

PT1

# INTRODUCTION TO SECTION I

## *Social Work Education's Response to Inequality*

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PT1P1 The chapters in this section explore how and to what extent social work educational programs around the globe contribute to reducing inequality (United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10). Social work operates in a world where people interact with the structure and systems that either support their development or become an obstacle to their growth. The values of the social work profession are based on the understanding that these structures and circumstances affect people and their lives and that the choices people make in their lives are influenced by the system and the society in which they live. Thus, it is important to address the systemic inequality that leads to social problems and instability. Social work education programs around the globe need to align their curriculum, pedagogy, and practice teaching methods to prepare well-qualified and skilled social work professionals to address increasing inequality within and among countries and communities. This section of the book includes 10 well-researched chapters that discuss how social work educational programs can contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (specifically Goal 10, reduced inequality) by educating and skilling graduates through an inequality-centered curriculum, pedagogy, and practice. A search of the literature reveals that various topics related to inequality are being researched and studied across educational disciplines because there are few discussions on how to teach and prepare social work graduates to respond to inequality in our global society. The chapters in this section address this gap and will facilitate future research and deliberation on social work education in response to inequality.

- PT1P2 Open classroom discussion on inequality is needed now more than ever before. Our students live in a society that celebrates privilege. Furthermore, there is a general tendency that most students who enroll in social work post-graduate programs do not have a social work educational background. In this environment, developing empathy and responsiveness to social problems and the suffering they witness in the world is a fundamental task of social work teaching. This can be done in several ways. First, educational institutions can provide dedicated courses in social work teaching programs at all levels of study that focus primarily on various forms of inequality and their impact on human life. Second, students can be given the opportunity to undertake their practice learning in organizations that work with different vulnerable groups so they are exposed to the multiple sufferings and disparities experienced by our society. The learning experiences that social work students obtain from their educational programs shape their perspectives on various challenges faced by individuals in our society.
- PT1P3 Chapter 2, by Shorena Sadzaglshvili and Ketevan Lekishvili, outlines the unique experiences derived from the Georgian interuniversity collaborative project. The authors argue that the collaboration between social work and psychology programs fosters innovation in service delivery and intervention strategies. To increase responsibility, sensitivity, and empathy among students, it is important to create a collaborative environment in which social work graduates learn through observations and experiences. In Chapter 3, Maik Arnold advocates for incorporating critical perspectives into social work management education to prepare students for adaptive leadership and policy advocacy. Policy advocacy and leadership qualities are important skill sets that have been required for bringing social change and addressing the systemic inequality that has persisted in most countries for centuries. We live in a neoliberal society where profit controls the production and welfare of people, which remains a low priority for administrations. In this situation, it is important to educate social work students in skills such as critical reflection, cultural competence, and community engagement to serve the neediest populations in global society. The development of a sense of sensitivity toward different vulnerable groups is possible through a well-developed curriculum, pedagogy, and practice settings. To address the widening income gap, wealth inequality, and the unequal distribution of opportunities and welfare, social workers, as members of a human service and human rights profession, need to prepare their workforce in the 21st century.

- PT1P4 In Chapter 4), “Teaching Social Workers to Act in an Unequal Society,” Stavros K. Paralis outlines some useful advice for social work educators to make social work education inclusive, comprehensive, and responsive to social issues and challenges. The chapter provides insights into incorporating social justice into pedagogy through critical social work perspectives and intersectionality, representing diversity and inclusion in the social work curriculum, incorporating experiential learning opportunities to students, encouraging reflective practices, and promoting research and evaluation. In Chapter 5, Adi Fahrudin, Husmiati Yusuf, and Kus Hanna Rahmi ask the fundamental question, “Does social work operate in an unequal and unfair world?” They succeed in responding to this question by outlining how and to what extent social work responds to inequality and unfair treatment in our society. The authors argue that social work educational programs should teach societal structural injustices such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism because this would make the learners sensitive and responsive to the situation in a larger society. To make social work an inclusive and responsive profession, it is also important to emphasize antioppressive practices in social work education, which include identifying and criticizing oppressive structures and advocating for change.
- PT1P5 Neoliberalism and globalization have had profound impacts on the service delivery and welfare of people who are poor and vulnerable. We are witnessing pay cuts, the shuttering of services, and reduced benefits for the neediest people around the globe. As a result, we have been challenged to find new ways of providing welfare, support, and provisions to poor, vulnerable, and marginalized communities across nation-states. To prepare our workforce for a new society, we need to follow new ways of educating and training. In Chapter 6, Roshini Pillay outlines the educational potential of podcasts in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has restricted student mobility and the learning space. Using experiences from one of the most unequal societies, South Africa, the author argues that “when employed intentionally, educational podcasts have the potential to provide students with an engaging and interactive learning experience, increase motivation, and keep students connected to their studies beyond the classroom” (p. x). In our changing world, it is imperative that social workers find new ways of educating their learners. Social work learning was greatly impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic because of its “field”-based orientation. Students were unable to undertake fieldwork because administrations around the

globe imposed lockdowns and mobility restrictions to curb the virus; hence social work had to migrate to online fieldwork learning.

