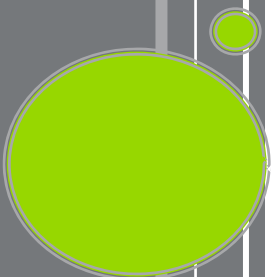


Strengthening the social service workforce to protect children

Maestral's approach and expertise

Maestral. 



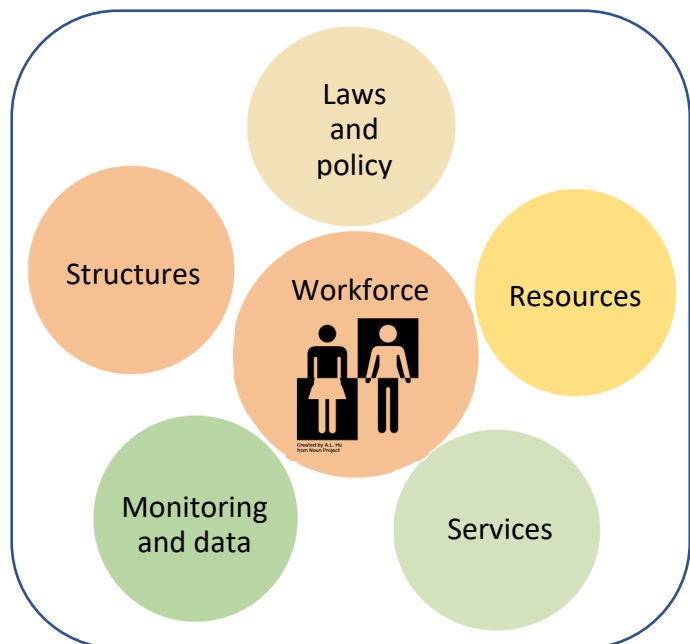
How does strengthening the workforce help children?

Maestral has been engaged in child protection system strengthening for over a decade. Informed by these experiences, we have realized that a well-planned, competent and supported workforce plays a critical role in ensuring child protection and response within the wider social service system. In many ways, the workforce is the backbone or spinal cord of the protection system. Without a strong and well-resourced workforce at the core of the social service system, the legal and policy framework for child protection is not implemented, data is not collected and used to inform and strengthen programming and resources, and the critically necessary services to prevent and respond to child protection risks and violations do not reach children, their caregivers and families.

Investing in the social service workforce bolsters other efforts to strengthen the child protection system sustainably, including enforcement and implementation of policies and laws, operability and effectiveness of case management systems, and service delivery (GSSWA/UNICEF 2019).

The social service workforce plays a fundamentally important role within the child protection system. Maestral recognizes that this workforce:

- includes frontline workers (i.e., those who engage directly with children and families), who are responsible for the identification of children and families who are vulnerable or whose rights have been violated. The social service workforce is responsible for identifying these risk factors, strengthening existing protective factors¹ and addressing vulnerabilities whilst also building resilience;²
- conducts assessments, provides services and/or refers to preventive and responsive/rehabilitation services for all children at risk of or experiencing protection concerns, including issues related to care;
- coordinates service providers from various sectors to address the various needs of vulnerable children and their families, including case closure processes and decision making;
- monitors and provides oversight for children receiving child protection support;
- plays a key role in supporting positive behaviours and seeking to shift negative attitudes, traditions, customs and practices surrounding child protection;
- advocates for policies, services, resources and educational systems that support and promote improvements within the sector and for the profession; and
- holds to account the policymakers and legislators overseeing the legal and policy framework for child protection.



¹ Protective factors are understood as the conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that, when present, mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families.

² Resilience refers to the ability of children and their families to deal with, and recover from, adversity and crisis, influenced by individual characteristics and external factors like diversity of livelihoods, coping mechanisms, life skills such as problem-solving, the ability to seek support, motivation, optimism, faith, perseverance and resourcefulness.

Who are these social service workers and what do they do?

The social service workforce for child protection includes those whose mandate it is to advocate for children, including to prevent and respond to cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation. They include government workers, as well as workers engaged by non-governmental and community-based organizations. They may or may not hold a professional title. The social service workforce for child protection includes workers who directly interact with children and families at the household level as well as those who supervise child protection programming and services and people responsible for developing relevant policies, regulations, standards and guidelines.

