support for the worker, and as a method for facilitating work between colleagues. This helps to improve outcomes for children and families, by supporting anti-discriminatory practice, helping workers apply theory to practice and by facilitating more relationship-based work. While in Factor A, the aim is on supporting workers to do the right things in practice, in Factor B there is a more explicit suggestion of what doing the right thing means – namely, being anti-discriminatory, and working in relationship-based ways. Factor B accounts for one-sixth (16%) of the total variance, with 6 participants significantly associated with it (3 from Moldova, and 1 each from Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania). No participants from Croatia, Kosovo or Serbia were associated with this factor, suggesting that country-of-origin may be influential to some extent.

Factor C – Helping workers to understand children and families

Factor C is labelled “Helping workers to understand children and families”. Participants highly associated with this factor seemed to consider supervision to be an important forum for developing understanding. Supervision benefits the worker, via emotional support and professional development, but it primarily aims to improve outcomes for children and families. It does so by helping workers develop a better understanding of children and families, especially in the context of multi-disciplinary teams, and of considering different ways of approaching the same problem. One participant from Romania, a supervisor, said that *“at the beginning, [the worker] comes and says, this is the law, this is what I do, [but] afterwards they go through the reflection process and think about other options and solutions”*. Supervision thus helps workers do their jobs more effectively and is one of the most important components of good practice. As one participant from

Bulgaria said, *“supervision helps me feel like a human, such as a human with value, that I am doing well and being useful”*. It also helps to some extent in applying theory and research knowledge to practice. Despite how helpful it can be, workers may sometimes avoid supervision, even though it does not require a great deal of self-awareness on their part or involve an examination of their personal biases or taken-for-granted assumptions about how society works.

Overall, this suggests a model of supervision in which the primary aim is to develop the worker's understanding of children and families, so that they can address problems in more varied ways. Factor C accounts for one-sixth (18%) the total variance, with 6 participants significantly associated with it (2 each from Albania and Romania, and 1 each from Bulgaria, and Moldova). No participants from Croatia, Kosovo or Serbia were associated with this factor, suggesting again that country-of-origin may be influential to some extent.

Summary

Overall, the Q-method data suggests there is a primary view of supervision across the region, focused on helping workers to do the right things well in their practice. By itself, Factor A accounts for one-third of the total variance. However, this also means that although Factor A may represent a significant proportion of people's views, there are more people who would disagree with it. The other two factors summarised here between account for another one-third of the total variance and represent subtly different conceptions of what supervision is and what it is for. Factor B emphasises more the need to support workers emotionally, while Factor C emphasises more the need to help workers understand the families they work with. That being said, it is also important to recognise the consensus that exists between all the Q-method participants, particularly in relation to the role of supervision for development, support, and practice. The differences identified here between participants are thus ones of degree, rather than disagreement.

3.5 Overall summary of findings

This research, involving more than 65 Romanian respondents, all professionals working in social services addressed to different vulnerability categories (mainly in child protection), involved as supervisors, or supervised in the process, revealed several important conclusions.

First and foremost, the research in Romania showed that there is no clear understanding over the process of supervision and the conceptual delimitation becomes stringent to be addressed at different levels. If only the senior social worker has the capacity and the authority to supervise another social worker or the entire team this is part of, who can supervise the rest of the multidisciplinary team?

The study identified two kinds of supervision: professional and functional. It appears that the professional one is conducted exclusively by the senior social worker, exclusively for the other social workers, while the functional one brings a broader approach, by integrating the entire multidisciplinary team and by being focused on emotions management within the professional context. It is also

concluded that supervision itself, as a process, must be clarified and well defined, within one single formula, which covers the need in its complexity, while avoiding confusion.

Professional supervision is mainly understood and internalized as a process focused on professionalisation, on identification and development of the technical competences, so much needed in social work. In addition to this, except the mentoring function, it is obvious that the professionals working in social services, being confronted on a daily basis with inadequacy, vulnerability, suffering, trauma, illness, segregation etc, do need a safe space for ventilation, at personal or collective level, do need a facilitated discussion for them to understand the effect of their work on themselves and to manage its emotional load. From this perspective, supervision would significantly contribute to building and promoting the culture of self-care in social work.

Supervision, even if officially recognized as a profession in Romania, is not clarified within the applicable legislation as process, clear objectives, and requirements. Supervision is referred to and encouraged by current legislation, but not particularly defined, nor foreseen as mandatory. Moreover, supervision is not well known in the Romanian system of social services and increasing awareness becomes compulsory in the perspective of quality standards and assured quality of social work. Very (too) often, supervision is saw only as a formal process, which can be skipped or overlooked, or, even more often, can be taken over by the manager (hierarchical superior) and integrated with one of the management functions.