PT1P6 The social work curriculum must include extensive content on various forms of discrimination that have been present in our society since time immemorial. Although there is a difference in the way people are discriminated against in developed and developing societies, discrimination on the basis of race and color is prevalent in both developing and developed societies. Most developed countries discriminate against people on the basis of class and economic gains, whereas in developing and less-developed economies, people are discriminated against on the basis of their caste, class, and geographical location. In Chapter 7, Sharif Haider presents the findings of a research study that investigated how social work educators used a virtual reality simulation to teach social work students to understand the nature, process, and intersectionality of different forms of discrimination, such as racism, Islamophobia, sexism, and poverty, at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels, as well as how they need to confront these discriminations in their social work practice. This discussion opens new avenues for teaching and learning methodologies for social work in the 21st century that will help learners better understand societal dynamics and discriminations in their various forms.

PT1P7 In Chapter 8, Gülten Uçan and Cemre Bolgün present the findings of an action research study that explored how to integrate advocacy through media and critical media literacy skills into undergraduate social work professional education. Advocacy is the most powerful and effective tool social workers can use to achieve positive and visible changes in our global society. To make advocacy a widely used tool of social work practice, it needs to be taught and practiced at various levels of social work education. On the basis of the findings of this study, given the opportunity for learning through teamwork, assignments, and research projects, social work students clearly demonstrate an enhanced ability to understand and apply media as a tool for gaining the professional skills required for social work practice.

PT1P8 The most pressing challenge for social work in the early 21st century is to prepare social work graduates who are ready to serve in the most demanding humanitarian crisis situations, such as disasters, war-affected areas, and people who are experiencing extreme poverty and inequality, alongside a number of health and well-being challenges experienced throughout the world on a daily basis. Social work practices in the 21st century are transforming along with a transformation in terms of technology, economic

growth, and the changing demands of service users and providers. However, social work as a human service profession should have a profound interest in the marginalized and vulnerable groups of society, who are deprived of modern technological and economic advancements. In (Chapter 9, Annie Townsend and Zoe Brennan provide a useful account of “how reflexive practice can be utilized to help facilitate meaningful engagement with students on colonialism and localization” in social work field education and practice learning. The authors argue that the most important thing social work educators should do is support and inspire students to practice social work in humanitarian contexts in complex societies experiencing poverty, inequality, and vulnerability. In the concluding chapter of this section, Chapter 10, Paula Sousa, Daniela Monteiro, Hélia Bracons, and José Luís Almeida discuss an important issue related to raising awareness around demystifying and deconstructing stereotypes and prejudices in the professional education process of social work students, specifically those associated with poverty and poor populations. Poverty and its ill effects have long been at the forefront of academic discussion; however, there are few evidence-based research and practice guidelines for working with people affected by poverty and inequality in social work and other allied social science disciplines that are part of the human service profession. Poverty in the 21st century is seen as an economic aspect, and the cultural, political, and demographic aspects of poverty are not given the required emphasis in academic learning. This chapter aids in understanding the perceptions of poverty by social work students in the European Union and thereby helps in developing social work educational programs focused on poverty and inequality.



## 2

## C2 **Implementing Innovative Projects for Social Work and Psychology Academic Programs**

### Learning Labs for Equal Rights

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C2S1

#### **Introduction**

C2P1 This chapter endeavors to provide an illustration of the implementation of learning labs at Ilia State University and Gori State University. The objective is to foster a human rights approach within the education of social work and psychology students, thereby enhancing their capacity to deliver services to people with disabilities.

C2P2 Social work programs prepare students to work effectively with people with disabilities through a multifaceted approach that combines theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and hands-on experience (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). It is critical to teach coursework that covers disability studies, including theories of disability, social models, and intersectionality. These courses provide students with a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental factors that impact individuals with disabilities. In addition, social work is practical profession that integrates theoretical courses with practice. Therefore, field placement is critical for social work students to develop their competencies (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Students engage in field placements called internships in settings that serve people with disabilities, such as rehabilitation centers, special education programs, or disability advocacy organizations. These placements

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offer hands-on experience working directly with individuals with disabilities under the supervision of experienced professionals.

C2P3 At field placements, students are required to receive training in assessments and interventions. They learn assessment techniques and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of people with disabilities. This includes understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, advocating for their rights, and promoting their autonomy and independence (Reamer, 2013).

C2P4 As Sales (2004) underlined, cultural competency and sensitivity are the most important competencies that are developed in practice. Students are trained to approach their work with cultural competency and sensitivity, recognizing the diversity within the disability community. This includes understanding the experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Within this context, legal and ethical issues are also considered. In particular, social work programs cover legal and ethical issues related to working with people with disabilities, including confidentiality, informed consent, and disability rights legislation, as well as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA—inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility). The IDEA method, which focuses on inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, is a comprehensive approach to creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. Inclusion promotes a sense of belonging and value for all employees, fostering a culture where diverse perspectives are embraced and everyone feels included. Diversity refers to seeking differences in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives with the aim to build a workforce that reflects a variety of characteristics and attributes. Equity ensures fairness and impartiality in policies, practices, and resource distribution, addressing systemic barriers and promoting equal opportunities for all individuals. It is critical to create a workplace that is physically and digitally accessible, accommodating diverse needs and ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate and contribute (Sales, 2004).

C2P5 Finally, a collaboration and interdisciplinary approach allows social work programs to emphasize collaboration with other professionals, such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, and educators, to provide comprehensive support to individuals with disabilities. This interdisciplinary approach ensures holistic care and addresses the diverse needs of clients.

