CHILD PROTECTION HUB
FOR SOUTH EAST EUROPE

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CHILD PROTECTION HUB

A regional study

OF SUPERVISION FOR CHILD PROTECTION PROFESSIONALS IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

March 2022

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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

WITH FUNDING FROM
AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

OAK FOUNDATION

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the efforts of the team at Terre des hommes and Child Hub who offered such excellent coordination and support for this project. We were thrilled to work with such a dedicated and enthusiastic team of national researchers, who brought their warmth and compassion as well as their excellent work ethic to this study. Thank you to the children, families, communities and schools who participated in this research during a very challenging period of time, and adapted based on what was safe and supportive for everyone during the pandemic.

Partner Institutions:

Albania - Terre de hommes

Bosnia-Herzegovina - Save the Children North West Balkans

Bulgaria - Know-How Center for the Alternative Care of Children

Croatia - Brave Phone, Zagreb Child & Youth Protection Centre in Zagreb;
Rijeka Protection Home for Children “Tić”

Kosovo - Terre des hommes

Moldova - Terre de hommes

Romania - Terre des hommes

Serbia - Centre for Youth Integration-Belgrade

Executive Summary

This report provides findings from a mixed-methods study of supervision for professionals in multidisciplinary child protection teams in seven European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, and Serbia). Individual country reports have also been produced and can be found here https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-online-library/supervision-child-protection-professionals-multidisciplinary-teams

Methods and sampling

With a team of local researchers, supported by Country Associates, we recruited a sample of respondents to complete key informant interviews (n=40), a survey (n=226), and Q-sorts (n=38). The sample included supervisors, supervisees, University professors, NGO program coordinators and project officers, psychologists, Child Protection Unit Heads, Service Directors, and private practitioners. The local researchers also obtained and analysed key policy documents from each country (n=17).

Key findings

The importance of supervision is widely recognised across the region, at least by those with experience and knowledge of it. Supervisors and supervisees alike are very positive about its benefits for multidisciplinary teams, for individual workers and for children and families. There is a strong consensus about the need for developmental and emotionally supportive supervision. Supervision works best when it is provided separately from management, and when it is regular and consistent.

We also identified some different conceptions about what supervision is, how it should work and who it benefits the most. Some respondents said that supervision should ultimately benefit the child and focus on ensuring the quality of casework. Others said that supervision should ultimately benefit the worker and focus more on emotional support and development. Such differences were nuanced and should not detract from the consensus about the importance of supervision, and the need for emotional support and professional development. Examples of good practice were identified across the region, and most notably in Croatia and Romania.

However, study respondents also raised significant concerns about a lack of supervision in many places. Given the complexity of child protection work, this means workers are left without sufficient support, resulting in a poorer quality of service for families, and burnout for the worker. Concerns were also raised about the availability of support for supervisors, a lack of understanding of supervision within the child protection system, and about the short-term nature of funding. In some countries, concerns were raised about the lack of a well-developed legal framework for the provision of supervision.

Regional Recommendations

To improve the provision of supervision, our respondents made a range of recommendations. Some were country-specific to each country and are discussed in the local reports. Nonetheless, there were seven recommendations that apply across the region, and another six that apply especially to multi-disciplinary teams:

	Who?	What?
1	Policymakers, in consultation with sector experts, universities, and social service organisations	Set clear standards in law, policy, and guidance
2	Universities, professional associations, social service organisations	Increase awareness of supervision within the workforce
3	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be available for every child protection worker
4	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be provided regularly
5	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be provided separately from management
6	Policymakers, social service organisations	Being a supervisor should be a dedicated role
7	Universities, professional associations, social service organisations	Create a supportive community of child protection supervisors, with more specialist training (including as part of university programmes and curricula)
8	MDTs	Group supervision is particularly important in this context as it helps facilitate positive team relationships and ensures a common understanding of each family / child.
9	MDTs	Group supervision to be included in legislation and policy pertaining to MDT professionals and how they should work together in child protection cases.
10	MDTs	Group supervision should include all child protection professionals within the MDT, not just social workers / social care staff.
11	MDTs	Supervisors need to have a good understanding of child protection work specifically, preferably with experience of working in the field themselves.
12	MDTs	Supervision to be provided regularly by the same person over a period time, to enable a trusting relationship to develop between the team and the supervisor.

Conclusion

In a key informant interview, one respondent said, "you cannot have social work without supervision". This is true – and applies equally to child protection practice more generally, whether delivered by social workers or other multidisciplinary professionals. Yet many child protection workers in multidisciplinary teams in these countries are engaged in child protection practice without supervision, or with only inconsistent access to supervision. This is deeply concerning for workers, children, and families alike. Without regular access to high-quality supervision, workers are likely to have lower confidence, experience more stress and have less opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills. Children and families will as a result experience a less effective service. While the provision of supervision does not guarantee high-quality services and a well-supported workforce, the absence of supervision will absolutely make these outcomes much more difficult to achieve.

On 24th February 2022, midway through data collection for this project, Russia invaded Ukraine. Many of the local researchers were affected because they live and work in nearby countries and because of their efforts to support refugees. That they continued to do this vital work, while also collecting data for a project on supervision, is testament to their professionalism and their humanity.

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1 Introduction

This report provides a regional analysis of the findings from a mixed-methods study of supervision for professionals in multidisciplinary child protection teams in seven European countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, and Serbia).

The aims of the study were to explore the different understandings, experiences, and challenges of supervision as experienced by child protection professionals involved in multidisciplinary casework with children and families. The specific objectives 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.

Provide recommendations for strengthening supervision across the region and in specific countries.

The idea for this project was first suggested by the ChildHub Country Associate from Moldova and was unanimously supported by all the other Country Associates in the network, to address a major gap in the evidence base for supervision in this context.

The research was led by the lead author, delivered in partnership with a team of local researchers, and coordinated via the Child Protection Hub project. It was funded by the Austrian Development Agency, Oak Foundation and Terre des hommes. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the above-mentioned donors.

Terre des Homes (Tdh) is the leading Swiss organisation for children's aid, supporting millions of children around the world each year. In Europe, Tdh works to help children at risk of abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. In 2020, they supported more than 100,000 beneficiaries in three main areas, migration, accesss to justice and service provision.. As part of this work, Tdh has initiated the Child Protection Hub, which has been supported by the European Commission, the Oak Foundation and the Austrian Development Agency.. ChildHub is a network of child protection services in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, via which professionals can share knowledge and good practices, access

[1] The present research did not cover Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to the partnership ending before the research started.

specialist training and skills development programmes, and advocate for policy and practice reforms. ChildHub is coordinated by a Tdh Regional Support Hub in Budapest, with dedicated local Country Associates in Albania, Kosovo, Moldova, and Romania, and links with external partner organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Save the Children, Northwest Balkans)[1], Bulgaria (the Know-How Centre for the Alternative Care of Children, New Bulgaria University), Croatia (Brave Phone), and Serbia (the Centre for Youth Integration).

2 Introduction

Supervision is widely considered to be the cornerstone of good social work and child protection practice, and there is a remarkable degree of international consensus about how it should function, and its myriad benefits (Beddoe and Wilkins, 2019). Having regular access to effective supervision is said to result in more positive outcomes for the worker, the wider organisation, and for children and families involved with services. The benefits of effective supervision include emotional support and enhanced wellbeing for the worker (Mor Barak et al., 2009), greater retention of staff within the organisation (Renner et al., 2009; Chiller and Crisp, 2012), and more empathic, collaborative, and purposeful practice with families (Bostock et al., 2019; Wilkins et al., 2018).

2.1 What is supervision?

Supervision is something that happens between two (or more) people – a supervisor, with more experience and expertise, and the worker (or workers) being supervised. The quality of the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is foundational for the various functions and benefits of supervision more generally. A good working alliance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the provision of effective supervision. As well as being a relationship, supervision is also a set of activities seeking to fulfil a variety of aims. The most well-known model is provided by Kadushin (1993), who argued that supervision has three primary functions – administrative, educational, and supportive.

Administrative supervision ensures that the worker is correctly implementing agency policies and procedures. The supervisor has formal authority, and is responsible for monitoring workers' adherence to process, and enabling them to perform their duties. Educative supervision ensures that workers develop their knowledge and skills. To fulfil this function, supervision needs to be reflective, so that supervisees gain insight into their work and explore different ways of doing things. Supportive supervision ensures that workers do not become overwhelmed with emotional or work-related stress. The supervisor is available and approachable and supports the supervisee's confidence and job satisfaction (Smith, 2011). Based upon this model, Hawkins and Shohet (1989) identified ten supervisory activities and linked these with Kadushin's three functions (table 1).

Activity (in relation to supervisees)	Function		
Space for reflection on the content and process of work	Educational		
Developing knowledge and skills	Educational		
Receiving information and another perspective on their work	Educational	Supportive	
Receiving feedback on their work and on their development as a professional	Educational	Supportive	
Receiving validation and support for their work and for their development as a professional		Supportive	
Sharing responsibility for work-related problems and difficulties		Supportive	
Space to explore work-related emotional distress		Supportive	
Ensuring high-quality practice		Supportive	Administrative
Ensuring a pro-active approach to work			Administrative
Planning work, to ensure good use of resources			Administrative

Table 1 Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) categorisation of supervision activities in relation to Kadushin's (1993) model of supervisory functions

Supervision can also be defined in relation to how it is organised. For example, supervisors and supervisees need a private space to meet, and for others in the wider organisation to recognise the importance of the activity. Meetings may involve one supervisor and one supervisee (1:1 supervision), or one supervisor and a group of supervisees (group supervision). Other forms of supervision, such as with peers or with an external supervisor, may also be used (Toros and Falch-Eriksen, 2021).

2.2 Supervision in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe

A summary of each country is now given in relation to their child welfare systems, and the role and status of supervision. These summaries are brief, and no doubt there is much more that could be said. Individual country reports have also been prepared to supplement the regional analysis, and these provide more detail in relation to each country.

Albania

In Albania, the social work profession is relatively young, and public services continue to develop (Dhembo et al., 2020). It was not until the dismantling of the country's communist dictatorship in the early 1990s that social work began to emerge as a distinct profession. Social services in the country have been heavily dependent on foreign donor funding (USAID, 2014). As a result, they tend to adopt international models of child protection, with top-down approaches to service development.

More recently, Albania has begun to introduce a systems approach in child protection, which has seen some promising developments, albeit the system is still fragmented (Lai, 2016). Quality review mechanisms are not well established and are limited in scope. Existing regulatory frameworks tend to emphasise reporting duties, rather than the quality of services and lack human and financial resources (Tahsini, 2017). Although supervision has been described as "central to good social work practice" in the country (Dhembo et al., 2020), much of what is provided focuses on administration. Supervisors are not often specially qualified or trained and, in some cases, a single supervisor may be responsible for a very large group of workers. In some organisations, efforts have been made to provide more emotionally supportive supervision, but these have been reliant on short-term project-based funding.

In a study of 62 social workers, students, and managers, Dhembo (2015) found that supervision operated primarily as a mechanism for monitoring the activities of frontline staff, and not as a form of professional support. Knowledge about supervision was generally poor, and it was considered to lack a firm basis in legislation or policy. This suggested the need for "more local investment in training and [the] implementation of functional…supervision models" (ibid).

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, significant reforms have been made to the country's child welfare system since the end of communism, including the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Guth, 2014), the introduction of a new legal framework to promote community-based services, the creation of a State Agency for Child Protection (Ivanova and Bogdanov, 2013), new case management and quality assurance standards, and a reduction in the country's reliance on institutional care for children (Guth, 2014: 13).

Since 2001, following the Child Protection Act (2000), every city has a child protection department. There are different types of services for children and families, managed by municipalities or assigned by them to NGOs. There is an active non-governmental sector in the country working to support families and drive further policy reform. Despite some progress, social workers in child protection departments are relatively low paid, have high caseloads, operate in poor conditions, and lack resources. They do not yet constitute an autonomous professional community, while those in more general social services have better working conditions and more opportunities for professional development.

Supervision was introduced following the establishment of the national child protection system. It is generally seen as a form of emotional care for workers and provided most often by psychologists or psychotherapists. This has benefits, but also raises questions about the extent of supervisors' knowledge and experience specifically of child protection work. In addition, the provision of supervision in child protection is often dependent on short-term, project-based funding. The absence of supervision more generally is cited as a reason for high rates of staff turnover and the variable quality of practice. A new Social Services Act (2020) has recently been introduced to regulate the provision of supervision for those working with children.

Studies of social work in the country have focused on aspects such as initial education (Jack and Jordan, 1998), while also recognising the need for supervision to help newly qualified workers develop their skills (Dimitrova, 2017). Supervision is generally considered to be important for social workers, albeit less so for other professionals involved in child protection work (ibid).

Croatia

In Croatia, the country's child welfare system has been founded on contemporary legal conceptions of children's rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Various laws govern the child protection system, including the Social Welfare Act (2013), Family Act (2015), and the Family Violence Protection Act (2020). The first school for social work in the country was founded in Zagreb in 1952 (Ajduković and Branica, 2009).

Family Centres are established in larger cities to provide preventative services, while religious and civic organisations also work to support families and protect children. A comparative vignette study between Croatia and Sweden found that Croatian social workers were more likely to adopt a child-protection orientation, and recommend the removal of children from home, while those in Sweden took a more supportive approach (Brunnberg and Pećnik, 2007).

Efforts to ensure the provision of supervision have been ongoing for at least twenty years (Ajduković, 2005), having starting in the 1990s when, following the country's war of independence, social workers and psychologists supported displaced persons and refugees via the Society for Psychological Assistance. Discussions of supervision in the country go back further to the 1970s, when Professor Nada Smolić Krković began to publish on the topic. In 2006 a postgraduate programme of study for supervision was established. The Croatian Association for Supervision

and Organizational Development has around 130 members currently licensed to provide supervision. The Croatian Association has been a member of the European Association of National Organisations for Supervision (ANSE) since the early 2000s. Currently, supervision is mostly provided by licensed supervisors, on a demand-led basis by different services and NGOs. As a result, social workers report improvements in relationships and cognitive competencies, and a greater sense of professional security (Ajduković & Kožljan, 2021).