In addition to the conclusions already pointed out above, this final section provides a discussion regarding the main conclusions and challenges emerged from the research, together with the correspondent recommendations for the improvement of the supervision processes in Romania. The main points refer to finding a common understanding of the supervision process, accessing supervision, the difficulties and achievements of the supervision process, fostering the culture of self-care in Romanian society, training in supervision and the confusion of roles.

Finding a common understanding over the supervision process is essential for it to be legally regulated. Supervision is expected to serve its main goal, to increase the quality of social work, by boosting the social intervention, while the professional preserves his own balance and capabilities, in order to offer the needed help in an ethical manner. Finding different names for supervision will not solve the problem, nor facilitate its acceptance and integration in social work. This can be achieved by using its exhaustive definition and by promotion, as a collaborative effort.

Accessing supervision with openness and consequence determines an articulated process of self-development and this is a very strong argument which should determine its promotion, especially by the social organizations, which have the responsibility of introducing the process in the right way and to create proper needed contexts. The respondents in Romania clearly pointed out that initially, those involved in supervision did not know exactly what to expect from these sessions, what exactly the supervision entails and how this support service can be useful to them. Another expectation was that the supervision should have offered a training course or a context of discussion in which they could have received clear instructions and answers from the supervisor.

During the supervision sessions, **difficulties** were encountered with the honest expression of needs and dissatisfaction. Another challenging aspect was listening to the opinions of other members of the team and accepting them when they disagreed with their own ideas or perceptions. An often-mentioned change highlighted the improvement of the communication process within the team or group, as a result of attended supervision sessions. Supervisors have helped to the development of the ability to actively listen, receive, and provide feedback. Emotional regulation was one of the main changes on which the respondents insisted. Participants learned details about their colleagues' activities, better understood their work contexts, were able to contribute with different solutions or approaches. Among the resources activated by the participants in the supervision were availability, attention, professionalism and sharing of relevant professional

experiences. Communication and openness were the most common answers, in terms of gaining. In addition, emphasis was placed on empathy, confidentiality, and honesty. Therefore, the organizations should be equally responsible to facilitate the integration of supervision in the daily work practice, significantly contributing to a participatory organizational culture.

An important aspect to be discussed is the lack of **the culture of self-care** in Romanian society. In Romania, as in many other East European countries, historically and culturally speaking, people were and still are not used to reflect, to practice presence, to practice the willingness to confront themselves with the effect of their choices and of the daily work on them. Even in organizations in which staff's access to supervision, coaching, counselling is affordable, the professionals are the ones not recognizing the need, acting with avoidance, and not attending the sessions. Therefore, one of the main important steps is building the selfcare culture, both at organizational and systemic level. Proper and clear legislative regulations, targeted advocacy work for raising awareness and sustainable systems of financing at national level would significantly contribute to building a self-care culture, as essential premises for supervision. This would serve to supporting the practitioners at a professional and personal level through specialised services, taking attractive forms for professionals, in order to reduce the number of specialised staff who end up leaving the field before their time as a result of burn-out or accumulated frustration, or who end up lowering ethical standards of practice.

The **training program in supervision**, as it is regulated nowadays, is a long lasting one, implying costs which are difficult to be covered by the professionals in the social sector. Consequently, there is a special need of flexible and relevant-on-the-job training pathways (up-skilling) for the professionals, which imply finding a sustainable form of financing. It is important to mention that, in Romania, the professionals in the social sector cannot pay for the supervision, since the level of their salary payment does not allow this, nor can these services be delegated to organisations, which, unlike those in the business sector, do not have the necessary strength to organise and finance internal programmes with an impact. Moreover, it is pointed out the need of these disadvantages small, grassroots organisations in rural areas, where intervention is most needed. The idea would be to create mechanisms to fund such capacity building programmes, especially by the local authorities and public responsible institutions.

A final point is the one regarding the **confusion of roles**. At national level, the supervision is very often understood and integrated as a management function, consequently it is conducted, in these particular situations, by the manager or the hierarchical superior. Not even in the ideal situations of a participative leadership, very much focused on empowerment and participation, the manager can provide supervision, considering his/her role, level of responsibility and professional objectives. Supervision is underlined as offering a confidential context and a process which gives space for free expression of thoughts, doubts, frustrations, fears, negative emotions. The manager can easily be a mentor, as it is also highly recommended, but not a supervisor. The objectivity and neutrality arose as mostly important to be assured within the process of supervision, as main conditions. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to clarify how the supervision must be conducted and also by whom.

5

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NATIONAL REPORT ON SUPERVISION

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ROMANIA

Belgrade, 2022.