- C2P6 Two Georgian universities—Iliia State University and Gori State University—in collaboration with international partners are in charge of the new project, which aims to establish university laboratories where interdisciplinary work is done by social work (master of social work program) and psychology academic programs (bachelor and master of psychology programs) together. The project commenced in September 2023 and will end in February 2025.
- C2P7 In Georgia, the field of social work dedicated to supporting disabled individuals has seen significant development in recent years. Although social workers have been active across various sectors for nearly 25 years, since the early 2000s, their involvement in interventions for people with disabilities remains comparatively underdeveloped. Broadly, social work practices in Georgia tend to be implemented on a general level, with interventions arising sporadically and in response to specific needs. Conversely, there exists a more established profession in the realm of child care (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2021).
- C2P8 Regarding the employment of disabled individuals, it is evident that social workers play an indispensable role in providing support throughout the process. For instance, in 2021, the Association of Social Workers of Georgia conducted a study on the challenges faced by disabled individuals in employment. Participants highlighted that they require support not only at the workplace but also during the job search process. They emphasized that current employment procedures often do not accommodate their rights, necessitating the assistance of professionals who can advocate for those rights and aid in the employment process. In fact, the state currently lacks sufficient experience in this domain, highlighting the need to establish practices and conduct studies that can offer both scientific and practical insights into this issue (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2021). The development of social work in this direction will in turn help to develop a new direction for the profession; social workers will be given the opportunity to use new interventions in their work environment and promote employment and, at the same time, new experiences will foster the process of developing the role of the social worker in multidisciplinary settings.
- C2P9 We must also discuss the problem of employment of people with disabilities in Georgia. According to a report from the public defender's office, the recommendations given to Georgia in 2016 (Public Defender of Georgia, 2016) remain valid in 2022. For example, the ombudsman, a government position associated with a specific office, stated in 2022 that

“despite the existence of developed legislation and implemented programs, the employment situation for disabled individuals has not shown significant improvement and the majority of them remain unemployed” (Khomeriki, 2022). The ombudsman office of Georgia emphasized that the challenges are particularly acute in workplaces, where employers often lack awareness of how to adapt the work environment for persons with disabilities. Simultaneously, persons with disabilities may struggle to navigate these situations effectively. This issue is especially critical when considering individuals with intellectual disabilities and their employment prospects. As a result, there is a high rate of persons with disabilities leaving the workplace (Khomeriki, 2022).

- C2P10 Disability social work is a specialized field within social work dedicated to enhancing the well-being of individuals with disabilities, whether physical, intellectual, or developmental. Professionals in this field, often referred to as social workers for adults with disabilities or disability case managers, serve as vital advocates for individuals with disabilities and their families. They specialize in delivering social services, assisting individuals in navigating available resources, enhancing quality of life, and advocating for the rights of adults with disabilities. Additionally, they play a pivotal role in facilitating access to government support for individuals with disabilities and addressing issues pertaining to social security return-to-work regulations and programs (The Complete Resource Guide for People With Disabilities, 2024).
- C2P11 A social worker can also offer crucial support to parents and family members of persons with disabilities in promoting the employment opportunities of the individual, thereby facilitating their freedom of choice. The social worker can also assist the individual directly in various aspects of the employment process. This assistance may include aiding individuals in finding suitable job opportunities, guiding them in preparing a résumé or supported individualized plan, navigating job search portals effectively, and facilitating communication with government agencies to navigate bureaucratic processes.
- C2P12 Once an individual is employed, the social worker can continue to provide assistance by facilitating communication with the employer and identifying any additional support needs. Collaborating with professionals such as psychologists, occupational therapists, or workplace support personnel may also be part of the social worker’s role. The social worker’s responsibilities

may encompass safeguarding the rights of the individual, assessing their ongoing needs, supporting their social integration, and addressing any other relevant concerns (Stevens & Harris, 2017).

C2S2

### **Importance of Collaboration Between Social Work and Psychology Academic Programs**

C2P13 Collaboration between social work and psychology academic programs is crucial for providing comprehensive support to people with disabilities. This collaboration allows professionals from both disciplines to combine their expertise in understanding and addressing the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. This collaboration is beneficial for establishing the best platform for future professionals working with people with disabilities. The following are some benefits of this interdisciplinary approach:

1. *Possibility of holistic assessment:* Social workers and psychologists bring different perspectives to the assessment process. While social workers may focus on environmental factors and social support systems, psychologists may delve into cognitive and emotional functioning. By collaborating, they can conduct a holistic assessment that considers both the individual's personal strengths and the systemic barriers they face (Hepworth et al., 2017).
2. *Integrated intervention planning:* Collaboration enables the development of integrated intervention plans that address the complex needs of individuals with disabilities. Social workers may focus on linking clients to community resources and support services, while psychologists may provide counseling or therapeutic interventions. Together, they can create a comprehensive plan that promotes the individual's well-being and maximizes their potential for success (Bogo et al., 2019).
3. *Interdisciplinary training:* Collaborative initiatives between social work and psychology programs can provide interdisciplinary training opportunities for students. These initiatives may include joint coursework, field placements, or research projects that allow students to learn from each other's perspectives and develop collaborative skills that are essential for effective practice (Regehr & Glancy, 2020).

4. *Research and evaluation*: Collaboration between social work and psychology researchers can advance knowledge in the field of disability studies. By combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, researchers can explore the effectiveness of interventions, identify best practices, and contribute to evidence-based practice guidelines (Trochim, 2006).