Kosovo

In Kosovo, an independent country only since 2008, the system of child welfare has been described as 'inadequate', with services lacking the necessary resources and supports (Bylykbashi, 2020). It has been argued that international standards on children's rights need to be incorporated into local laws, not least because children and young people make up more than half the population (Bahtiri and Qerimi, 2019). The Family Law of Kosovo (2004) recognises the importance of supportive services to enable children to grow up safely in their own families. The Inter-Ministerial Committee for Children's Rights, formed in 2008, brings different ministries and stakeholders together, in a combined effort to ensure children's rights are at the centre of policymaking. At a local level, each municipality is responsible for providing social services, and a model of inter-agency working (known as 'Round Tables') operates to ensure the participation of different organisations under the coordination of Centres for Social Work (Bregua, 2018). Civic society institutions, both local and international, work alongside municipal governments, to help provide services (Milligan, 2016).

Within this challenging context, supervision is a relatively new concept and not currently regulated by official or legal frameworks. Tdh, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, has recently provided training for thirty supervisors in Centres for Social Work, so that supervision can be made available at least for a small number of child protection professionals.

Moldova

Following the country's declaration of independence in 1991, Moldova experienced severe economic problems. Between 1991 and 1999, the Moldovan economic contracted by around 70%, before experiencing strong growth post-2000. Many children live in poverty, mostly in rural areas. Some estimates have suggested that more than half the children in the country are exposed to at least one form of abuse (Prohniţchi et al., 2006). In the face of these challenges, the government of Moldova ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. In 1998, a National Council for the Protection of Children's Rights was established, consisting of representatives from health, education, and welfare ministries. The process of de-institutionalising the care of children living outside of their families has been supported in the country by Lumos Moldova, a charity founded by JK Rowling (Ginu, 2021). The social work profession is generally viewed as being low-status, and services often struggle with limited resources and a lack of cohesion between different agencies (Moldovan et al., 2021).

Supervision was introduced and initially regulated by The Mechanism of Professional Supervision in Social Assistance Order (Minister of Social Protection, Family and Child, 2008), subsequently replaced with updated regulations in 2017 (Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Order No. 74 of 10.05.2017). This more recent guidance says that supervision helps develop and consolidate professional skills, ensures the quality of social services, encourages professional cooperation, reduces stress, prevents burnout, and enables staff to access the necessary resources for their work. Thus, it reflects the wider international consensus on the benefits of supervision, and the arguments made locally by Haraz and Vicol (2018) that supervision is "one of the most efficient ways of professional improvement of social workers (p. 237).

Romania

In Romania, supervision is a regulated as an occupation (according to the Occupational Standards for Supervisors in Social Services COR code 263513, approved in 2017) and a mandatory activity, included within the minimum standards for case management in child protection (quality standard no. 12, order 288/2006), for day-time social services for children (as regulated by the Order No. 27/2019) and for residential social services for children in the special protection system (as regulated by the Order No. 25/2019). All social welfare institutions are expected to establish that supervision is being provided for their staff. The National College of Social Workers of Romania requires its members to participate in various Continuing Professional Development activities, including supervision (Rentea et al., 2021). Despite these provisions, the practice of supervision has been described as a relatively recent development (Caras and Sandu, 2014), and a more recent survey found that fewer than 10% of workers had regular supervision, while more than half said they received support primarily from their colleagues, rather than supervisors (TdH, 2015).

Several studies from the North-east of the country have established agreement about the importance of professional supervision, particularly for newly qualified workers (Rentea et al., 2021). However, while workers said they preferred supportive supervision, managers were more focused on administration and oversight (Unguru, 2019). These studies also found some evidence of confusion about the differences between supervisory and management roles, and the different functions each should fulfil (Unguru and Sandu, 2019).

In addition to some conceptual debates about what supervision is and how it should happen, it is important for Romania to clarify who is entitled to offer supervision and for whom. The integrative, systemic approach, highly recommended in modern social work, emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary teamwork. Consequently, all professionals included in these teams, not only social workers (social assistants) should in theory have access to supervision, to increase the quality of their work, while building a culture of self-care.

Serbia

In Serbia, the Strategy for the Development of Social Protection (2005) introduced a strategic commitment to the development of professional capacity in the field of child protection. This included a recognition of supervision as one important component within the wider system of child welfare. In 2008, further guidance was introduced (Methods of Case Management and Supervision in Centres for Social Work), in which supervision was described as having various functions - support and professional development, monitoring, promoting professional responsibility and ensuring safe and effective services.

A comparative study of four countries in the region – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey – found that the introduction of case management guidance in Serbia had the potential to improve services and lead to a higher quality of work (Žegarac, 2017). However, an evaluative study of supervision conducted more recently questioned whether supervision was making a difference for workers in relation to their experience of emotional distress and trauma (Borjanić Bolić, 2019). This suggests that an administrative model of supervision predominates in the country, to the exclusion of more relational and emotionally supportive approaches.

3 Methods

To address the project objectives, the study adopted an observational design and a mixture of methods. The study was organised into four work streams, running concurrently within the required timeframe (between the start of February and end of March 2022). The study was led by the lead author, based in the UK, working remotely with a team of local researchers and Country Associates (table 2), responsible for recruitment and data collection, assisting with data analysis, and producing their own local country reports.

Country	Local researcher(s)	Country Associate(s)
Albania	Izela Tahsini	Valbona Carcani
Bulgaria	Milena Marinova	Radostina Antonova, Elen Ivanova
Croatia	Ines Rezo Bagarić	Emina Horvat
Kosovo	Xheni Shehaj	Valentina Zeka
Moldova	Olivia Pirtac-Goaga	Veronica Pelivan
Romania	Irina Adascalitei, Irina Opincaru	Raluca Condrut
Serbia	Marija Nijemcevic Popovski	Dragana Vuckovic

Table 2 A list of the local researchers and Associates for each country

3.1 Data collection

Data collection was organised into four work streams, as follows:

1. A desktop analysis of supervision policies and procedures
2. An online survey of managers and frontline workers in multidisciplinary child protection teams
3. Interviews with key stakeholders
4. A Q-study and follow-up interviews of managers and frontline workers in multidisciplinary child protection teams

Work stream 1 – document analysis

A desktop review of existing policy and guidance in the seven countries. Using their own judgement, local researchers, working with country associates, obtained at least one example of a policy or guidance document for analysis. The aim was to help understand the policy context for supervision within each country.

Work stream 2 – online survey

An online survey conducted using Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) and distributed via anonymous link to supervisors and frontline staff in multidisciplinary and child protection teams. The survey was available in English, as well as Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, and Romanian.

Respondents were asked to provide basic information about their personal and professional demographics (age range, gender, working pattern, and professional background), and a screening question, about their experience of either providing or receiving supervision. Those who provided supervision were asked questions in relation to being a supervisor. Those who received supervision were asked questions in relation to being a supervisee. If respondents said they both received and provided supervision, they were asked questions in relation to being a supervisor. Those who said they neither provided nor received supervision were asked questions about their attitudes and beliefs in relation to supervision.

Respondents were also asked to complete two standardised instruments - the Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale (Wainwright, 2010) and the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (Efstation et al., 1990; Patton, 1992). The first of these focuses on a specific supervision session (the most recent), while the second focuses more generally on the nature of supervision.

Respondents were then asked several open-ended questions in relation to supervision, how it makes a difference, and the barriers and facilitators for effective supervision. In two of the surveys (Albania and Romania), an additional question was added to explore a specific country-related issue. The results presented in this report are those comparable between the countries; the individual country reports present more localised interpretations of the data.

Work stream 3 – key stakeholder interviews

Interviews with key stakeholders, for example senior managers in child and family services, to explore their understandings and conceptions of supervision. An interview schedule was developed, composed of nine qualitative questions, and an additional five questions for stakeholders who themselves provided supervision (see appendix 1). Interviews were conducted either in English or the interviewee's first language, and audio-recorded for later analysis.

Work steam 4 – Q-study and follow-up interviews

A Q-study and follow-up interview with supervisors and frontline professionals. Q-studies represent an especially useful method for exploring subjectivity, with a focus on the views, opinions, preferences, and beliefs of respondents. Taking part in a Q-study involves reviewing a list of statements and sorting them using a normalised distribution grid from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Alongside the sorting task, respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions to further understand their views about supervision. (A list of the statements used for this study can be found in the Findings chapter below.)

Data analysis

3.2

Data from the key stakeholder interviews were analysed using Recursive Abstraction, a process also used for the follow-up questions in the Q-study (table 3). Recursive Abstraction (Polkinghorne and Arnold, 2014) is a method for analysing qualitative data in various forms. It involves a six-step process of data extraction, summation, and analysis. Like thematic analysis more generally, the aim is to identify underlying patterns and trends (Polkinghorne and Taylor, 2019).

Step	Heading	Notes
1	Highlighting the data	Points of interest within interview transcripts are highlighted
2	Extracting the data	Highlighted portions of the transcripts are extracted and placed into a table or spreadsheet, organised by question
3	Paraphrasing the data	Interview extracts are paraphrased, while maintaining the original meaning
4	Grouping the data	Paraphrased data extracts are grouped together to form initial themes, with extracts within the same group related to one another, as well as the theme itself
5	Generating codes	Paraphrased data is replaced with codes, to encapsulate as much of the meaning as possible, in the smallest number of words (steps 4 and 5 are repeated iteratively until the data analysis process is completed)
6	Review of codes	The date emerging at step 5 are the findings. This step is a review process, to check that meanings have not changed or been lost between the previous steps, and to identify patterns in the data (for example, thematic differences between groups)

Table 3 An overview of the process of Recursive Abstraction

The survey data were analysed via SPSS (version 25), to provide descriptive statistics. The standardised measures within the survey (the Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale, and the Supervision Working Alliance Inventory) were analysed according to their instructions (table 4).

Measure	Analysis
Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale	Consists of three items, with Likert-scale responses (from 1 to 10). Overall scores are calculated via the mean average for the item responses. Higher scores indicate a more positive alliance between supervisor and supervisee.
Supervision Working Alliance Inventory	Consists of 19 items, organised into two sub-scales (Rapport and Client-focus), with Likert-scale responses (from 1 to 7). Subscale scores are calculated via the mean average, of the first 12 items for Rapport and the remaining 7 items for Client-focus.

Table 4 Analysis of the standardised measures within the survey.

The Q-sorts were analysed using factor analysis, a common method for identifying underlying dimensions within datasets, to describe and account for variance. It starts, in a Q-study, by looking for correlations between individual respondents, with clusters of Q-sorts identified, and combined into idealised representations of different perspectives. Each factor thus captures and represents the variance of several different participants. These factors are interpreted using a qualitative approach, based on the sorting of the statements, and what this suggests about the views, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants represented.

3.3 Sampling and recruitment

Sampling was conducted on a pragmatic and purposeful basis (Robertson and Sibley, 2018; Suri, 2011). For the survey, local researchers circulated an email invitation to take part within multidisciplinary teams and professional groups. For the key stakeholder interviews, local researchers recruited people with a range of different professional backgrounds, to ensure variability in their views. For the Q-study, local researchers recruited a range of people with direct experience of providing or receiving supervision. Local researchers were set minimum targets per country as follows – five key stakeholder interviews, 15 completed surveys, and five Q-sorts.

3.4 Ethics

The study was approved by the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University (SREC/0069). The focus of the study – professional supervision – was not considered to be an especially sensitive topic for research, however local researchers were advised that if they had any reason to be concerned about the safety of a child or vulnerable adult, this should be discussed as soon as possible with their Country Associate. Fortunately, this did not occur.

Findings

4

The final dataset for the project is shown below (table 5).

	Albania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Kosovo	Moldova	Romania	Serbia	TOTAL
Documents analysed	3	4	1	1	1	4	3	17
Key informant interviews	5	10	5	5	5	5	5	40
Surveys	18	64	35	15	18	56	20	226
Q-method interviews	5	6	5	5	5	7	5	38
							TOTAL	321

Table 5 An overview of the final project dataset.

Document analysis

4.1

Across the region, various documents were identified that outlined the meaning, purpose, benefits, and organisation of supervision, although in some places official policy and guidance is more developed than in others. Mostly, these documents were various forms of legislation, government policy and guidance, or academic and educational documents (table 9).

Country	Documents analysed
Albania	Practicing Supervision in Child Protection and Care Agencies
	Decision of the Council of Ministers, 573, 2015, on the Standards of Services of Child Protection Units (approved by the Council of Ministers)
	Order no. 313, 2020, of the Ministry of Education and Science, on the organisation and functioning of the psychosocial service in preuniversity education institutions and the procedures of nomination, suspension and dismission in the psychosocial service
Bulgaria Surveys Q-method interviews	Ordinance on criteria and standards for social services for children 2003
	Methodological guide for terms and conditions to provide the service (2014)
	Methodological instruction (2020)
	Act for Social Services (2020)
Croatia	National Strategy for Children's Rights in the Republic of Croatia (2014-2020)
Kosovo	Guide to supervision, by Mimoza Shahini (published by Terre des Hommes)
Moldova	Mechanism of Professional Supervision in Social Assistance Practical Implementation Guide
Romania	Occupational Standard Supervisor in Social Services, COR code 263513
	ORDER No. 27/2019 of January 3, 2019, on the approval of minimum quality standards for day-time social services for children
	Order no. 25/2019 on the approval of minimum quality standards for residential social services for children in the special protection system
	ORDER No. 288 of July 6, 2006, for the approval of the Mandatory Minimum Standards on case management in the field of child rights protection
Serbia	Rulebook on organization, norms, and standards of work of the Center for Social Work
	Nevenka Žegarac (2015) From problems to opportunities in case management – handbook for practitioners. Belgrade: University of Belgrade - Faculty of Political Science
	Rulebook on foster care

Table 9 A list of the documents analysed.

References to supervision were usually embedded within more general guidance or policy for social services. In some countries, for example Croatia and Romania, the provision of supervision has a relatively long and well-established history.

Across the region, there is general agreement, in principle, that all staff working with children could benefit from supervision. Definitions of supervision are largely based on variations of Kadushin's model, with three recognisable functions of administration, education, and support. Supervision is also described as a formal process for the delegation of organisational responsibility, as a form of case management, as a method for monitoring staff activity, as an interpersonal interaction between two or more people (but not often as an enduring relationship), and as way of providing expert advice and guidance. In some documents, but not many, supervision is also described as a form of mediation (between the agency and the worker) and a space for reflection.