Members of the social service workforce for child protection engage in prevention, response and promotion activities in the following ways:

- **Prevention:** strengthening protective factors that fulfil children's rights, working with families and communities to create environments that prevent violence and facilitate child wellbeing and positive development, and supporting parents or caregivers in their ability to provide a safe and healthy family environment for children. Examples of prevention activities for the workforce includes conducting assessments of children and families; organizing and/or delivering parenting programs; providing referrals to social services such as cash transfers, educational or psychosocial support; providing counselling services; organizing community groups to promote positive social norms.
- **Response** to child protection violations, *i.e.*, situations where a child or children have experienced violence, abuse, exploitation, separation or other forms of harm. Examples of response services provided by the workforce include providing support and services to child survivors of VAC; conducting assessments; providing and/or referring to counseling and psychosocial support services; making referrals to services offered by the justice or health sectors; facilitating or referring to foster care or other forms of alternative care.
- **Promotion:** creating awareness of, advocating for and developing policies and programs that support children and families; raising awareness around and conducting advocacy in support of the workforce, activities related to allocating or managing budgets and other resources; providing oversight of human resources; monitoring or evaluating the child protection system, programs, services and initiatives; and promoting the sector and the profession.

How does Maestral support the workforce?

Maestral provides technical assistance and support to Governments, national stakeholders and technical and financial partners as UNICEF and USAID programs as they engage in country and regional activities to assess, map, design and implement action plans to recognize, promote, strengthen and support the social service workforce for child protection. This includes developing participatory and strengths-based approaches and tools that enable stakeholders to collect, analyse and use information to strengthen the workforce; supporting the development of action plans for strengthening the workforce, the legal and policy framework supporting that workforce, and the institutional framework serving as the custodian for professionalisation of the social service workforce for example a national association of social workers, a ministry and the overall governance and institutions responsible for planning, quality assuring, monitoring and financing the social service system and its' workforce. We are also working with national and regional partners to strengthen capacity of the workforce including pre- and in-service training, quality assurance and supervision. Action plans for workforce strengthening purposefully build upon and leverage existing strengths to address identified gaps and ensure that the number, capacity, allocated resources, location and structure of the social service workforce for child protection is sufficient, enabled and appropriately supported to successfully fulfil their function within the broader social service system. Maestral also provides technical assistance to strengthen the institutional environment that regulates the workforce. This includes, for example, support for drafting legislation and bylaws regulating the workforce and technical