- C2P14 The lack of collaboration between social work and psychology programs can lead to challenges in the real workplace when working with clients with disabilities. Without interdisciplinary training and coordinated efforts, professionals may struggle to provide comprehensive support that addresses the multifaceted needs of individuals with disabilities.
- C2P15 When social work and psychology programs operate independently, there is a risk of fragmented services for clients with disabilities. Social workers may focus primarily on practical support, such as access to benefits or housing, while psychologists may focus on therapeutic interventions. Without collaboration, clients may receive disjointed care that fails to address the full scope of their needs (Bogo et al., 2019).
- C2P16 Lack of collaboration can result in communication barriers between professionals from different disciplines. Social workers and psychologists may use different terminology, assessment tools, or intervention approaches, making it challenging to communicate effectively and coordinate care plans (Regehr & Glancy, 2020).
- C2P17 In the absence of collaboration, social workers and psychologists may duplicate efforts or overlook important aspects of clients' needs. For example, both professionals may conduct separate assessments without sharing information, leading to redundant assessments and wasted resources. This duplication can also cause confusion for clients and may contribute to a lack of continuity in care (Hepworth et al., 2017).
- C2P18 Collaboration between social work and psychology programs fosters innovation in service delivery and intervention strategies. Without interdisciplinary collaboration, professionals may miss opportunities to learn from each other's expertise and develop innovative approaches to address the complex needs of clients with disabilities (Regehr & Glancy, 2020).
- C2P19 Working in silos can limit professional growth and development for social workers and psychologists. Collaborative environments offer opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, skill development, and mentorship, which are essential for enhancing the quality of services provided to clients with disabilities (Bogo et al., 2019).

- C2P20 The above-mentioned consequences of the lack of collaboration between social work and psychology programs in the real workplace underscore the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation in providing effective support to clients with disabilities.
- C2P21 There is an added benefit of collaboration between social work and psychology academic programs because social work is a new profession in Georgia, and there is little experience for professional contacts between social work and psychology practitioners, as well as between teachers and students. This project aims to meet the demands of the labor market and serve the employment of people with disabilities who are age 18 and older and increase their quality of life.
- C2P22 Within this project, social workers as well as psychologists are encouraged to engage in continuing education and professional development opportunities to remain current with regard to best practices and emerging trends in disability services (Stancliffe & Lakin, 2011).

C2S3 **Prior Experience of Ilia State University and Gori State University**

- C2P23 The strategy of Ilia State University includes developing the third mission of the university that is a responsibility of the university for the well-being of society by providing care for people with disabilities and adapting the educational and working environment for them.
- C2P24 In 2001, Ilia State University (the former Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani Institute), in collaboration with the University of Scranton (Scranton, Pennsylvania, United States), developed a rehabilitation-teaching practice center that served to prepare students in the field of special education and social inclusion. Based on this experience, from 2003 to 2007, the Tempus project Occupational Therapy Implementation at the Higher Educational Level was implemented at Ilia State University. One of the results of this project was the development of the Copy-Shop Center for young people with disabilities who are age 18 and older. Through the support of the Ministry of Culture, beneficiaries are also involved in inclusive art projects.
- C2P25 Since 2019, Ilia State University has been involved in the Eurasian project Building Bridges—Development of Practice-Based Higher Education in Social Pedagogy as a Tool for Social Reforms and Inclusion of Persons With Disabilities in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Norway (CPEA-LT-2017/10043) within the framework of the university module Social

Pedagogy in Social Work. The students in the master’s program of social work and the bachelor’s and/or master’s programs of psychology were involved in integrated practice with partner organizations: the Child Development Institute, the Union for People in Need of Special Care, the Free Pedagogy Center, and the Signagi Region Socially Disadvantaged Therapy Union–“Kedeli.” During the practice period, students worked with people with disabilities, and during the teaching period they performed a number of tasks and activities together; as a result, the students learned and developed strength in a number of competencies. This project established a collaboration between the social work program and psychology programs within the university.

C2P26 The strategy of Gori State University also includes the development of the viable third mission and, accordingly, using the knowledge and expertise accumulated in the university space to establish democratic values in society and promote the development of society. During the past 2 years, Gori State University has participated in several third mission projects, among which are two ongoing projects: (a) Strengthening University Capacity for Supporting Inclusive Preschool and General Education, funded by the United Nations Children’s Fund, and (b) Supporting Diversity and Distinct Opportunities by Promoting Social Inclusion, funded by the U.S. Embassy in Georgia. In reference to the first project, Gori State University as an institution tried to apply and promote inclusive education-related methodology and strategies in various activities and services through regular teaching processes for preservice and in-service teachers. In the case of the second project, Gori State University aimed to create an adapted space for persons with disabilities, where students with disabilities and special educational needs will be able to improve their social, academic, and emotional skills.

C2P27 Accordingly, Ilia State University, in collaboration with Gori State University and international partners, is implementing a project that will meet the demands of the labor market by introducing an innovative learning/teaching environment for psychology and social work students.

C2S4

### **Project Aims and Objectives**

C2P28 According to Resolution 451 of the government of Georgia of September 7, 2021, there is a need to develop an environment adapted for people with

disabilities in Georgia. According to the existing situational analysis, the rate of employment of persons with disabilities is very low, which is due to the following factors:

- persons with disabilities are less competitive in the labor market;
- there is a lack of psychoemotional support specialists; and
- there is difficulty including persons with disabilities in workplaces from the point of view of their socialization.

C2P29 Accordingly, the aim the Learning Labs for Equal Rights project is to meet the demands of the labor market by introducing innovative learning/teaching methods and segmental intersection of adjacent existing academic programs, which will serve the employment of people with disabilities age 18 and older and increase their quality of life.

C2P30 The project aims to promote the training of relevant specialists who will develop practical skills and will later be employed in organizations interested in employing people with disabilities, and the existing educational programs will be improved and better adapted to the needs of the labor market. In addition, using smart technologies, existing knowledge will be disseminated to and/or shared with other organizations that are interested in integrating persons with disabilities in the working environment to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 451.