The benefits of supervision are described in relation to workers, children, and the wider service. These generally reflect those found in the international literature,

although there are some local differences. For example, in Bulgaria, supervision is recognised as a forum for discussing specific moral dilemmas, such as what to do when children are living at home in severe poverty and, in a material sense at least, would be better-off living in institutional care. Supervision is also considered a means for protecting children's rights and ensuring their participation in decision-making, perhaps reflecting the degree to which the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is embedded in local statutory frameworks. It is often suggested that supervision is necessary to develop the worker's knowledge and skills, and to make up for deficiencies in qualifying education. There is widespread agreement that supervisors need to be experienced, knowledgeable, and properly qualified. In some countries, notably Croatia and Romania, there are specific qualifying programmes for supervisors, and a system of licensing.

Organisationally, there is an expectation that supervision should be provided regularly, at least once per month, via a combination of group and individual sessions. Supervision should be recorded each session, with summary reports provided for service managers.

In summary, all the documents recognise the importance of supervision and note its various functions and benefits. However, some of the documents have more legal standing than others. For example, the document from Kosovo is a practice guide for supervision, whereas for Romania the documents included government-issued orders. There is a general lack of specificity about how supervision should be organised, and some local variations in terms of additional functions beyond the core set of administration, education, and support.

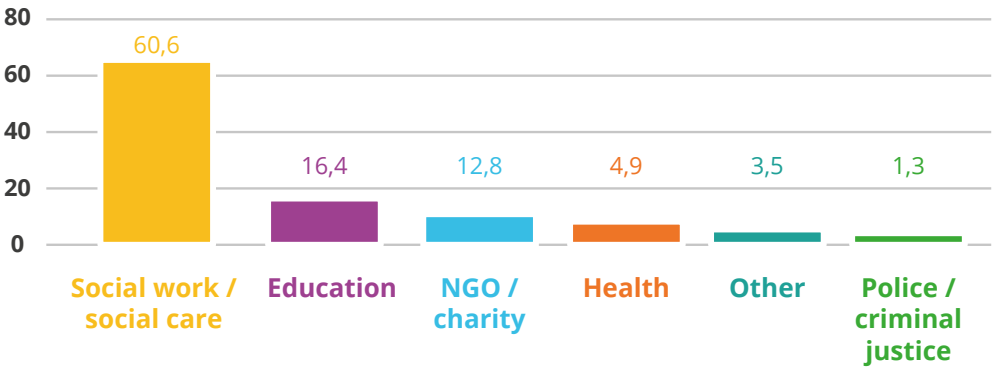
Survey results 4.2

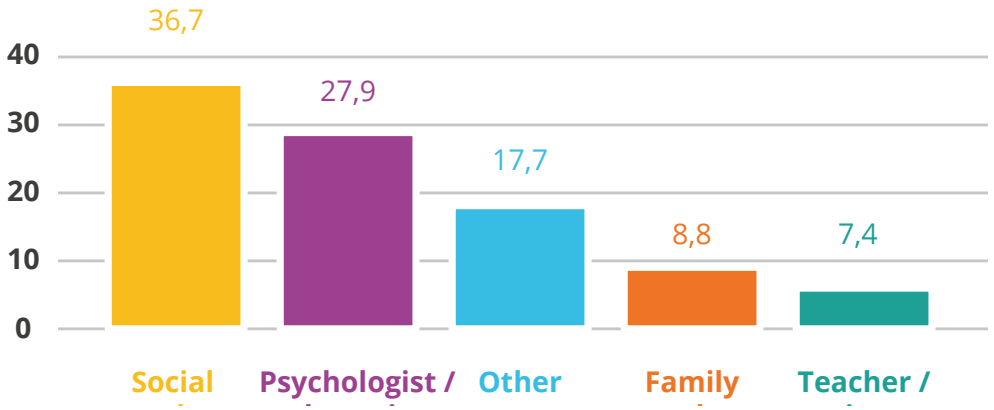
In total, 226 respondents completed the survey (>80% of the questions), and the regional findings are now presented in the following order – (1) personal and professional demographics, (2) role in relation to supervision, (3) frequency, format, and length of supervision meetings, (4) topics of discussion within supervision, (5) the helpfulness of supervision, (6) the Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale, and (7) the Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory. Qualitative comments (on how supervision makes a difference, and how it might be improved) are considered separately.

Personal and professional demographics

Most of the respondents were female (n=186, 82.3%). Most were aged between 35 and 44 years (n=72, 31.9%) or 45 and 54 years of age (n=72, 31.9%). The majority were working full-time (n=203, 89.8%), and had a master's degree (n=152, 67.3%).

Most respondents worked in the field of social work and social care, and were either social workers or psychologists, therapists, or counsellors (figures 1 and 2). The majority directly with children and families (n=171, 75.7%) and in the field of child protection (n=187, 82.7%). Nearly two-thirds said they worked specifically in multi-disciplinary teams (n=145, 64.2%).





Figures 1 and 2: Area of work (%) and current work role of respondents.

1. Role in relation to supervision

Most respondents said they received supervision (n=191, 84.5%), and more than half said they provided it (n=119, 52.7%). Just under half (n=104, n=46.0%) said they received and provided supervision. A minority (n=20, 8.8%) said they did not receive or provide supervision (figure 3).

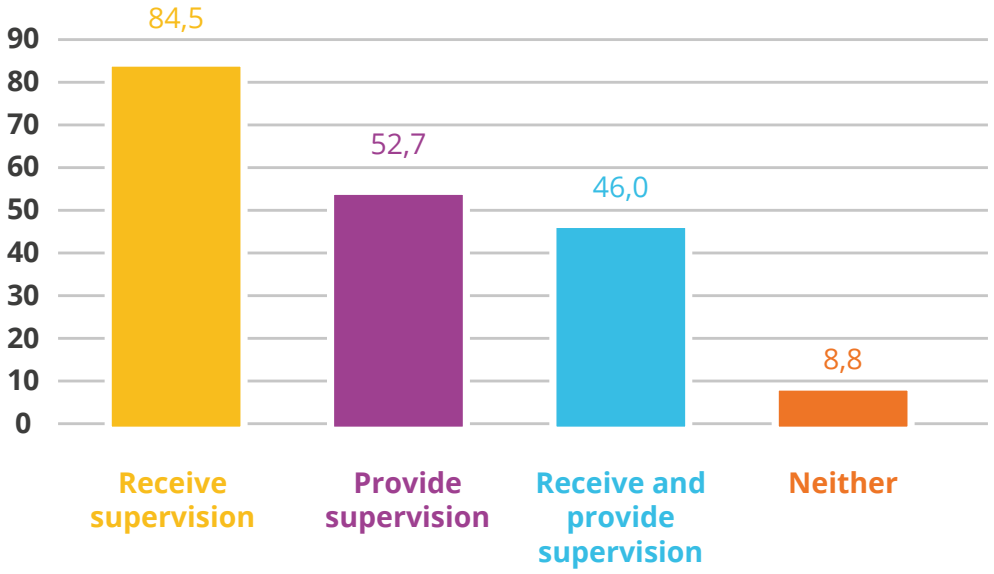


Figure 3: Currently receive or provide supervision (% of respondents).

Just over half of respondents (n=119, 52.7%) said they answered the survey questions from the perspective of a supervisor, while most of the rest (n=87, 38.5%) said they answered from the perspective of a supervisee.

Of the small number of respondents not providing or receiving supervision (n=20), most were from Bulgaria (n=7) or Romania (n=10). Most said they would like to receive supervision (n=14, 70%) and provide it for others (n=12, 60%). Nearly half said they worked directly with children (n=9, 45%), and most said they worked in the field of child protection (n=14, 70%). When asked why they did not receive supervision, respondents commented on the absence of supervision generally and the lack of formal support for it, for example:

- *"There are no practice standards or systems [in place]" (social work administrator, Bulgaria)*
- *"I do not receive [supervision] because there is no such service offered to employees in our organization. I don't offer because I could [only do it] in my free time, free time that I haven't had for a long time" (Romania, NGO office manager)*
- *"I didn't know it existed in our country" (Romania, social worker)*
- *"Because the institution where I work does not invest in the quality of the professional act, and I do not offer supervision because I am not qualified to do it" (Romania, social worker)*

2. Frequency, format, and length of supervision meetings

Respondents who received and / or provided supervision were asked about the frequency, format, and length of their meetings. More than one-third (n=84, 37.2%) said they had between three and six supervision meetings in the previous six months, while a quarter (n=57, 25.2%) said they had one or two. A smaller proportion said they had seven or more (n=38, 16.8%). One-in-ten (n=23, 10.2%) said they had no supervision meetings in the previous six months (figure 4).

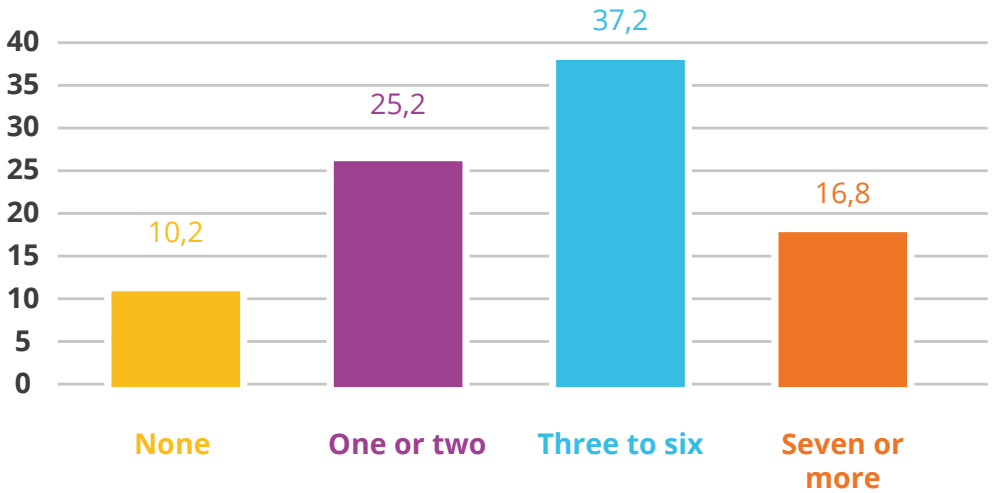


Figure 4: Number of supervision sessions in the previous six-months (% of respondents).

Comparing between countries shows that those from Serbia had the most supervision sessions in the previous six months, while those from Moldova had the least (table 10). (Nb. The figures in the second column of the table do not reflect raw numbers of sessions; in the survey, respondents were asked to estimate how many sessions of supervision they had in the previous six months using a Likert scale, where 1 = none, and 8 = thirteen or more. The third column of the table indicates where these mean numbers would have fallen on this Likert scale.)

Country	Mean	Indicative number of sessions in previous six months	N	Std. Deviation
Albania	3.59	Three or four	17	1.661
Bulgaria	3.02	Three or four	56	1.814
Croatia	3.62	Three or four	34	1.776
Kosovo	3.43	Three or four	14	1.869
Moldova	2.78	One or two	18	1.166
Romania	3.40	Three or four	45	1.876
Serbia	4.28	Five or six	18	2.740
Total	3.37	Three or four	202	1.881

Table 10 The mean number of supervision sessions in the previous six months, by country.

The most common format of supervision was group meetings (n=151, 66.8%), consisting of professionals working together with the same family (n=71, 31.4%) or from the same team but not necessarily in relation to the same family (n=80, 35.4%). Just under one-quarter said they received supervision in a one-to-one format (n=52, 23.5%). Nearly half the respondents said their supervision meetings lasted between one and two hours (n=103, 45.6%), and more than half said that during these meetings they discussed one or two families (n=141, n=62.4%).

3. Topics of discussion within supervision meetings

When asked what topics they discussed, respondents identified decision-making, assessing risks and needs, the children they were working with, analysis and reflection and emotional support as among the most common. Supervisors and supervisees tended to answer slightly differently to these

questions. For example, while nearly two-thirds of supervisors (n=78, 65.5%) said they discussed emotional support in supervision, only half of supervisees (n=44, 50.6%) said the same (table 11).

	Overall (N=226)		Supervisors (N=119)		Supervisees (N=87)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tasks for the worker / for me	84	37.2%	47	39.5%	29	33.3%
Timescales	53	23.5%	28	23.5%	21	24.1%
Decision-making	**121**	**53.5%**	**67**	**56.3%**	**46**	**52.9%**
Risks and needs	**136**	**60.2%**	**76**	**63.9%**	**48**	**55.2%**
Children	**130**	**57.5%**	**68**	**57.1%**	**54**	**62.1%**
Adults / parents	103	45.6%	51	42.9%	42	48.3%
Quality of practice	104	46.0%	53	44.5%	39	44.8%
Analysis and reflection	**135**	**59.7%**	**70**	**58.8%**	**53**	**60.9%**
Emotional support	**136**	**60.2%**	**78**	**65.5%**	**44**	**50.6%**
Intervention plans	90	39.8%	54	45.4%	28	32.2%
Something else	4	1.8%	2	1.7%	1	1.1%

Table 11 The various topics discussed in supervision, as reported by respondents overall, and by supervisors and supervisees.

4. The helpfulness of supervision

When asked what their supervision helped with, most respondents were confident that it helped in a range of ways, and especially for thinking about risks and needs, analysis and reflection, and for making good decisions. Supervision was relatively less helpful in relation to helping adults and / or parents, or for developing intervention plans, although even here most respondents still said it was helpful.

	Overall (N=226)			
	Does not help / helps a little		Helps a lot / always helps	
	N	%	N	%
Making good decisions	**42**	**18.6%**	**175**	**77.7%**
Thinking about risks / needs	**27**	**12.0%**	**184**	**81.4%**
How to help children	37	16.4%	163	72.1%
How to help adults / parents	47	20.8%	152	67.3%
Ensure high quality practice	36	15.9%	163	72.2%
Analysis and reflection	**22**	**9.7%**	**178**	**78.7%**
Emotional support	33	14.6%	168	74.4%
Developing an intervention plan	55	24.3%	144	63.7%

Table 12 What supervision helps with

Supervisors were generally more confident about the helpfulness of supervision (figure 5), compared with supervisees. Notably, four-fifths of supervisors (n=96, 80.6%) said their supervision helps a lot or always helps with emotional support, while 'only' two-thirds of supervisees said the same (n=57, 65.5%).