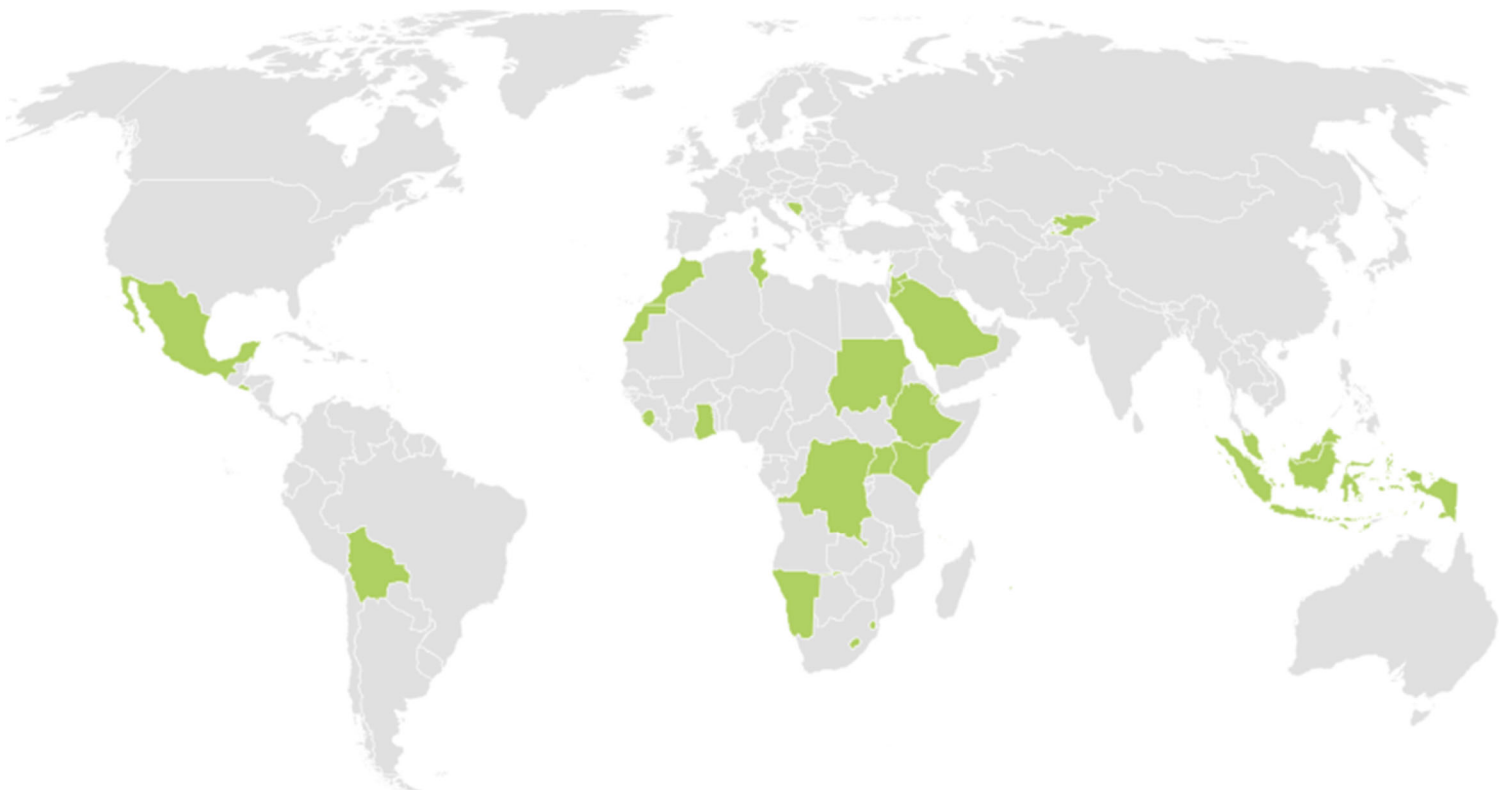
assistance within the broader civil service sector, public administration and governance reforms to strengthen recruitment processes, job-guidance, key performance evaluation processes and design of workforce governance and organizational set-up.

Maestral’s approach to such workforce strengthening involves:

- a system strengthening approach– especially strengthening the role of government;
- advocacy for the importance of a national body to take on the role of custodian for social service workforce strengthening and social work professionalisation;
- capacity strengthening of national mandate holders and key actors;
- multi-sectoral engagement – agreements among all stakeholders/actors;
- linkages between community based and statutory based child protection/social services;
- standards – curriculum, practice-based;
- a holistic vision, rather than looking at child protection in a silo, or issues within child protection in silos – i.e. child labour, VAC etc;
- a strengths-based approach recognizing that all caregivers bring strengths and assets to provide care and protection to their children, recognizing, however, that they often require support and services to be able to access their internal and external strengths;
- an inclusive definition of social service workforce, recognising that in many settings the role of para-professional workers is invaluable and must be included in the workforce strengthening effort;
- a life-long learning approach which requires investment in continuous professional development.

What and Where has Maestral engaged in Workforce Strengthening Efforts?

Maestral has contributed to and worked closely with UNICEF, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and national governments in the following countries.