C2P31 The framework of the project will include an interdisciplinary educational curriculum that envisions students of social work and psychology developing the competencies that will enable them to create supported employment opportunities for persons with disabilities who are age 18 and older at both Ilia State University and Gori State University, their affiliated organizations and/or centers, and other similar places of employment. In this manner, they will contribute to the involvement of persons with disabilities in the community.

C2P32 The implementation of this project is in line with the goals of the Vocational Skills Agency, which focuses on improved organization of inclusive education in vocational education institutions. Within the framework of the project, an electronic portal will be created for interested organizations, where an evidence-based model of employment of persons with disabilities in the workplace and involvement in the professional community (algorithms for adjusting skills and work tasks) will be shared.

C2S5 **Establishment of Laboratories/Hubs for Supporting Employment of Persons With Disabilities on the Premises of Ilia State University and Gori State University**

C2P33 Multidisciplinary/multiprofessional Learning Practical Laboratories, called hubs, have been established at Ilia State and Gori State Universities to promote employment in the higher education system. This activity includes the development of laboratories by purchasing appropriate inventory and hiring appropriate personnel. Eight laboratories have been established.

C2P34 Four laboratories are organized at Ilia State University:

1. Polygraph Shop for publishing, printing, design, and photocopying
2. Healthy Food Corner, a café for university students and staff
3. Fine Art Lab, encompassing a number of activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and wooden products manufacturing
4. Meeting Garden, which hosts social activities and functions as an inclusive space for dynamic experience and personal growth

C2P35 Four laboratories are organized at Gori State University:

1. Traditional Gastronomy, a bread-baking laboratory
2. Vineyard, caring for fruit trees
3. Winemaking
4. Computer Lab

C2P36 Each laboratory employs two job coaches (a person who has experience working with people with disabilities), a teacher of the relevant crafts, two or three persons with disabilities, five to seven psychology students, and one social work student.

C2P37 Recruitment of people with disabilities was provided through the support of the Legal Entity of Public Law State Employment Support Agency, which has been in operation since January 1, 2020. The agency, in line with the developed programs, creates accessible supportive services countrywide and launched various supportive mechanisms in 2021: namely, job seekers enjoy services countrywide, such as consultations and communication with the employer, consultations about career development, and supported employment. The program also includes services for persons with disabilities and persons with special educational needs who express the will and motivation to be employed. Services envisage an inclusive approach for

job seekers and active communication with employers, namely, vocational training/qualification, short courses, consultations, internships, salary subsidies to employ persons with disabilities, employment forums, and engagement of the local municipalities.

- C2P38 A total of 20 people with disabilities were employed. The main criteria were moderate or mild disability and a desire to work in the supported environment. Together with craft teachers, people with disabilities carry out various activities, conventionally including rural types of activities such as baking bread, winemaking, and tending vines, as well as more urban types of activities, such as woodworking.
- C2P39 Social work students and psychology students spend approximately 2–3 days per week working within the program over an anticipated 45 total academic weeks (three semesters) during the implementation of the project. In addition, within the framework of the project, both Ilia State University and Gori State University hired a social inclusion researcher/supervisor in the field of social pedagogy and a researcher/supervisor in the field of job analysis. All four supervisors are actively involved in assessing the functioning of persons with disabilities, breaking down each job into subtasks, developing detailed work instructions, and ultimately providing supported employment, in which the students are directly involved.

C2S6 **Conducting Practical Scientific Work on the Basis of the Laboratories for Persons With Disabilities**

- C2P40 Evidence collection is conducted in laboratories using the evidence formation framework. This five-step model of Soydan and Palinkas (Palinkas & Soydan, 2012) is used as a standard for evidence-based practice. In addition, the interaction of the evidence with the context, craft teachers, persons with disabilities, supporters of persons with disabilities, students, and supervisors is analyzed to avoid the formation of only declarative knowledge and so as not to neglect procedural and conditional knowledge. For this purpose, an internal working group is formed, within which each piece of evidence is discussed and analyzed. This will generate local evidence of best practices.
- C2P41 In a lab-based setting, students, under the guidance of academic personnel (experts) and researcher/supervisors, gather evidence that will be used to develop skill development models (determining the fit and/or relevance of skills to job type).

- C2P42 Thus, academic staff (experts), specialists (art teachers and support staff, job coach), supervisors, and students are actively involved in the evidence-building process. This process is monitored by the project leaders, who ensure the implementation of practical research in accordance with scientific standards together with other employees (from both universities) and in cooperation with international consultants.
- C2P43 Academic staff participating in the projects at both universities will improve their qualifications through trainings held by representatives of the Rudolf Steiner University College and the Spanish universities: Department of Occupational Therapy, University School of Nursing and Occupational Therapy of Terrassa, Autonomous University of Barcelona, and the Center for Sanitary and Social Studies.
- C2P44 The training topics will concern work analysis and issues of social pedagogy. Based on this experience, the academic staff will update the existing study syllabi and introduce effective teaching methods in practical and theoretical courses related to persons with disabilities. New materials will be integrated into practice teaching. In addition, students from undergraduate and graduate academic programs of related professions (psychology, social work) will be trained.