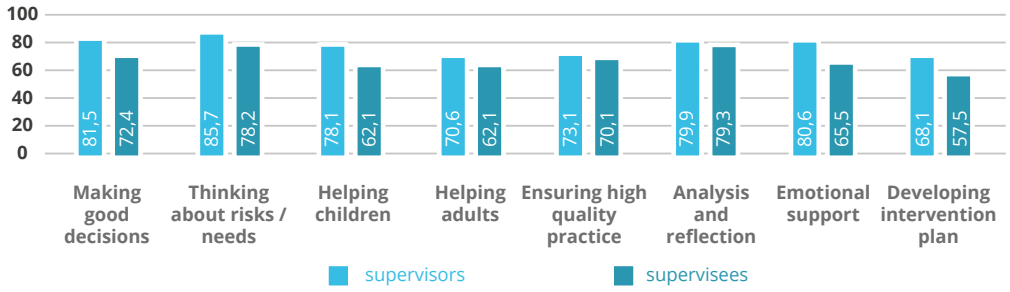


Figure 5: Supervisors and supervisees who said their supervision helped a lot or always with (% of respondents)

A variable of overall helpfulness was created, by taking the mean average of the items listed in table 12. Those who neither received or provided supervision thought supervision would be more helpful, compared to those who do receive or provide it, albeit only just (figure 6).

Figure 6: Overall rating of helpfulness in relation to supervision (mean average of the 8 items listed in table 12)

Respondents in Moldova, Romania and Serbia rated the helpfulness of their supervision below the regional average. Those in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Kosovo were above the regional average (figure 7).

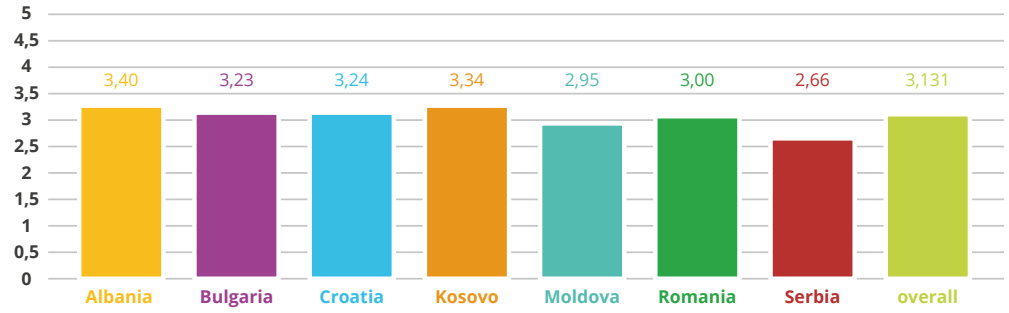


Figure 7: Overall rating of helpfulness per country (mean average of the 8 items listed in table 12).

5. The Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale

The Leeds Alliance in Supervision Scale is a standardised measure (Wainwright, 2010), consisting of three Likert-items and two open-text questions. Respondents were asked to think about their most recent supervision session, and to what extent the discussion focused on things the supervisee wanted to focus on, whether the supervisee and supervisor understood one another, and whether the session was helpful for the supervisee. For each item, the respondent provided a score between 1 (definitely not) and 10 (definitely yes). Respondents from Croatia gave the highest average scores for the three items, while those from Kosovo and Moldova gave lower scores, particularly for the first item (table 13).

Country		Leeds - focused on things the supervisee wanted to focus on	Leeds - The supervisee and supervisor understood each other	Leeds - This supervision meeting was helpful for the supervisee
Albania	Mean	7.29	7.44	7.94
	N	17	16	16
	Std. Deviation	2.568	2.529	2.594
Bulgaria	Mean	7.00	7.61	7.54
	N	53	54	52
	Std. Deviation	2.418	2.294	2.146
Croatia	Mean	8.69	8.97	8.78
	N	32	32	32
	Std. Deviation	1.655	1.675	1.736
Kosovo	Mean	6.86	7.92	7.69
	N	14	13	13
	Std. Deviation	2.656	1.935	2.720
Moldova	Mean	7.19	7.33	7.87
	N	16	15	15
	Std. Deviation	2.536	3.177	2.295
Romania	Mean	7.65	7.76	7.42
	N	43	37	38
	Std. Deviation	2.235	2.229	2.647
Serbia	Mean	6.93	7.67	7.33
	N	15	15	15
	Std. Deviation	2.251	2.225	2.059
Total	Mean	7.46	7.87	7.79
	N	190	182	181
	Std. Deviation	2.340	2.287	2.302

Table 13 Leeds Alliance in Supervision scores, per country.

Via open-text questions in the survey, respondents identified a range of ways in which their most recent supervision session had been helpful. For example:

- [We discussed] potential victims of trafficking…as we do not have much experience with such cases, this discussion was very valuable for me and the other participants (social worker, Albania).
- The worker had time and space to discuss with colleagues a difficult situation. To receive different perspective about the situation and the family relations (psychologist, Bulgaria).
- [The] supportive behaviour of the supervisor and the rest of the group… helped me to feel empowered and supported, it strengthened the sense of belonging to a group of people who professionally deal with similar challenges (psychologist, Croatia)
- During the conversation with the [supervisee] we discussed the difference between practice-theory [and taught-theory]. The [supervisee understood] how there are some differences between what is taught in theory and what is being applied in practice (social worker, Kosovo).
- We focused on the individualized approach of the child and identifying the needs according to the degree of complexity (social worker, Moldova).
- The reflection process has helped the supervisee to become aware of and manage their own emotions in relation to sensitive cases (psychologist, Romania).
- [My supervisor] gave clear guidelines on how to act in a given case, taking into account standards and norms, and still satisfy the best interests of the child (social worker, Serbia).

A smaller set of respondents described how their most recent supervision session had been unhelpful. For example:

- Unfortunately, valuable time is wasted discussing issues that we cannot change in any way, even though they are a huge obstacle to our work (psychologist, Bulgaria)
- Supervision sessions were not initiated at the request of employees, which is why it is viewed with reluctance and gives rise to many frustrations (guidance counsellor, Romania)
- It's hard for me to remember because the last meeting was more than 6 months ago. We are overwhelmed by the scope of cases and supervision serves to exchange key issues regarding burning cases (social worker, Serbia).

6. The Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory

The Supervisory Working Alliance Inventory (SWAI) is another standardised instrument, used to measure the overall rapport between supervisor and supervisee, and the degree of client focus within their supervision discussions. It consists of 19-items, the first 12 of which are combined (using a mean average) to provide an overall score for Rapport. The remaining 7 items are combined (using a mean average) to provide an overall score for Client-focus. As each item is scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, the overall scores for Rapport and Client-

focus also range from 1 to 7. Higher scores indicate a more effective working alliance and a greater degree of client-focus. Normative scores derived from the original study of the SWAI are 5.44 for Rapport and 5.85 for Client-focus (Efstation et al., 1990).

Compared to these normative scores, the SWAI scores in this study were slightly lower for Rapport, and slightly higher for Client-focus (table 14). Supervisors reported higher scores for both dimensions compared with supervisees (table 15). Respondents from Albania, Bulgaria, and Croatia gave the highest scores for Rapport and Client-focus (table 16).

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SWAI - Rapport	193	2.17	7.00	5.6928	.99287
SWAI - Client Focus	189	1.43	7.00	5.5313	1.19885
Valid N (listwise)	189				

Table 14 Supervision Working Alliance Inventory scores.

Country		SWAI - Rapport	SWAI - Client Focus
Albania	Mean	5.7309	5.6789
	N	114	112
	Std. Deviation	.85356	1.03494
Bulgaria	Mean	5.6378	5.3166
	N	79	77
	Std. Deviation	1.16871	1.38279
Croatia	Mean	5.6928	5.5313
	N	193	189
	Std. Deviation	.99287	1.19885

Table 15 Supervision Working Alliance Inventory scores, by supervisors and supervisees.

Country		SWAI - Rapport	SWAI - Client Focus
Albania	Mean	5.8073	5.7187
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	.94757	1.12983
Bulgaria	Mean	5.9819	5.8848
	N	56	52
	Std. Deviation	.80453	.93595
Croatia	Mean	6.0228	5.6813
	N	31	31
	Std. Deviation	.82228	.93121
Kosovo	Mean	5.5128	5.3352
	N	13	13
	Std. Deviation	1.13847	1.42720
Moldova	Mean	5.2782	5.5873
	N	18	18
	Std. Deviation	1.13212	1.20113
Romania	Mean	5.3897	5.0931
	N	43	43
	Std. Deviation	.99456	1.43668
Serbia	Mean	5.3542	5.1786
	N	16	16
	Std. Deviation	1.25074	1.32017
Total	Mean	5.6928	5.5313
	N	193	189
	Std. Deviation	.99287	1.19885

Table 16 Supervision Working Alliance Inventory scores, by country.

Key informant interview findings

In total, 40 key informant interviews were completed (see appendix 2). The interviews were analysed using a process of Recursive Abstraction, resulting in several key themes, each of which is described below.

Thematic analysis

Eleven regional themes have been identified from the key informant interviews. These themes are presented in turn, organised into three categories (figure 8) – the wider context and organisation of supervision (themes 1 to 4); the content and purpose of supervision (themes 5 to 8) and the benefits of supervision (themes 9 to 11).

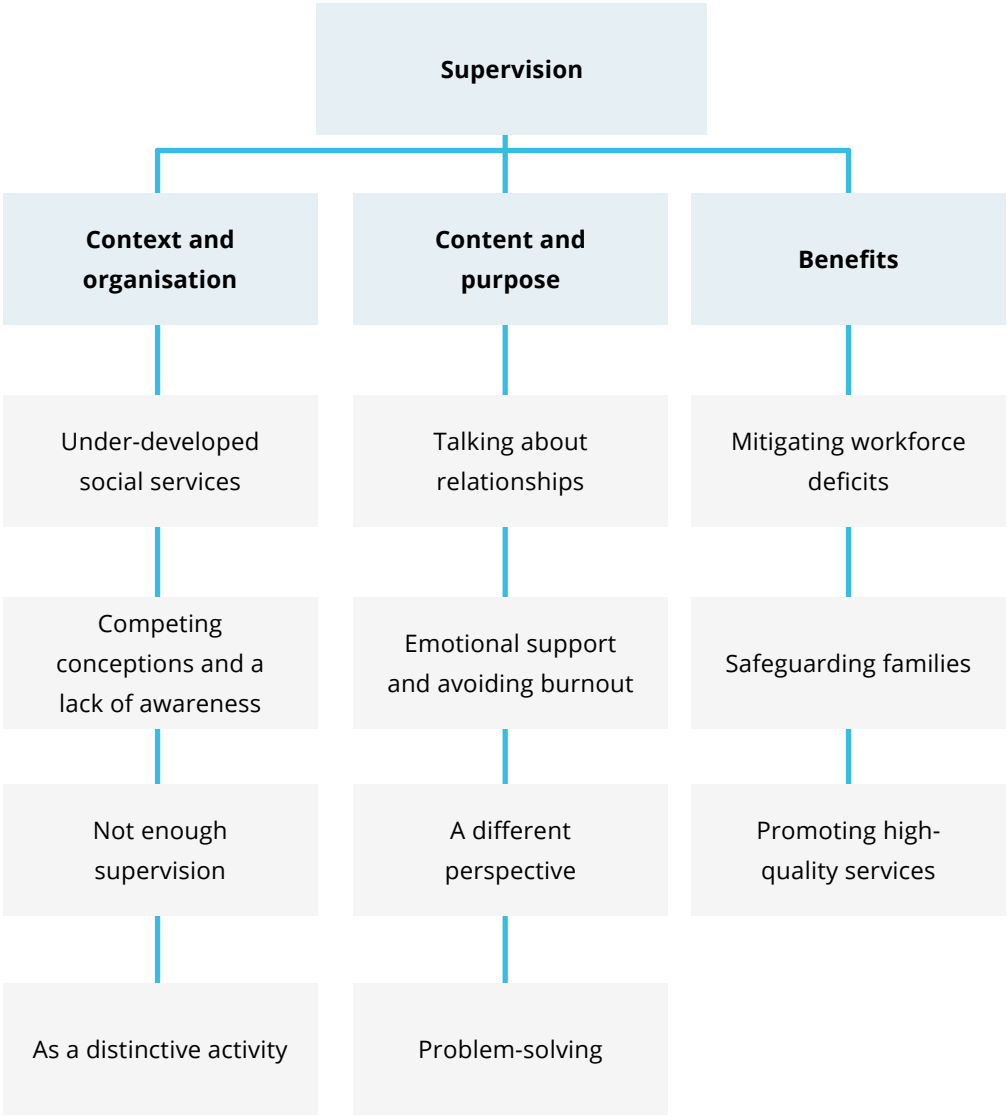


Figure 8: A visual representation of the key themes to emerge from the key informant interviews.

Theme 1: Under-developed social services (the wider context and organisation of supervision)

Repeated concerns were raised about the state of the wider social assistance system and poor working conditions. There are many more families who need support than current systems can realistically help. The well-being of children and their families is not seen as a high-enough political priority in any of the seven countries. Services were described as under-funded and suffering from high staff turnover. As one key informant said, "we are faced with a lack of capacity, resources, [we have] impoverished social areas in which insufficient investment is made. The state is constantly saving on what it should invest in the most…the problem is that social protection does not collect political points, it does not benefit politicians" (NGO worker, Serbia). One key informant suggested why this might be the case:

> *"Consumers of social services [share] a characteristic of political insecurity… no one who is on social assistance becomes a politician, he is a 'declassified person'. Our society still cannot understand this structural moral problem."* (Supervisor and University Lecturer, Bulgaria)

While there are examples everywhere of good practice undertaken by committed and enthusiastic members of staff, there are not enough well-trained and qualified professionals to meet the needs of families. As a result, services often focus on responding to crises, rather than community and family-based preventative services. As noted by one key informant, "the accent is put on the number of cases we solve, but not on prevention" (senior representative, Community Social Assistance Service, Moldova).

As a result, when asked how supervision might be improved, some key informants argued that what needs to change is the entire system of social protection and assistance. Politicians, and whole societies, need to recognise the importance of supporting families. According to some of the key informants, without significant change at every level, it is unlikely that improvements in supervision will make much of a difference. As stated by one interviewee:

> *"Of course, supervision is an integral part of social work – [you] can't have social work without supervision [but] I think that the supervision is completely redundant in this kind [of environment] because it creates a fake illusion that [good services] are possible without [a] good methodology for casework, infrastructure, the payment of social workers and the environment of work, academic education, and social workers [as] autonomous professionals"* (Supervisor and University Lecturer, Bulgaria).

Given this wider context, it is unsurprising that while all the key informants noted the importance of supervision, many also acknowledged that it offers no panacea. As one key informant said, "I am directly responsible for a very large number of cases…between 100 and 300 cases, and one supervisor…imagine the number of families, children, adults you work with and monitor" (supervisor, Serbia).