No.	Country	Geographic areas	Areas of support	Sectors involved
1	Barbados	National	SSW assessment	Government workers responsible for protection and care of children and youth, civil associations, academia
2	Bolivia	La Paz and Cochabamba	SSW assessment	Government (Social Welfare), civil associations, academia, municipalities
3	Bosnia-Herzegovina	National (two entities and one district)	SSW assessment Development of National Action Plan (3) Design and implementation of five webinars designed to address child protection and COVID-19.	Government /entities (social welfare), cantons, municipalities, academia
4	Comoros	National (covering the three islands)	Evaluation of the child protection system	Government (legislation, governance supporting the social services and child protection workforce, services provided, coordination and processes used)
5	Democratic Republic of Congo	National	As part of role with 4Children, mapping of the child protection system, development of child protection training materials for the statutory and auxiliary social welfare workforce, development of a competency framework for the auxiliary workforce	Government (Social Action) and civil society
6	Djibouti	National	SSW assessment Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Employed SSW and volunteer/para-professional workers engaged by government, IOs, non-government, and CSOs
7	El Salvador	San Salvador, San Martín and San Miguel	SSW assessment	Government (Social Welfare), civil associations, academia, municipalities
8	Ethiopia	Six regions and Federal level	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government SSW, IO and NGO seconded SSW to gov that are responsible for child protection
9	Eswatini	National	As part of role with 4Children development of social work HIV-sensitive case management guidelines, SOPs and development of a training package, piloting, and sustainability plan. Facilitating the change from employing any person irrespective of a degree to a commitment	

No.	Country	Geographic areas	Areas of support	Sectors involved
			to employing person who are qualified in BSW.	
10	Ghana	National	SSW assessment 5-year Capacity development Plan	Government (social welfare), Local government (decentralization)
11	Indonesia	Initially 5 pilot districts, now expanding to 11 districts	Development of training and tools for social workers and managers to ensure case management functions of Integrated Child and Family Welfare Centers	MOSA
12	Jordan	National	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs & CSOs
13	Kenya	National	Rapid assessment of the social service workforce for child protection in five counties; results used to inform the development and roll-out of a ten-day standardized induction training for all Children's Officers and other Child Protection Professional Practitioners. Development of five-day standardized induction training for all Child Protection Volunteers. Design and implementation of a 12-part webinar series on child protection and COVID-19 for government Children's Officers.	Government, IOs, NGOs, Kenya School of Government
14	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	National	Rapid assessment of current child protection activities, including programs and services aimed at both prevention and response to child protection issues and systematic responses to child rights violations.	Government and NGOs
15	Kyrgyzstan		Appraisal of the governance of the childcare and social protection system and support to articulating milestones for the EU direct budget support project.	Government (policy and legislative framework, governance, institutions, functions, roles and responsibilities for planning, quality assuring, monitoring and financing the childcare and social protection system and its' workforce)
16	Lebanon	National	MOSA capacity assessment and MOSA strategic plan for the protection of children and women. SSW assessment, development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs, private sector & CSOs
17	Lesotho	National	Development of Child Protection Strategy and implementation plan; as part of role	Government (Ministry of Social Development),

No.	Country	Geographic areas	Areas of support	Sectors involved
			with 4Children, development of case management protocols, with training materials, SOPs and manual for supportive supervision.	International and national non-government organizations
18	Malaysia	National	Tips for social workers to ensure case management functions in the context of COVID-19 containment	MASW, MWFC
19	Mauritius	National	Functional audit of the Child Development Unit for the Ministry of Gender, Child Development and Family Welfare	Government (mapping of CDU-programmes, services and SWOT-analysis of gatekeeping functions)
20	Mexico	CDMX and Chiapas	SSW assessment, development of standard competency for child protection and response and competency-based curriculum for government child protection workforce.	Government (Sistema Nacional DIF, Sistema Estatal DIF Chiapas, and Sistema Estatal DIF), academia,
21	Morocco	National	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs & CSOs
22	Namibia	National	As part of role with 4Children, development of social work HIV-sensitive case management guidelines, SOPs and development of a training package, piloting and sustainability plan	Government (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare), national NGOs
23	Palestine	National	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs & CSOs
24	Sierra Leone	National	Standardized Social work curriculum: BSW, Diploma, Certificate Field practicum agreements with partners Basics of social work and case management ToT for in-service training Training of lecturers who will implement BSW curriculum	Ministry (social welfare), Universities, Academia, NGOs
25	Sudan	National	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs & CSOs
26	Tunisia	National	SSW assessment, Development of National Action Plan for SSW strengthening	Government, IOs, NGOs & CSOs
27	Uganda	National	Via engagement with 4Children, supported the design of Para Social Work Standards and development of a standardised national case management toolkit	Government, National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU), Academia, IOs, NGOs

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