C2S7

### Teaching Methodology

- C2P45 Students' teaching is conducted using innovative methods based on project- and/or problem-based learning with real clients in a safe environment/context. In particular, innovative methods include learning at the place of employment. The "place-and-train" method is an approach used to provide job training and support to individuals with disabilities within real workplace settings. This method emphasizes hands-on learning experiences and practical skill development tailored to the specific job requirements (Makashvili, 2021). The place-and-train method involves placing individuals with disabilities directly into workplace environments, where they receive on-the-job training and support. Rather than traditional classroom-based training programs, this approach emphasizes experiential learning within authentic work settings. Trainers and supervisors work closely with participants to teach job tasks, provide feedback, and gradually increase independence until the individual can perform the job duties competently (Lombardi & Nardone, 2011).

C2P46 Also, with the approaches of social pedagogy, the trinal method is used. The trinal method, developed through the European Union research project Ceste-Net (2005–2007) and later tested in the former Soviet Union countries, aims to integrate artistic subjects and exercises with theory and practice in vocational training. It offers trainers opportunities for reflection and contributes to the research and modeling of the method. Evaluation of the projects highlighted various approaches, including using art to deepen understanding of theoretical subjects, develop professional attitudes and skills, aid in diagnostic processes, and engage with clients through artistic activities (Makashvili, 2021). The method emphasizes the role of the arts in process-oriented action, personal development, and cultural well-being, although further research is needed to explore its full potential (Bamford, 2006; Schmalenbach, 2011; van Houten, 2003). According to Vera Simakova (2021), the Blagoe delo organization implemented the trinal method in a practical setting with individuals with disabilities, providing education and training alongside craft workshops and various artistic activities, notably theater performances. The existing connection of the trinal method with the practice of Waldorf pedagogy, along with a number of ideological aspects, is due to the fact that in Waldorf schools, arts-and-crafts classes have played a very important role from the beginning. Experiencing theoretical knowledge through aesthetic feelings was an indispensable part of learning (Simakova, 2021). The following are the most important aspects of using art tools:

- in teaching, deepening of theoretical content through art tools;
- art as a means to better understand the person and art as a diagnostic tool;
- art as a means of improving the attitudes and abilities of the social teacher; and
- art as a means of working with the client.

C2P47 This practice is based on the harmonious development of the three basic abilities of a person—to feel, think, and create— and, as a result, individuals with a disability in society can be included in the following three ways:

- inclusion through creativity and communication (social-domestic communication, joint sociocultural activities, exchange of cultural products, participation in the life of the local community);

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- inclusion through teaching (acquisition of knowledge, teaching of new skills, development of abilities and social and personal competences, sharing of experience, formation of professional competences); and
- inclusion through labor (process of joint labor activity, exchange of labor products, provision of services and exchange of services).

C2P48 This approach garnered significant success and sparked widespread interest in the other regions. Using the above-mentioned methods, the goals of IDEA are achieved, which implies student-centered teaching, students' free choice, and self-determination (self-management). The student is considered a social actor.

C2P49 Students will practice at the universities' disability-friendly employment labs/hubs, using innovative teaching methods that involve project-based, problem-solving learning with real clients in a safe environment, resulting in increased employability for students in related professions through the development of their unique competencies. Such an approach will provide a unique opportunity for psychology and social work students to work in multiteams, sharing and complementing knowledge and receiving professional supervision. Psychology and social work students will undergo international training provided by international project consultants.

C2P50 Labs are used for social work and psychology students as a place for practice, where an analysis of various jobs for disabled people is prepared, specific work-related skills of people with disabilities are determined, and social integration and the involvement of these individuals in the supportive community are ensured.

### C2S8 **Assignments for Social Work Students and Their Performance**

C2P51 Having social work students gain practical experience with individuals with disabilities in a supported work environment is invaluable. By interacting directly with individuals with intellectual disabilities, students can develop a deeper appreciation for their unique needs, strengths, and capabilities. Moreover, practical experience allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life scenarios, strengthening their skills in assessment, intervention, and advocacy. Working with people with disabilities also enhances students' cultural competence because they learn to navigate diverse backgrounds and perspectives within this population.

- C2P52 Additionally, hands-on experience fosters critical thinking and problem-solving abilities as students encounter various situations requiring creative and adaptable approaches. This exposure prepares them for the complexities of the field and equips them with the confidence to address the multifaceted needs of individuals with disabilities.
- C2P53 At Ilia State University, the social work program offers students a wide array of practical opportunities. Drawing from past experiences in supporting individuals with disabilities in employment, the current project offers four social work students an excellent practice placement that allows them to gain practical experience and develop their skills in delivering social work services to individuals with disabilities while promoting their inclusion in the working environment.
- C2P54 The Practice Learning Agreement encompassed several crucial learning activities aimed at preparing students for their practical work, particularly concerning individuals with disabilities and the role of social workers in this context, and supervising their practice. To achieve this objective, several learning activities were meticulously planned:
1. *Understanding individuals with disabilities:* This activity focused on delving into the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities, exploring the challenges they face in Georgia, and understanding their perspectives. To facilitate this, students engaged with literature addressing disabilities and studies highlighting challenges and successes within the Georgian context and watched videos to prompt discussions. These discussions, held during meetings with the practice supervisor, encouraged deeper exploration of the subject matter.
  2. *Familiarization with legal frameworks:* This activity aimed to acquaint students with the legal documentation concerning individuals with disabilities in Georgia. Understanding the rights of disabled individuals, both within the workplace and in society at large, is vital for social workers to effectively identify and address instances of rights violations. To facilitate this, the practice leader delivered a presentation on key documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities and relevant Georgian laws. Furthermore, students were encouraged to independently study these documents, prepare presentations, and raise questions to clarify any unclear or intriguing aspects. At the same time, students were introduced to research

regarding the rights of people with disabilities in Georgia (e.g., reading reports from the public defender's office).