Theme 2: Competing conceptions and a lack of awareness (the wider context and organisation of supervision)

Across the region, there exist a small variety of ideas about what supervision is, and more concerningly, a lack of awareness among elements of the wider workforce. All the key informants are experts about supervision and expressed agreement about how important it is. One said, "I consider we (supervisors) are the doctors of the soul. I think supervision is very important and has a high impact" (senior representative, Community Social Assistance Service, Moldova). Yet between them, the key informants also expressed different ideas about how it should be provided, what it is, and what it achieves. A key informant from Romania said, "there [are] many voices that think they are talking about the same thing, but actually mean different things" (supervision trainer). Another said that "Supervision is not uniformly applied or understood" (NGO project coordinator, Moldova). A third, from Bulgaria, noted that this is not unusual when considered from an international perspective:

> *"There is no common understanding of what this supervision is, there is no such understanding at the international level, there are different paradigms…according to different [people] it can be centred on the client, but it can also be centred on the professional. There is a great variety"* (Head of Child Protection Department, Bulgaria).

Broadly, there were two types of supervision being discussed in these interviews – that which focuses on the worker's practice with individual families (referred to variously as functional, methodological, or technical supervision, or as case management) and that which focuses on the worker's development of knowledge and skills (mostly referred to as professional supervision and as clinical supervision). Both were considered to involve the provision of emotional support.

Some key informants posed rhetorical questions, wondering aloud – who is supervision for? Some argued that it should benefit workers, with tangential benefits for families, while others said this risked losing sight of the child. A key informant from Serbia said, "the role and responsibilities of the supervisor are not fully defined" (supervisor in child and family services). Another, from Albania, said, *"I cannot distinguish between mentoring and supervision…at the beginning, I was confused in my role, should we do case management or monitoring? The law asks for both…I think [some areas] have good practices in this regard, but in other municipalities, no"* (Head of Child Protection Unit).

In relation to the wider workforce, concerns were raised about a lack of awareness. A key informant from Albania said, *"[Supervision] is unheard of, it is 'unwalked territory', [even though] the need is very strong"* (Head of Child Protection Unit). Another, from Kosovo, said "[we need] the right understanding of supervision, [to make] the transition from traditional (controlling) to more professional supervision". Whether workers are offered supervision or not can depend on the knowledge of the service head, whether he or she understands the benefits and feels it is important enough to organise. Some workers view supervision

as a means of control, rather than professional support. As one key informant noted, “most workers think that supervision is a type of control and they don’t understand what supervision is [and] I think that those who provide funding for supervision don't understand the essence of supervision [either]” (Social work department manager, Bulgaria).

Theme 3: Not enough supervision (the wider context and organisation of supervision)

In addition to their agreements about the importance of supervision, all the key informants expressed concerns about its availability. They talked about the absence of supervision, about a lack of sufficient supervisors and how many workers need supervision but do not have it. One, from Serbia, said, “I know that employees do not have enough supervision [and] the training we have for supervisors is not enough” (supervisor in residential children’s home). A key informant from Bulgaria described supervision as “a luxury… in the field of social work on child protection” (Head of Child Protection Department, Bulgaria). Another, from Kosovo, said, “there is no accountability for supervision…there is no accountability for the provision of [it] in decentralized systems”. Another, from Romania, said that despite having occupational standards in place, and master’s programmes for supervision training, and a national association for supervisors, “there is a great need, specialists in the field need [supervision], they have been through hard times, some are very tired, and maybe have lost their sense of purpose in their work [yet] not many public institutions have supervisors [and] in reality supervision does not happen” (NGO director).

Theme 4: As a distinctive activity (the wider context and organisation of supervision)

There was also widespread agreement about the importance of seeing supervision as a distinctive activity. First, it was argued that supervision needs to be provided ‘externally’. One key informant from Romania said, “The supervisor should be an externally trained person. The less you know about the people being supervised, the better” (supervisor). Another, also from Romania, said “Supervision should be external; in Romania we are not yet cured of this idea of hierarchical relationships… when there is someone from the outside there is neutrality that allows for an effective supervision process” (NGO director). Even in countries where this view was not so strongly expressed, there was still a common belief that the supervisory role needs to be a specialist one. A key informant from Albania said, “not everyone can do supervision. Supervisors should be accountable…supervisors need status, authority. Our position as supervisors needs that, the ministry or the law should make it officially known who are the supervisors and their tasks” (Head of Child Protection Unit). Another key informant, from Croatia, said, “there should be more…control of supervisors’ work, licenses are a good way” (private practice supervisor). Others noted that supervisors were too often expected to provide supervision as an adjunct to their ‘day job’, and without being paid for it. One key informant from Moldova said, “the fact that it is not paid, so it is informal, the lack of supplementary pay is the challenge.” (NGO program manager).

Key informants also argued for the need to separate management and supervisor functions, so that the two roles are not inhabited by the same person for the same worker. A key informant from Moldova said, "In many services, the supervisor is the manager, this is wrong, as you cannot be one person and lead and provide support" (NGO program manager). From Bulgaria, a key informant said, "Supervision isn't a conversation between [a] manager and worker about how she or he performs the work tasks and [about] time frames", and that supervision needs to be "[focused] on professional self-development" (psychologist, Bulgaria).

Theme 5: Talking about relationships (the content and purpose of supervision)

Turning to the content and purpose of supervision, despite the different conceptions of supervision outlined above, there were four emergent themes across the key informant interviews. First, that supervision provides a space for talking about relationships – between family members, between the worker and the family and between professional colleagues. For some, this meant talking with workers about specific families with whom they were having difficulties. Many key informants emphasised that the nature of these discussions would depend on the needs of the worker. Often, the decision to talk about a specific family would be prompted by the worker's sense of feeling stuck or helpless. For example, one key informant said that in a recent supervision session, they had talked about a family because "the social worker felt powerless…and had no more mechanisms to proceed with it. It was good to work on it, I brought [ideas about] what she can do to find a way to deal with it" (private practice supervisor, Croatia).

As well as talking about intra-family relationships, and those between the worker and the family, supervision also provides a space to talk about relationships between professionals. This was especially so in the context of difficult working relationships. A key informant from Romania described a supervision session in which:

"We had a problem that was bothering all of us, but we were avoiding discussing it and then it was a facilitated setting where the problem was brought up, everyone had their say and we were able to come to a solution. The supervisor helped us look at it from different perspectives, helped us to understand what our expectations are, what we could compromise on and see that we could reach a common point as a team" (supervisor).

Theme 6: Emotional support and avoiding burnout (the content and purpose of supervision)

As noted above, all the key informants said they recognised the importance of supervision, even though many also acknowledged that it does not provide a panacea. The provision of emotional support for workers via supervision was the other theme presented here about which there was universal agreement. There was not a single interview in which emotional support was not mentioned, as well as being described in Q-method follow-up interviews and open-text survey questions. A key informant from Bulgaria said this applied for anyone who "[worked] with people. That is true for teachers, for medical doctors too. Because

this work is emotionally demanding. They need a space for talking about cases – to be able to get out of the "pressure cooker" (director of residential home, Bulgaria). For others, there was something particular about the nature of child protection work that mean emotional support was even more important. This resulted from the complexity of the work, because of the worker's exposure to traumatic events, and because of the challenge of working with involuntary clients (e.g., parents who have not asked for help and do not want any intervention). A key informant from Croatia said, "Child protection is a very demanding and exhausting job on several levels. There is no chance that everyone will be satisfied. [Workers] have to do interventions with people who are involuntary clients, parents who do not want the services of the social welfare system. That is already very difficult" (University Professor and supervisor). Another key informant summed it up as follows:

> *"[Supervision] is necessary because of the complexity of the cases. We work with severe cases, cases of violence. There is professional burnout for us because these are the most difficult stories to bear…The child protection work is very difficult and emotionally stressful"* (Head of child protection department, Bulgaria)

As a result, supervision is for many a form of therapy for workers. As one worker said, even though they did not receive supervision often, they knew it was important as a form of emotional support:

> *"There are cases which affects us a lot and nobody takes care of our emotional part…I suffer a lot and feel affected in various cases. When we take children from families, I suffer for a long time thinking if [the] children will have a better life outside the family… it would be an important emotional support [if we had supervision]"* (supervisee, Bulgaria).

Often, if not always, the need for emotional support was necessary to avoid burnout, a situation in which workers feel physically and emotionally exhausted, often resulting from long-term stress. Although some other solutions were highlighted, such as better working conditions, improved pay, and more holiday allowance, supervision was nonetheless seen as important for addressing this problem.

Theme 7: A different perspective (the content and purpose of supervision)

One of the other key functions of supervision, in addition to emotional support, is the ability of the supervisor to provide a different perspective in relation to casework. This function of supervision is consistent with the earliest emergence of supervision, as described by the American social work pioneer, Mary Richmond, who said, *"supervisors have the advantage over the worker, who makes his [sic] analysis unaided, [because] they do not know the client or his story" and consequently they can provide "insight into hidden relations of cause and effect"* and *"uncover how situations that seemed similar [are] upon examination…different in essence"* (2017:

348-352). The idea that supervisors can provide a different perspective, in part because they do not know the client, was extended by one key informant to include workers – *"the less you know about the people being supervised, the better"* (supervisor, Romania). A social worker from Kosovo made a similar point, saying supervision *"[provides] some new vision in working with a particular family"*.

More generally, the view was expressed that supervision helps workers 'step back' from their day-to-day work and consider different perspectives. One supervisee said "[supervision] always helps me to look at [the case] from a different angle…I love having group supervision" (social worker, Croatia). While supervision is an interactive activity between two or more people, nonetheless there was something particular about the ability of the supervisor to enable consideration of different perspectives. This might result simply because their presence changes the dynamic between the workers, or because the supervisor is able to create a safer space in which workers can express previously unvoiced thoughts and ideas. As a result, "everyone [can have] their say…the supervisor helped us to look at it from different perspectives, helped us to understand what our expectations are, what we could compromise on and see that we could reach a common point as a team" (supervisor, Romania).

Theme 8: Problem-solving (the content and purpose of supervision)

Another of the purposes for supervision is to provide workers with solutions (or the solution) to their work-related problems. A social worker from Kosovo said, "[in supervision] we find solutions to the nature of [seemingly] random problems". In cases where workers are unsure about what to do, some supervisors see it as their role to identify *"the essence of the problem"* (private practice supervisor, Croatia) and to find solutions. As the following extract suggests, this might mean needing to see things in the 'right' way:

> *"[Workers] identify a way, some solutions, a plan on how they want to intervene. Having this safe and confidential space, when you come to a child protection case and I see that there is a danger for the child or family, I work with the person being supervised to make him aware of the danger"* (supervisor, international development organisation, Romania).

For some, the need for supervisors to help resolve child protection-related dilemmas means that, for example, psychotherapists without direct experience of child protection may not be the ideal supervisors for workers in this field. While such supervisors can provide emotional support, they would not necessarily have the right expertise to explore different options and decide upon a solution. One supervisee said that:

"I worked with a young boy who lived with her grandparents. Her mother had a psychiatric disorder and she had limited parental rights. It was a complex case because the mother started to come to school. She had the right to visit him in school. I needed supervision of this case. I connected with different supervisors and all of them worked in the psychotherapeutic field, and they couldn't help me in this case. This wasn't a therapeutic case, [it] was a child protection case" (psychologist, Bulgaria).

This problem-solving orientation was most often described in relation to practice-focused supervision. From this perspective, supervision should leave the worker with an enhanced sense of clarity, or resolution, about what to do next. The supervisor is an expert, who can 'dispense' solutions to the worker - *"the supervisor to its [sic] supervisee is similar to the doctor and its [sic] patients in the hospital: at each stage the doctor consults [the] patient, [and] proposes the adequate actions [and] treatment"* (Chief of Community social assistance service, Moldova).

While it was not the case that key informants presented a dichotomous view of supervision – either it is for the provision of emotional support, or it is a problem-solving activity – there were different emphases placed on each variation.

Theme 9: Mitigating workforce deficits (the benefits of supervision)

Turning now to the benefits of supervision, the first theme is that of mitigating for deficits in the wider workforce. Key informants raised concerns about the relatively poor quality of education, and the absence or limited availability of specialist training for workers. Key informants were clear that this resulted not from deficits with individual workers, but from wider systemic issues. Noting that "child protection is a very demanding and exhausting job" (University Professor and supervisor, Croatia), some key informants said their local education systems were not always capable of equipping workers with the necessary skills and knowledge. As a result, supervision was important for "raising awareness [about the] worker's gaps in knowledge and skills" (University Professor, Head of Association for Supervisors, Croatia), although as the same key informant noted, we must be careful not to assume that supervision can mitigate all these problems – *"supervision cannot compensate for the lack of good, targeted education… it can only patch things up"*. As another key informant noted, having a relatively inexperienced and untrained workforce is unfair on families and workers alike:

"Their salaries are very low, there is a high turnover and often people with minimal or no [education] work there. I said this ten years ago and I will now say [again] that it continues to be a very serious abuse of both the professionals… and the clients who are already in severe social isolation and difficulties. To put people who are unprepared against people who have severe social problems and many needs…is an abuse of both sides, which continues to happen in our child protection system (Clinical social worker and supervisor, Bulgaria).

Some key informants said professional development was the primary purpose of supervision. It *"focuses on professional self-development"* (Clinical social worker and supervisor, Bulgaria), it is "a training method" (psychologist, Bulgaria) and "it

helps every professional, not just [inexperienced] ones, in improving their skills" (NGO coordinator, Albania). This type of supervision (also) relies partly on the motivation of the worker – *"When the worker wants to develop his or her skills it is possible with supervision. When he or she doesn't want to develop skills, that is mission impossible!" (*psychologist and supervisor, Bulgaria).

Theme 10: Promoting high quality services (the benefits of supervision)

Key informants also said that supervision helps ensure the provision of high-quality services. It helps workers feel more confident, provides a space to think and reflect, protects their mental health and emotional well-being, and reduces the likelihood of burn-out. These things all contribute to a reduction in staff turnover, and families benefit from a more consistent service. Retaining staff in their jobs enables more investment in staff development. Workers feel more capable and motivated and obtain a clearer sense of purpose. As a key informant from Moldova noted, the impact of supervision "for families is evident, there is a big difference between a demotivated employee suffering from burnout and an efficient employee, [who fulfils] his [sic] job and duties, at his [sic] maximum potential" (NGO psychologist and supervisor, Moldova). Another, from Romania, also noted how supervision helps workers to *"become more attentive to the beneficiaries, they come up with better ideas and solutions [and] most importantly, they change their perspective, which positively influences the beneficiaries"* (independent social worker and supervisor, Romania).

Via group supervision, teams work better together and feel more cohesive, as workers gain a better understanding of one another's roles and areas of expertise. Providing an example from Albania, one key informant said that, for her, group supervision has many benefits – *"it helps [workers] grow professionally, learn by mistakes, and feel supported…discussions in the group help the understanding and help solve group dynamics. Cases are managed better, and children and families get better quality care. It helps every professional, it improves quality of services for beneficiaries and the work performance of the individual and the organisation"* (NGO coordinator, Albania).

Yet many key informants also recognised that supervision does not necessarily result in these benefits. For some, supervision works differently for more and less experienced workers. Some said supervision helps all workers, while others said it is more important for less experienced members of staff. Others noted that supervision can be effective when implemented well, but not when implemented poorly. For example, if managers meet with workers and only talk about performance standards, this will not lead to the benefits outlined above, because it is not really supervision. Others said that we risk over-estimating the benefits of supervision if we do not also consider the wider working conditions and the education of the workforce. Some noted that the benefits of supervision rely as much on the worker's contribution as that of the supervisor. As summarised by a supervisor from Croatia, *"there are people who have been reborn after supervision because it has allowed them to recognise the value of it, but there are also some individuals who remain unwilling to change, who do not take care of themselves [and] so we can only speculate about the effect on children"* (private practice supervisor, Croatia).

Theme 11: Safeguarding families (the benefits of supervision)

Finally, while all the key informants identified ways in which supervision can be positively beneficial, a small but significant number described how supervision can also prevent negative effects. It is important to have supervision because "workers have significant responsibilities and powers and need support and monitoring" and because "children are the most vulnerable beneficiaries" (NGO worker, Serbia). Child protection work is "an invisible trade" (Pithouse, 2019), and supervision is important not only to promote positive outcomes, but to ensure that:

> *"Employees respect ethical standards in [their] interactions with beneficiaries and do not profit from their vulnerability. Employees can easily intimidate, humiliate, [or] use beneficiaries, [who] usually don't know how to protect themselves, [or] whom to complain [to]"* (NGO project coordinator, Moldova).

Barriers and facilitators to the provision of effective supervision 4.3

As part of the interview, key informants were asked for their views about barriers and facilitators to the provision of effective supervision. While some of these were country-specific, there were also some regional commonalities. Many of these mirror the themes described already.

In relation to supervision policy and guidance

Some countries have relatively well-developed policies, while others have nothing or almost nothing. For those in countries without well-developed guidance, this was felt to be a significant barrier. Yet even where policies and guidance have been enacted, key informants were apt to note that these had been developed without consulting supervisors and workers from the field of child protection. Others said that even with policies in place to say that all workers should receive supervision, the reality is often different, and the guidance does not specify what sort of supervision should be available. Still others said that the bureaucracy involved in delivering supervision, such as keeping records and writing summary reports, is too onerous.

In relation to the availability and provision of supervision

The most common barrier was simply the absence of supervision. For some, this was because workers did not want to have it, while others said there were too many workers who want it, and not enough supervisors. Where supervision is provided, it may be variable in quality and reliant on short-term, project-based funding. One key informant described how this approach to funding had led to some paradoxical situations in which some workers were provided with too much supervision:

"[Workers] are overloaded with supervision, if there are several projects going on, they get one from different places, from different people…the supervisory relationship [should] be long-term, sustainable, not so on a project, from time to time. It must be desired, chosen, not because…there is a project. In my opinion, this is an oversaturation of supervision, which does not make their work more effective" (Clinical social worker and supervisor, Bulgaria).

Supervision was said to work best when it is provided regularly, on a continuous basis, and delivered with a clear structure.

In relation to supervisors

Key informants commented on the lack of sufficient people trained and experienced to provide supervision. There was generally only a limited amount of training and education available for people who want to become supervisors, although some countries (such as Romania) have very well-developed programmes. Some supervisors were said to lack expertise about different models and theories of supervision. Many had to combine their provision of supervision with other roles, especially in management. Some key informants suggested that too many supervisors provided casework supervision, and there was an absence of more developmental and supportive supervision. Supervision was said to work much more effectively – to only work at all– when provided by someone other than the worker's line manager.

In relation to the wider workforce

Finally, supervision is more difficult to provide regularly and effectively when workloads are high and there are not enough staff. When there is a lack of trust in public services, and a low political prioritisation of family services, recruitment will be difficult, and families will not be motivated to engage positively with workers. When the workforce itself also suffers from a lack of access to high-quality education, it is a mistake to see supervision as the solution to these more deep-rooted and complex problems.

4.4 Examples of good practice

Despite the barriers to effective supervision outlined above, the interviews and the survey were replete with examples of good practice, and good experiences with supervision. These included specific supervision sessions, for example:

"My last supervision was just this morning, and it was a bit overwhelming, because people came with all their concerns [but] we worked on what they were worried about and what they could change and influence, how they could manage their emotions more effectively. They talked about their frustrations, but they also discovered strategies they had used before that helped them" (social worker, Romania).

*"[My] last meeting was a group one, led by an external supervisor (part of a UNICEF project). The child expressed serious mental health issues and there was also [worries] that they could harm themselves or others. All the group felt various emotions which were not easy to express, and they were named. We analysed the factors that contributed to the situation and ways to go ahead. At the end of the meeting, we felt more confident on how to proceed, although you know there are no easy or quick solutions, especially working on a socio-cultural context that is hesitant to deal with mental health issues" (*Head of Psychosocial Unit, Albania).

Others spoke more generally about the benefits of good supervision. For example:

"Absolutely amazing things happen in supervision if you really create the context for people to open up. I'm often absolutely amazed and excited by the need that exists and is unmet. The fact that [workers] continue to come to the sessions, even if it's not mandatory, they continue to explore and make the most of this space shows that there is a lot of potential there for development. I would have been glad to have the opportunity that they have - to benefit from supervision from the beginning of my career, when I started [working with cases of] domestic violence and it was very hard" (supervisor, Romania).

"The whole experience [of supervision] has been super good, super valuable and it has been lucky for me to have been a part [of it]. It has been helpful for me to share cases and provide professional advice on my cases. These have been the compass of orientation in concrete case management" (Child protection supervisee, Moldova).

One of the shared aspects across these examples, and others not included here, is the opportunity that supervision provides to stop and think, to share what is on the worker's mind, how they are thinking and feeling, with someone else, and to receive in return support and guidance. In many ways, this brief description is at the heart of effective supervision, even when there are differences of opinion about the nuances of which aspects of supervision are more important, and how it should be organised.

Q-method findings 4.5

In total, thirty-eight Q-sorts were collected, and thirty-seven included for analysis (one had been incorrectly completed; see appendix 3). As outlined above, each participant was presented with a list of thirty-seven statements and asked to sort them into a pre-defined grid according to how much the participant agreed with them (from +5, most agreed, to -5, least agreed). The statements were re-used from a previous study of supervision in the UK (Pitt et al., 2021), and covered a variety of issues, including the benefits of supervision, and the ways in which supervision may support good practice. The Q-sorting procedure was treated as an interview and completed face-to-face or via Zoom. After completion of their sort, participants were also asked six follow-up questions:

1. Thinking about the statements and the way you have arranged them, are there any that you found particularly easy or difficult to think about? If so, what ones and why?
2. What are the main aims, would you say, of having supervision, for you or for child protection professionals within multi-disciplinary teams more generally?
3. During your supervision meetings, when you're thinking about work with a particular family, what sorts of things would you talk about it?
4. What difference does your supervision make for you? And for the families you work with?
5. What is the best thing about your supervision? Can you give a specific example of something that has been helpful to you?
6. If you could change one thing about your supervision, what would it be?

Principal Component analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in three distinct factors, each with an Eigenvalue of >1.0 and 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 (see appendix 4). Correlations between the factors were moderate, falling between 0.5 and 0.6 (Dancey and Reidy, 2007). The full list of statements (and how they were sorted within each factor) are shown in table 19.

Interpretation of each factor is based on the overall configuration of the statements, including distinguishing and consensus statements. Distinguishing statements are significantly unique for each factor, while consensus statements reveal commonalities between them.

		Factors		
		A	B	C
	Statement	**Rank**	**Rank**	**Rank**
1	Supervision involves thinking about how the worker's feelings affect their practice	5	-2*	4
2	Supervision involves analysing the worker's thoughts	3*	-4*	1*
3	**Supervision involves analysing the worker's values**	**1**	**-1***	**0**
4	Supervision does not require the worker to have much self-awareness	-5	-5	-1*
5	Supervision involves applying theoretical knowledge to practice	-1	2*	1
6	Supervision involves applying research knowledge to practice	-1*	1	2
7	Supervision involves thinking about things that have gone well in practice	2	4*	1
8	Supervision does not include thinking about what went wrong in practice	-4	-3	-1*
9	Supervision involves thinking about what could have gone better in practice	5*	3*	2*
10	Supervision involves the worker thinking about 'why did I do that'?	4*	-1*	-3*
11	Supervision involves thinking about taken for granted assumptions that are held in society	2*	-2*	-1*
12	**Supervision does not involve thinking about the worker's personal biases**	**-1**	**-1**	**-1**
13	Supervision involves thinking about imbalances of power between professionals and the children and families who use services	0	-4*	-1
14	Supervision involves discussing ethical issues and dilemmas that arise in practice	4*	0	2

		Factors		
		A	B	C
	Statement	Rank	Rank	Rank
15	**Supervision helps the worker manage his or her emotions**	**3**	**4**	**3**
16	**At times, workers may actively avoid having supervision**	**0**	**-1**	**1**
17	Supervision can be emotionally difficult for the worker	2	1	0*
18	Supervision has little impact on the worker's decision making	-5*	-3*	1*
19	Supervision enables the worker to think more clearly	3	3	5*
20	**Supervision does not enable the worker to develop as a professional**	**-4**	**-5**	-4
21	The worker does not learn a great deal from supervision	-3*	-2*	-4*
22	Supervision allows the worker to consider different ways of approaching the same problem	1	2	5*
23	**Supervision allows the worker to think more 'curiously'**	**0**	**1**	**0**
24	Supervision allows the worker to practice in a more anti-discriminatory way	0*	2*	-3*
25	**Supervision leaves the worker open to showing his or her weaknesses**	**-1**	**0**	**0**
25	Workers can have 'too much' supervision	-3*	0	-2
27	Supervision is more about supporting the worker, and not helping children and families	-2	0*	-2
28	Supervision allows the worker to better understand the children and families they work with	1	1	4
29	Supervision helps improve outcomes for children and families	0*	5*	3*
30	Supervision makes it harder for the worker to do their job	-3	-3	-5*
31	**Supervision usually ends up producing more questions than answers**	**-2**	**-1**	**-2**
32	Supervision allows the worker to practice with children and families in a more relational way	1	3*	2
33	**Group supervision for workers in multi-disciplinary teams helps them reach a common understanding of the case**	**2**	**2**	**3**
34	It can be dangerous for children and families when child protection workers do not have supervision	-1	0	-3*
35	There are more important things for workers to do than have supervision	-2	-2	-5*
36	I would like more time in supervision to be spent on reflecting	-1	1*	-2
37	Group supervision is especially important for workers in multi-disciplinary teams in the context of child protection work	1	5*	0

*Table 19 Factor scores for each of the thirty-seven statements relative to the Q-sort grid. Statements marked with a * are distinctive to the specific factor ($p < 0.05$). Consensus statements are in bold.*

Consensus

Across the three factors, which between them explain nearly two-thirds of the variance (63%), there was consensus about nine of the statements. These indicate a shared view that supervision helps with professional development, provides emotional support, and enables members of multi-disciplinary teams to reach a common understanding about the families they are working with. In addition, there is a consensus that it helps provide workers with solutions for their work-related problems.

Factor A – Helping workers identify what to do in practice

Factor A is labelled "Helping workers identify what to do in practice". Participants associated with this factor consider supervision an important forum for thinking - especially in relation to what has gone well (and why), and what could have gone better in practice with families. It includes thinking about feelings in relation to how they affect the worker's practice, more so than to provide emotional support. 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, about ethical issues and dilemmas and by reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions. One participant from Albania said that the main goals of supervision for her included *"offering a more complete panorama to see things more clearly"*, while another, 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 impacts the worker's decision-making.

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 self-aware, it is not 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 about values, anti-discriminatory practice, or relationship-based working. It is relatively important for workers in multi-disciplinary teams, but no more so than for those in other types of teams.

This suggests a model of supervision in which the worker is helped to think about 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 and has 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). This diversity suggests that the conception of supervision represented by this factor is relatively common across the region, between different professional groups and those in different roles.

Factor B – Helping workers to manage their emotions

Factor B is labelled "Helping workers to manage their emotions". Participants highly associated with this factor consider supervision to be an important forum for emotional support and for improving outcomes for families. One participant from Albania said the best thing about her supervision was how it left her "feeling good in terms of psycho-emotionally" and 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 apply theory to practice, and identify what has gone well in practice. Supervision is especially important for workers in multi-disciplinary teams. One participant from Romania said, *"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, and it could be improved by being a more reflective space than it often is.

This suggests a model of supervision in which emotional support is the primary aim, which also helps facilitate positive working between colleagues. This improves 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 to support workers to do the right thing, in Factor B there is a more explicit description of what this means - 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.