3. *Discussing various types of disabilities*: Practice students were assigned the task of preparing presentations centered on this topic, emphasizing the significance of empowerment and the role of social work in assisting individuals with disabilities.
4. *Self-reflection*: The next activity entailed students engaging in self-reflection to identify their strengths as future social workers. They were also prompted to analyze the internal challenges associated with implementing social work practices with individuals with disabilities.
5. *Project activities*: The following activity aimed to analyze these self-reflections. The objective of this phase was to familiarize students with the project's goals and objectives while discussing their potential roles. To achieve this, students were encouraged to actively participate in scheduled project meetings.
6. *Supporting people with disabilities in the working environment*: The subsequent activity focused on the role of social work in facilitating the employment of individuals with disabilities. To achieve this, students were tasked with acquainting themselves with the challenges associated with the employment of persons with disabilities. Additionally, they engaged in discussions with their supervisors regarding the role of social work in addressing these challenges.
7. Subsequent activities were aimed at facilitating discussions concerning students' practical work experiences.

C2P55 Within the aforementioned activities, students acquired a deeper understanding of the constraints faced by individuals with disabilities. They gained insights about how to empower people with disabilities, the protection of their rights, and the challenges they encounter, both domestically and internationally. Engaging with relevant and important literature and research reports further enriched their knowledge base. Moreover, students improved their communication skills and familiarized themselves with protocols for interacting with individuals with disabilities. Additionally, they explored vital topics such as employment-related issues and the role of social workers in the workplace.

C2P56 Through self-reflection, students demonstrated a strong interest in working with individuals with disabilities and expressed a keen motivation to expand their knowledge in this area. However, they also acknowledged

encountering challenges, particularly in communication and conflict resolution, stemming from their lack of prior experience in this field. The researcher/supervisor addressed these concerns with the group, facilitating discussions on potential solutions and providing guidance through separate assignments.

C2P57 Students shared observations from their workplace interactions, highlighting the strengths of individuals with disabilities. For instance, those employed in kitchen roles showcased exemplary communication skills and a keen enthusiasm for learning and development. Individuals in the publishing workshop exhibited a passion for design and expressed a desire to delve deeper into publishing work. Overall, students noted a high level of motivation among all employees to actively contribute to the workplace. Furthermore, the students actively contributed to the development of an assessment form tailored to evaluate social and other needs of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. They demonstrated their commitment by expressing readiness to utilize the questionnaire in future assessments.

### C2S9 **Assignments for Psychology Students and Their Performance**

C2P58 There are about 32 psychology students involved in four laboratories of 20 people in supported employment. Students are also required to take a course called Inclusive Education.

C2P59 The leader of the course allocated a significant amount of time during the inclusive meetings to discuss the topics initiated by the project leader herself to deepen the understanding of project's overall goal and objectives. Various methods were employed to address these topics, including discussions, sharing personal experiences, scenario modeling, presenting completed examples, role playing, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, and reflection.

C2P60 The following issues were among those discussed:

1. The therapeutic essence of work: productivity as a mechanism for the development of adaptation (discussion, sharing personal experiences)
2. The historical context of human activity and its crucial role in survival (discussion, reflection)
3. Exploring the correlation between work norms and skills (sharing personal experiences, discussion, reflection)

4. Creativity of the support person in the process of supporting individuals to connect resources to individually selected cases (engagement in modeled situations, discussion, reflection)
5. Assessing the degree of cultural relevance in one's activity and/or work (sharing personal experiences, discussion, reflection)
6. Discussion of activities within the context of the work environment, with a specific focus on examples from diverse work environments existing within the university space (sharing student presentations, discussion)
7. Exploring the responsibility for skill development in productive activities and mastery (sharing personal experiences, discussion, reflection)
8. Reviewing the "workplace mastery" model, drawing from international recommendations and the experiences of Ilia State University. This entailed sharing stories of supported employees from previous years and engaging in discussions and reflections.
9. Introducing key life and entrepreneurial skills and the importance of artistic-symbolic activities for the development of these skills (stories shared by support workers in previous years, discussion, and reflection)

C2P61 Despite the different specificities of these laboratories and the different skills required, a standardized questionnaire developed by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists—the COPM (The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure)—was administered by students (Nieuwenhuizen et al., 2014). Teams of two students were organized to conduct interviews with each beneficiary. In total, 20 interviews were conducted by students. The purpose of these interviews was to identify problem areas, to work on them in accordance with the goals of the laboratories, and to plan such activities in the laboratory that will help to consider the limited skills of individuals and develop potential areas of their social and cognitive abilities.

C2P62 Despite the widespread use of the COPM (The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure), there are some challenges associated with using it with individuals who have autism spectrum disorder and other neurodevelopmental disorders. In particular, several beneficiaries had difficulty answering and/or understanding the question, "What do I think other people expect of me?" In such cases, students tried to change the wording of the question and rearranged it to be understandable for the beneficiary. There were also difficulties with point assessments: To the question, "What do

I want?” (what type of activity to perform), beneficiaries recorded different answers, and then, students asked them to rate their performance on a 10-point scale. If the team of students reported that the beneficiary was unable to provide an appropriate score for the response, the team would offer a score, but this was a last resort. Interviews were facilitated and supervised by the researcher/supervisor, who tried to minimize student influence on the responses and scoring of the beneficiaries. If the process reached a dead end, the researcher/supervisor tried to facilitate the interview; they helped the students and gave them ideas on how to conduct the interview. Researcher/supervisor intervention was minimal to maximize the degree of independence of the student group in administering the interview. The students had the opportunity to record the interview with the consent of the respondent to further analyze the answers.