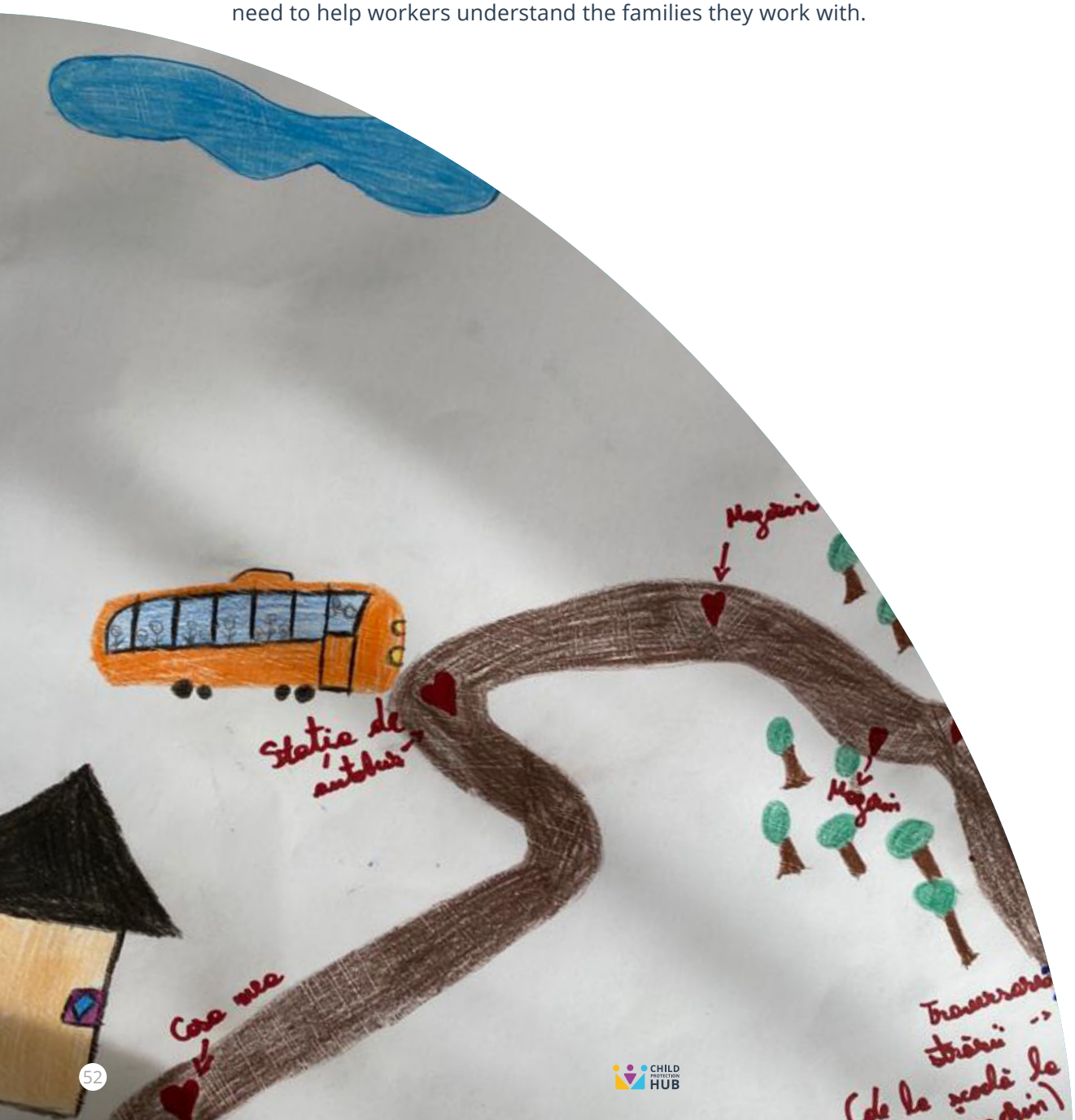
Factor C – Helping workers to understand children and families

Factor C is labelled *"Helping workers to understand children and families"*. Participants highly associated with this factor considered supervision to be an important forum for developing their understanding of families. Supervision benefits the worker, via emotional support and professional development, but it primarily improves outcomes for children and families. 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 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".. 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.

This suggests a model of supervision in which the primary aim is to develop the worker's understanding of children and families, so 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 suggest there is a primary view of supervision across the region, focused on helping workers do the right things well in their practice. By itself, Factor A accounts for one-third of the total variance. Yet this also means there are more people who would take a different view. The other two factors here 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.



Discussion

5

Reflecting on the findings, it is important to emphasise the consensus that exists in the region regarding supervision. Among the 300 or so people who took part in the study, there are few if any who do not consider supervision an important component of child protection practice. This may be unsurprising, given that many were themselves supervisors. On the other hand, many were supervisees and some neither received nor provided supervision, yet they too agreed about the importance and value of it. In many studies of supervision in other countries, such as the UK and Australia, those in receipt of supervision are often noticeably less convinced of its value.

There is also a consensus that supervision must provide emotional support for the workforce. This is the case even for key informants who might disagree ultimately about whether the purpose of supervision is to help the worker or the child. There is also widespread agreement about the need to develop laws, policies, and guidance in relation to supervision (or to improve existing laws, policies, and guidance). Finally, there is agreement about many aspects of the content of supervision, notably that it should provide a space for talking about relationships (intra-family, intra-professionally and between families and professionals), about emotions, about professional skills and knowledge and for problem-solving in relation to families.

Yet there also emerged some subtle differences, with different respondents emphasising different components of supervision. One noted already is whether the ultimate beneficiary of supervision should be the worker or the child, and in relation to the different types of supervision that workers need. Some respondents emphasised the need for functional (or case management) supervision, while others emphasised developmental supervision. In some countries, where one or the other is well provided for, respondents identified the need for more of the other. Finally, there was some disagreement in relation to the evidence base for supervision. Some argued we have all the evidence we need already. Others said that while high-quality evidence is hard to find, the self-report of workers and supervisors provides reasonable if not conclusive proof of efficacy. Others queried the relevance of the question:

"I think that measuring supervision effectively is very complex and philosophically… how [can you] measure the satisfaction of someone who is watching theatre? I don't know. And why do we need to do it?" (Social Work department manager, Bulgaria)

In the introduction, reference was made to Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) categorisation of different supervisory activities in relation to Kadushin's three-part model of supervision (educational – supportive – administrative). Considering this categorisation again in relation to these regional findings shows that all of the same activities are in evidence, yet with particular emphasis on three of them - developing knowledge and skills (educational), space to explore work-related emotional distress (supportive) and ensuring high-quality practice (administrative). While this might suggest the applicability of Kadushin's three-part model, the educational and supportive functions are more apparent than that of administration (table 20).

As such, these findings are relatively unusual when considered internationally, where concerns are more often expressed about the dominance of the administration function. It is hard to avoid drawing a conclusion based on the widely held view across the region that management cannot be combined with supervision. In places where this has been done, such as in the UK, administration quickly dominates the supervision agenda, and workers generally report low levels of satisfaction, even while having more frequent and regular access to supervision. Here, on the other hand, the primary complaint is about a lack of access to supervision, but when it is provided, workers (and supervisors) are more positive about its benefits.

Activity (in relation to supervisees)	Function		
Space for reflection on the content and process of work	Educational		
Developing knowledge and skills	Educational		
Receiving information and another perspective on their work	Educational	Supportive	
Receiving feedback on their work and on their development as a professional	Educational	Supportive	
Receiving validation and support for their work and for their development as a professional		Supportive	
Sharing responsibility for work-related problems and difficulties		Supportive	
Space to explore work-related emotional distress		Supportive	
Ensuring high-quality practice		Supportive	Administrative
Ensuring a pro-active approach to work			Administrative
Planning work, to ensure good use of resources			Administrative

Table 20 Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) categorisation of supervision activities in relation to Kadushin's (1993) model of supervisory functions.

Finally, to reflect further on some of the nuanced differences that exist across the region, we present two models, the first based on three variations of supervision and the second on four supervisory orientations (types of supervisor). As noted above, there is a strong consensus about some core aspects of supervision, and these are represented in the middle of the Venn diagram below (figure 9). There are also some other aspects of supervision that are considered important by many, but not all, respondents. These are also represented on the Venn diagram in the overlaps between each combination of two circles. Finally, there are aspects of supervision that while most would still consider to be important, are emphasised more in particular variations of supervision than others. These are the components that appear only in one of the circles on the Venn diagram. We have labelled these three variations as follows – action-focused, curiosity-focused, and emotion-focused. As a worker, receiving these variations of supervision would result in a subtly different experience, and a different type of supervision conversation, each though these different groups of workers would also have much in common.

One can also make a similar characterisation of four different supervisory orientations, which indicate how a supervisor might act differently as a companion, controller, guide, and mirror (figure 10). The use of the word 'and' here is deliberate because each supervisor may adopt all four orientations at different times and with different workers. As illustrated by the accompanying quotes, each of the variations is present across the region, with different implications for the nature and content of their supervision discussions.

The controller orientation is one anticipated more by workers who do not have supervision, and do not have a good understanding of it, rather than being part of the role per se. The other orientations are more evident from the perspective of supervisors and supervisees. Sometimes, the supervisor is a mirror, letting the supervisee see him or herself, and his or her practice, from a new point of view. A mirror is relatively passive, as emphasised in the accompanying quote – "I'm there to listen" – yet still has impact. A companion, also being relatively passive, is someone who travels with you, experiencing the things you experience and giving you confidence to go places you might not otherwise go. On the other side of the diagram are two more active orientations. A controller is someone who can tell you what to do with legitimate authority. A guide is more active than a companion, being someone who recommends where you should go, rather than just following your lead, yet ultimately allows you to decide for yourself.

In the introduction, reference was made to Hawkins and Shohet's (1989) categorisation of different supervisory activities in relation to Kadushin's three-part model of supervision (educational – supportive – administrative). Considering this categorisation again in relation to these regional findings shows that all of the same activities are in evidence, yet with particular emphasis on three of them - developing knowledge and skills (educational), space to explore work-related emotional distress (supportive) and ensuring high-quality practice (administrative). While this might suggest the applicability of Kadushin's three-part model, the educational and supportive functions are more apparent than that of administration (table 20).

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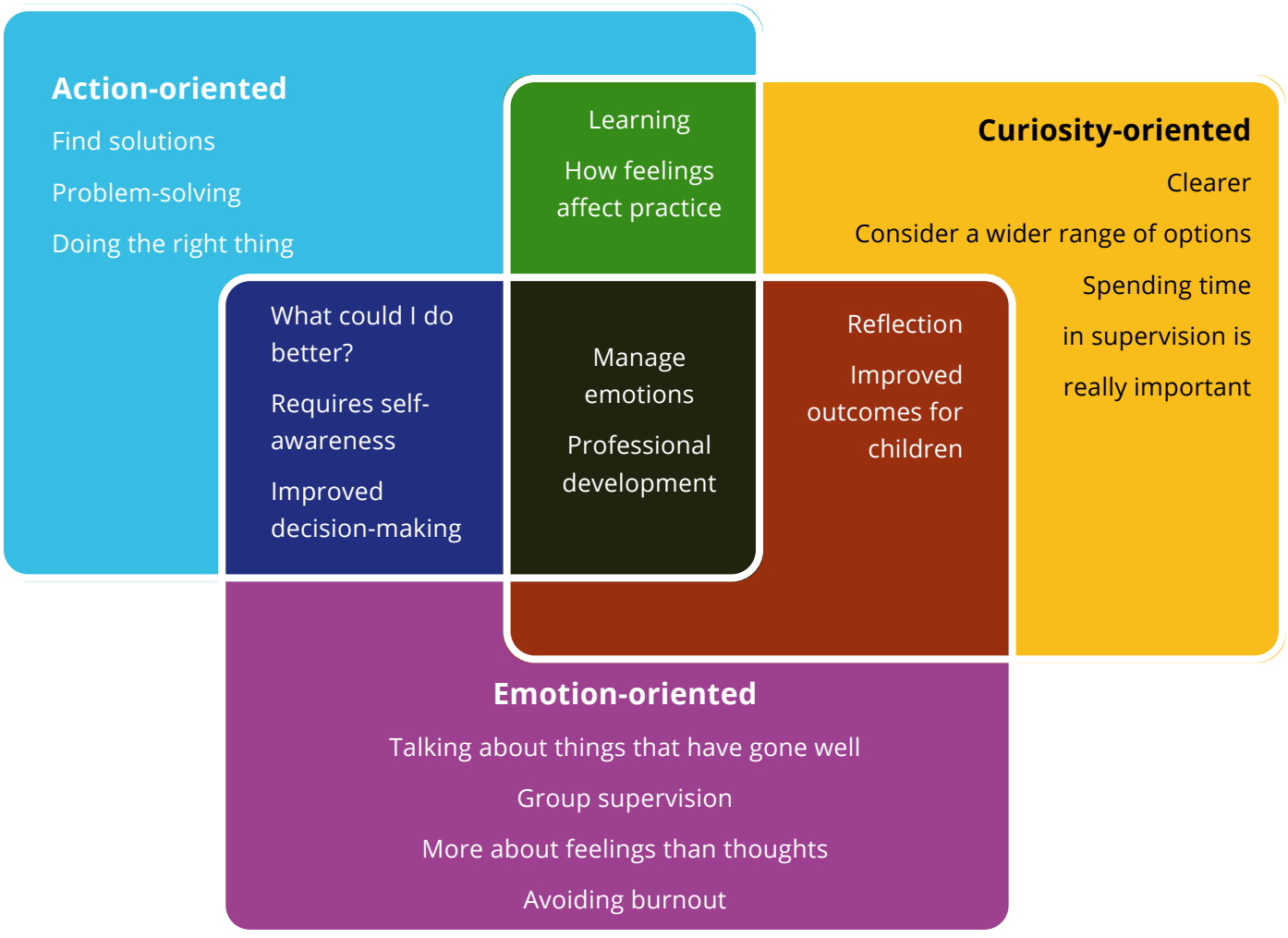
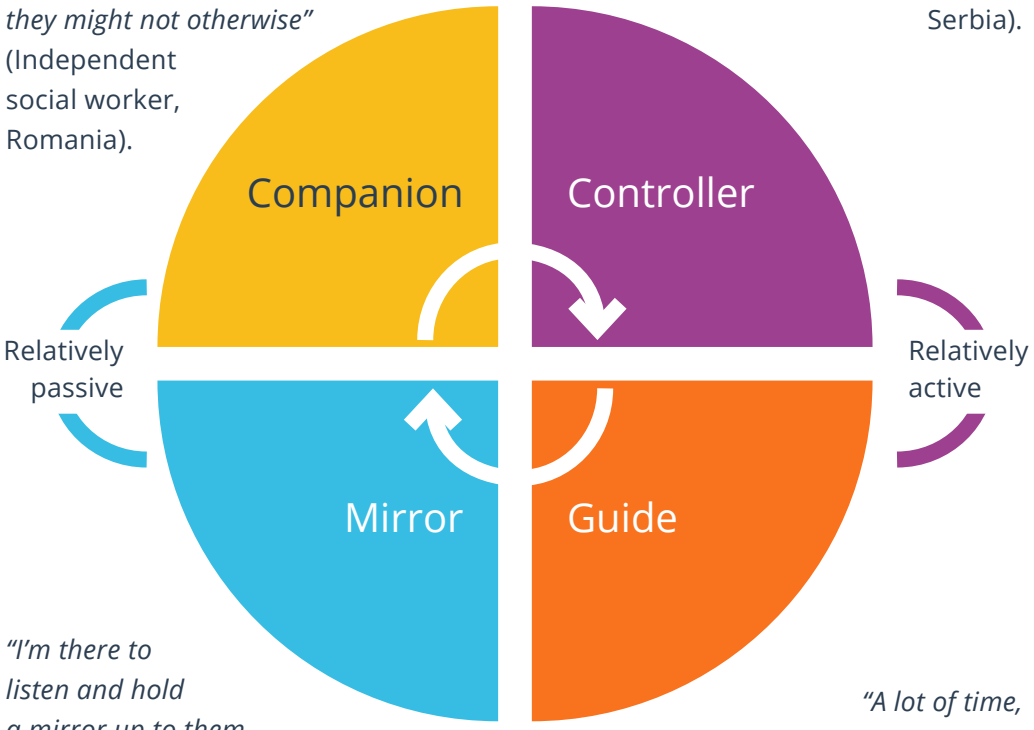


Figure 9: Three variations of supervision – action, curiosity, and emotion.

"As someone who has accompanied teams working in child protection, I can say that it is important, it's a safe setting in which they can explore things they might not otherwise" (Independent social worker, Romania).

"I think [there is a] conflict of interest, on the one hand [supervisors] are controllers, and on the other hand [they provide] support" (supervisor, Serbia).



"I'm there to listen and hold a mirror up to them and ask them questions. I've found that sometimes just by talking about something, things can be set up differently if you ask the right questions" (NGO director, Romania).

"A lot of time, [the worker] doesn't see other solutions, visions, perspectives... supervision helps you see you are not alone. In my opinion, every person has the need to be guided" (NGO child protection officer, Moldova)."

Figure 10: Four different supervisory orientations - supervisor as controller, companion, mirror, and guide.

6 Recommendations for policy and practice

During all forms of data collection (the survey, the key informant interviews, and the Q-study), respondents were asked about what changes they would like to see in terms of policy and practice for supervision. Some were country-specific to each country and are discussed in the local reports. Nonetheless, there were seven recommendations that apply across the region, and another six that apply especially to multi-disciplinary teams (table 21).

	Who?	What?
1	Policymakers, in consultation with sector experts, universities, and social service organisations	Set clear standards in law, policy, and guidance
2	Universities, professional associations, social service organisations	Increase awareness of supervision within the workforce
3	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be available for every child protection worker
4	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be provided regularly
5	Policymakers, social service organisations	Supervision should be provided separately from management
6	Policymakers, social service organisations	Being a supervisor should be a dedicated role
7	Universities, professional associations, social service organisations	Create a supportive community of child protection supervisors, with more specialist training (including as part of university programmes and curricula)
8	MDTs	Group supervision is particularly important in this context as it helps facilitate positive team relationships and ensures a common understanding of each family / child.
9	MDTs	Group supervision to be included in legislation and policy pertaining to MDT professionals and how they should work together in child protection cases.
10	MDTs	Group supervision should include all child protection professionals within the MDT, not just social workers / social care staff.
11	MDTs	Supervisors need to have a good understanding of child protection work specifically, preferably with experience of working in the field themselves.
12	MDTs	Supervision to be provided regularly by the same person over a period time, to enable a trusting relationship to develop between the team and the supervisor

Table 21 High priority, cross-regional recommendations.

1. Set clear standards

Where policies and guidance exist (e.g., in Romania and Croatia), these could be improved in consultation with sector experts, especially to clarify what supervision is and how it should be done. For other countries, policies and guidance need to be developed as they do not yet exist. Such policies should be developed in consultation with experts working in the field of child protection.

2. Increased awareness of supervision

Among parts of the workforce, there is a lack of awareness about what supervision is (and what it is not). More should be done to raise the profile of supervision and ensure all workers understand what it is and the benefits of having it.

3. Supervision should be available for every child protection worker

Every worker in child protection should have supervision. Child protection work is too complex and too demanding for workers to manage effectively, or for long, without it. It is unfair and potentially damaging for both workers and families when workers do not have supervision.

4. Supervision should be provided regularly

Supervision is often provided based on short-term funding. While such supervision is often helpful, a lack of regularity limits its effectiveness. It may also lead to paradoxical situations in which some workers are given too much supervision from different supervisors, while others have none. Supervision more evenly spread across the workforce, and provided more regularly, would establish a clearer understanding of what supervision is, and ensure more workers benefit from it.

5. Supervision should be provided separately from management

One of the clearest recommendations is for the separation of supervision from management. Where 'supervision' is currently being provided by managers, this should be reviewed and if possible, it should be provided independently of management. The two roles are important but distinct, and do not complement each other well.

6. Being a supervisor should be a dedicated role

Being a supervisor should be a dedicated role, not combined with management, but also not combined with being a caseworker. Supervisors should not have to provide supervision in their 'free time' or without being paid. While it is possible, even useful, to combine supervision with other non-practice roles, such as University work, it is not feasible to ask those working directly with families to also supervise the work of others, at least not without formally recognising that they are fulfilling two (or more) distinctive roles.

7. Create a supportive community of supervisors, with more specialist

Providing effective supervision requires a special combination of skill, experience, and expertise, especially in the field of child protection. This requires the right training and educational opportunities, and more generally a community in which supervisors can learn from one another and get support for themselves. Courses

and programmes should be designed in consultation with, or led by, those working in the field of child protection already, with sufficient experience and expertise to understand what supervisors need to know and what they need to do.

8. Group supervision is especially important for MDTs

In the context of MDTs, group supervision is especially important (alongside, not as a replacement for, individual supervision). It helps facilitate more positive team working and ensures a shared understanding about each family among the different professionals.

9.Group supervision to be included in legislation and policy for MDTs

To help establish the provision of group supervision in this context, legislation and policy pertaining to child protection case work for MDTs should refer to the need for supervision, and specify how often and in what format(s) it should be provided.

10. Group supervision in MDTs should include all child protection workers

Group supervision in MDTs is not just for social work and social care staff – all child protection workers should take part, to learn from one another, share different perspectives, and gain knowledge of each other's roles

11. Supervisors need to understand the field of child protection practice

Especially in MDTs, supervisors need to have experience and knowledge of the child protection field. While others can provide effective supervision too, for example in relation to professional development and emotional support, it is important for workers to be guided in their practice, and this is where experience and knowledge of the field is invaluable.

12. Supervision to be provided regularly by the same person

Finally, for supervision to be provided regularly by the same person, to enable trusting relationships to be developed between the MDT professionals and the supervisor. While this may be an important component of other forms of supervision, it is especially important when the supervisor is aming to help with casework in the context of group working. Understanding more about the team dynamics and creating an atmosphere in which each individual is able to express him or herself, to share doubts, questions, and worries about themselves – this takes a great deal of trust, and having a turn-over of supervisors, each of whom may be very skilled and experienced, is not conducive to creating the best atmosphere for group supervision in particular.

7 Conclusion

In a key informant interview, one respondent said, “you cannot have social work without supervision”. This is true – and applies equally to child protection practice more generally, whether delivered by social workers or other multidisciplinary professionals. Yet many child protection workers in multidisciplinary teams in these countries are engaged in child protection practice without supervision, or with only inconsistent access to supervision. This is deeply concerning for workers, children, and families alike. Without regular access to high-quality supervision, workers are likely to have lower confidence, experience more stress and have less opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills. Children and families will experience a less effective service. While the provision of supervision cannot guarantee high-quality services and a well-supported workforce, the absence of supervision does make these outcomes much more difficult to achieve.

Appendix 1

Interview schedule for key informants and supervisors

Share the following descriptions of supervision with the interviewee at the start of the interview

In this interview, I want to ask about your knowledge and experiences of professional supervision. Supervision is commonly used in social work and other child protection settings, and usually involves a manager 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 carers."

Q1. What do you make of this description? Do you recognise it as something that is happening in (your country) or field of work?

Generic questions (for all respondents)

Q2. What is your professional role, how would you describe what you do day-to-day and what your responsibilities are in relation to child protection work?

Q1a (If not clear) Do you directly provide supervision for child protection professionals as part of your role? (Yes / No).

Q3. How would you describe the current state of supervision in the context of child protection work in (your country) or field of work? How is it provided, what is it for and what does it achieve?

Q4. Can you say something about the history of supervision in child protection work, how has it developed in (your country) or field of work and why?

Q5. Why is supervision important (or not important) in the context of child protection work in (your country) or field of work?

Q6. What policies and procedures guide the provision of supervision for child protection workers in (your country) or field of work?

Q6a (prompt if not otherwise mentioned) – What sort of policies and procedures specifically guide the provision of supervision for child protection workers from different agencies or disciplines, especially where they are working in multidisciplinary teams for child protection cases?

Q7. How effective do you think supervision is for workers and for families in (your country) or field of work, and how do you know?

Q8. What do you think are the main challenges facing the provision of supervision in (your country) or field of work?

Q9. Thinking ahead to five- or ten-years' time, what would you like supervision to 'look like' in (your country) or field of work and what would need to happen to get there?

Additional questions for supervisors

Q10. Thinking now about the supervision that you provide; how often would you meet with the same worker and what sorts of things would you talk about with them?

Q11. What are the main aims of having supervision discussions with these workers, would you say?

Q12. Thinking specifically about your most recent supervision meeting, how would you describe it? What happened, what did you talk about, and how did you feel at the end?

Q13. How do you think your supervision helps the worker? And how does it help children and families?

Q14. And the final question, if you could change one thing about the provision of supervision in (your country) or field of work, what would it be?

Appendix 2

A list of the key informants who took part in the interviews.

Country	Participant role
Albania	Program Coordinator, NGO
	Head of a Child Protection Unit
	Head of a Child Protection Unit
	Head of a Psychosocial School Unit
	Head of a Rights and Protection Agency

Country	Participant role
Bulgaria	Psychologist and supervisor
	School psychologist
	Staff member, Agency for the Quality of Social Services
	Staff member, Agency for Social Assistance
	Director of a children's residential home
	Manager, Social Work Department
	Supervisor and University Lecturer
	Psychologist and supervisor
	Clinical social worker and University Lecturer
	Head of a Child Protection Department
Croatia	Supervisor, University Professor, and senior member of Association for Supervisors
	Head of an Institute for Children
	Child psychologist and supervisor
	University Professor and supervisor
	Private practice supervisor
Kosovo	Supervisor
	Director of a Centre for Social Work
	Professor of Social Work
	Social worker
	Government official, Department of Social Work
Moldova	Child protection officer, NGO
	Senior staff member, Territorial Structure for Social Assistance
	Project coordinator, NGO
	Project manager, NGO
	Senior worker, National Agency for Social Assistance
Romania	Senior worker, Human Resources and Organisational Development
	Senior representative, National Council for Social Workers
	Social worker, NGO director, supervisor
	Senior representative, Supervisors' Association of Romania
	Independent social worker, supervisor
Serbia	Project worker, NGO
	Professor of Social Work, Faculty for Political Science
	Supervisor
	Supervisor
	Assistant Professor, Social Work Department

Appendix 3

A list of the participants in the Q-study.

Country	Participant role
Albania	Program Coordinator, NGO
	School psychologist
	School social worker
	Supervisor
	Supervisor
Bulgaria	Psychologist and supervisor
	University lecturer and supervisor
	Supervisor
	Team manager
	Supervisee
Croatia	Head of NGO
	Private practice psychologist
	Social worker, Centre for Social Welfare
	Program Coordinator, NGO
	Program Coordinator, NGO
Kosovo	Social worker
	Social worker
	Social worker
	Social worker
	Social worker
Moldova	Psychologist and supervisor, NGO
	Child protection officer and supervisee, NGO
	Senior staff member, Territorial Structure for Social Assistance, and supervisor
	Senior staff member, Community Social Assistance, and supervisor
	Community social assistant, and supervisee

Country	Participant role
Romania	Director, and supervisor, NGO
	Director, NGO.
	Supervisor
	Supervisee
	Supervisor
	Regional director, supervisee
	Supervisor
Serbia	Project worker, NGO
	Counsellor for foster carers
	Case manager in children's services
	Counsellor for foster carers
	Case manager in children's services

Appendix 4

The factor matrix for the Q-study, with * indicating a defining sort (p < 0.05).

Q-sort	Factor A	Factor B	Factor C
35 (Kosovo)*	0.8695	0.212	0.2259
36 (Kosovo)*	0.8695	0.212	0.2259
37 (Kosovo)*	0.8645	0.2042	0.239
33 (Kosovo)*	0.8266	0.3225	0.1435
10 (Serbia)*	0.7952	0.1893	0.0856
34 (Kosovo)*	0.779	0.3416	0.1778
2 (Bulgaria)*	0.7488	0..0375	0.2666
20 (Croatia)*	0.6761	0.1894	0.4109
17 (Croatia)*	0.6696	0.2631	0.3988
5 (Bulgaria)*	0.6388	0.2198	0.3588
16 (Croatia)	0.6313	0.3084	0.6101
7 (Serbia)*	0.5996	0.1132	-0.0598
6 (Serbia)	0.5973	0.3221	0.5107
30 (Albania)*	0.5861	0.2574	0.4981
19 (Croatia)	0.5578	0.2987	0.4727
11 (Moldova)*	0.536	0.3946	0.3304
4 (Bulgaria)*	0.5168	-0.1057	0.4375
24 (Romania)*	0.4248	0.1424	0.3412
13 (Moldova)*	-0.0073	0.7897	0.0739
14 (Moldova)*	0.1932	0.7058	0.071
3 (Bulgaria)*	0.1493	0.6559	0.1431
12 (Moldova)*	0.4605	0.6353	0.3495
22 (Romania)*	0.264	0.6117	0.0299
26 (Romania)	0.5391	0.5854	0.2858
32 (Albania)*	-0.2347	-0.5816	-0.4779
23 (Romania)	0.5163	0.5245	0.3229
8 (Serbia)	0.4463	0.4713	0.3386
27 (Romania)	0.1963	0.2901	0.0682
1 (Bulgaria)*	0.3256	-0.1853	0.7301
29 (Albania)*	0.3287	-0.0666	0.7035
31 (Albania)*	0.3024	0.293	0.6814
15 (Moldova)*	-0.0056	0.4144	0.662
21 (Romania)*	0.0818	0.357	0.598
18 (Croatia)	0.5632	0.416	0.5645
28 (Albania)	0.4774	0.3305	0.5323
9 (Serbia)	0.1392	0.5092	0.5194

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March 2022