- C2P63 The researcher/supervisor advised the students to establish a rapport with the respondent and gain their trust immediately before the interview, so that the interview could be conducted more honestly and the answers they received would be closer to the truth.
- C2P64 After a certain period of time, the interviews should be repeated for the purpose of re-evaluation, to observe how the situation of the beneficiaries has changed and whether the independent variables had any influence that would affect the progress of the project.

C2S10

### **Benefits of a Rights-Based Approach**

- C2P65 Adopting innovative student-centered teaching methods can significantly enhance the human rights approach for people with disabilities. Considering the rights-based approach is very important for the planning and development of programs related to persons with disabilities.
- C2P66 A human rights-based approach is not a panacea, but rather a means to ensure that services are developed in accordance with standards. The rights-based approach ensures that all individuals have an equal opportunity to develop. Persons with disabilities and the elderly are two of the most vulnerable groups after children in terms of rights violations because many of them do not have the means to defend their right to demand treatment with dignity. They often have to live in situations where it is difficult for them to realize their rights: They become victims of exploitation, discrimination, and ill treatment; they may not be involved in the decision-making process

related to them and they do not have access to the basic services that ensure the protection and enforcement of fundamental rights (Gigineishvili, 2021).

- C2P67 Services based on a rights-based approach are considered best practice because they: (a) support healthcare and social care staff in fulfilling their professional ethical obligations; (b) improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare and social care, improve the decision-making process, and enhance the well-being of all service users; (c) send a message to society that persons with disabilities are, first, persons with rights equal to the rights of others; (d) ensure greater participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in the design and delivery of health and social services; (e) help healthcare and social care staff to better understand the range of social and cultural factors that influence an individual's health and well-being; and (f) reduce the number of complaints and lawsuits (Gigineishvili, 2021).

C2S11

### **Expected Outcomes and Conclusions**

- C2P68 As a result of the project, well-equipped scientific, practical laboratories (hubs) have been developed at Ilia State University and Gori State University. We expect that scientific work will continue, even after the end of the project. In these laboratories, continuous practice and supervision of social work and psychology students will be carried out. Work with potential employers will continue in order to make available to them practical knowledge and/or information on how to implement supported employment.
- C2P69 Teaching methods that provide multidisciplinary, problem-solving, project-based, hands-on learning will be improved in the existing social work and psychology curricula of universities. With the involvement of various professionals at the practice site, international standards will be introduced to facilitate the implementation of supported employment for persons with disabilities.
- C2P70 A continuous education program will be developed at Ilia State University and Gori State University, taking into account feedback from students, knowledge in laboratories, and international experience. The continuing education program will serve organizations that are interested in employing persons with disabilities who are age 18 and older for whom vocational education is available. In addition, a web page will be created for organizations that promote the employment of disabled people, where knowledge will be constantly shared and updated. This page will present different

skill-development models (matching skills to job type) based on empirical evidence from people with disabilities. All news will be made available to organizations interested in employing persons with disabilities who are age 18 and older using modern technological innovations.

- C2P71 As a result, a network of relevant organizations will be formed where all news and needs will be discussed and taken into account in further activities. In this way, it will be possible to disseminate and systematize the obtained best practices for other organizations that want to employ people with disabilities.
- C2P72 On the basis of international cooperation, lecturers, students, and specialists of Ilia State University and Gori State University will undergo trainings, thereby increasing their respective competencies. They will update the existing curricula of social work/psychology and implement effective teaching and/or learning methods; in addition, they will develop a continuous education program, which will serve organizations that are interested in employing persons with disabilities who are age 18 and older.
- C2P73 Finally, university-based students will be trained in allied professions (psychology, social work) from academic programs by offering integrated practice, where their teaching will be conducted using innovative methods (project-based, problem-solving learning with real clients in a safe environment), which will result in increased employment opportunities for these students through the development of their unique competencies. By prioritizing active engagement, critical thinking, and personalized learning experiences, educators can better prepare students to understand, internalize, and apply human rights principles in their future practice.
- C2P74 Because the project has recently commenced, there lie ahead numerous new and intriguing experiences. However, considering the accumulated experience since November 2023, it is pivotal to develop the role of the social worker effectively. Given the current stage where a multitude of specialists, including psychologists, supporters, and work coordinators, are involved with at least one disabled person, the direct responsibilities of the social worker may not be readily apparent. Often, the role within the professional context is ambiguous, necessitating the creation of a comprehensive guide for multiteam collaboration. Such a guide should meticulously address the needs of individuals with disabilities and the intricacies of the work and delineate the roles of each team member tailored to these requirements.
- C2P75 This imperative extends to social work students as well. Nonetheless, it is this very challenge that propels both students and the project team to

exert greater effort and devise strategies for the effective development of this new function. To this end, the project team is crafting a questionnaire for social workers to evaluate the socialization and engagement of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Moreover, the team has expedited the engagement of foreign experts for training sessions aimed at defining more specific roles and functions for professionals, along with intervention strategies. These measures aim to facilitate more effective collaboration and support for individuals with disabilities within the project's scope and later in the working context.

C2P76 In conclusion, the current project is beneficial for the universities because it promotes an inclusive environment and facilitates modern teaching and/or learning processes. Learning laboratories serve as hubs where students can develop their competencies and further develop their competitiveness in the labor market. These efforts will result in social integration and supported employment of people with disabilities who are age 18 and older.

C2S12

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