



CONFERENCE REPORT: THE FIRST SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY - SOCIAL COHESION IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

In Vitez, December 15 to 18, 2024, the first School of Social Work and Social Pedagogy titled *Social Cohesion in Social Protection* was held, aiming to enhance the competencies of professionals in social protection, promote interdisciplinary cooperation, and develop innovative approaches for working with vulnerable populations. The school sought to address key challenges in the field by providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, practical learning, and exploring new methods for improving practices in social protection. The event gathered experts, practitioners, and researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader region. It was organized by *PONTEM - the National Association for Social Pedagogy in BiH*, in partnership with the *Association of Social Workers of Sarajevo Canton* and with financial support from the *Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Policy*.

Focus on Contemporary Challenges in Social Protection

The central theme of the school revolved around contemporary trends and phenomena in the social protection system. Particular emphasis was placed on mixed migration challenges, focusing on unaccompanied children, victims of human trafficking, and returnees foreign terrorist fighters and their families. Through a series of lectures, workshops, and discussions, participants had the opportunity to explore how these phenomena impact social cohesion and to investigate possible approaches to improve the social protection system. Notably, workshops led by **Mr.sc. Eldar Ćerim**, focusing on case study development, and interactive discussions on supervision methods led by **Mr.sc. Fatima Bećirović**, were highlighted as particularly beneficial for professional development.

The school was attended by 33 participants from the social protection system, representing the Sarajevo Canton, Central Bosnia Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton, and Tuzla Canton.

Innovative Approaches and Interdisciplinary Cooperation

The school program was designed to enable a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to solving complex problems in social protection. This included the application of case studies, interactive workshops, and sessions focused on sharing best practices among participants. Special emphasis was placed on using qualitative and quantitative research methods to better understand the specific needs of vulnerable populations. Participants explored the rights and protection of unaccompanied children in the migration context, with a focus on the prevention and intervention in cases of human trafficking. Reintegrating returnees foreign terrorist fighters and supporting their families was another critical topic, alongside the role of social workers and pedagogues in strengthening social cohesion. Practical experiences enriched these discussions, particularly through case studies shared by practitioners. This approach allowed for practical application of acquired knowledge and provided a platform for discussing innovative solutions.

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS

Speakers at the school included **Mr.sc. Sanela Pekić** with a presentation titled *Supervision in Helper Profession* and **Mr.sc. Fatima Bećirović** with *Supervision in Helping Professions: Burnout prevention and professional support*. They presented the legal framework for supervision in Bosnia and Herzegovina, practical advice, supervision implementation methods, and self-care tools for professionals. **Dr.sc. Nina Babić** discussed the historical development of supervision in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

MA Danijel Vasilj delivered a lecture titled *The Role of Social Pedagogues in Mixed Migration*, focusing on competencies – knowledge and skills that social pedagogues can offer in working with people on the move, especially unaccompanied children and youth. Similarly, **MA Lejla Musić** gave a lecture titled *Unaccompanied and Separated Children in BiH*, addressing the legislative framework for handling unaccompanied children concerning the standard operating procedures of the Ministry of Security of BiH, supported by numerous examples from her extensive practice. In this module, **Dr.sc. Suada Selimović** discussed the potential for specialized foster care as a form of social protection for unaccompanied children.

Dr.sc. Izet Pehlić delivered a presentation on quantitative research in the profession, focusing on data collection methodologies and their presentation to professional and general audiences. **Mr.sc. Eldar Ćerim** focused on qualitative methodology and conducted an interactive session where participants practiced writing a case study.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

Following the evaluation of the professional gathering, most ratings ranged from **4.78** (overall relevance of the event for participants' work) to **4.93** (satisfaction with logistical arrangements). These ratings resulted from detailed structured questionnaires covering aspects such as content usefulness, topic relevance, organizational support, and workshop interactivity. Participants particularly highlighted the importance of practical examples and the opportunity for experience exchange as key factors contributing to their positive evaluation. Regarding participants' perspectives, the majority cited **lack of resources** (35.7%) and **lack of research methodology knowledge** (14.3%) as the main reasons for the low representation of professional publications.

When assessing the usefulness and necessity of supervision in social protection institutions, a significant majority of 71.4% of participants fully agreed with the statement. Additionally, 100% of participants agreed that the quality of a professional helper's work is significantly influenced by personality traits, such as character and worldview, which require continuous development.

Qualitative data from the evaluation, gathered through participants' statements and comments, reveal a wide range of topics and perspectives that contributed to the success of this scientific event. **Supervision** emerged as a key topic, particularly emphasizing its role in professional development and support for practitioners working with complex populations. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of **practical examples from practice**, which not only enriched their experience but also provided concrete tools for application in their institutions. The event also served as a platform for **networking and experience sharing**,

where professionals from different disciplines openly shared their challenges and perspectives, contributing to a better understanding of the professions of social pedagogues and social workers.

Participants' comments identified key themes for future gatherings, including the organization of supervision, self-care methods for professionals, and burnout prevention. Special interest was shown in challenges related to working with specific populations, such as at-risk minors, the impact of social media on children and youth, and professionals in healthcare settings and divorce proceedings. The need for strategic topics, such as systemic solutions for better positioning of helping professions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, advocacy, and public education on the significance of social pedagogy, was also highlighted. Participants suggested expanding topics on individual work, creative methods, and examples of best practices through casework, as well as focusing on preventive programs and innovative approaches in social pedagogy. These themes provide clear guidelines for further improving the content and relevance of future events.

Particularly valuable were discussions that facilitated *dialogue on professional dilemmas and challenges*, providing participants with valuable time for exchanging diverse views and potential solutions. The importance of *maintaining the mental health of professionals* was also emphasized as a crucial aspect of dealing with complex and emotionally demanding situations in their work. An atmosphere of professionalism and engagement among all participants further enhanced the quality of the event, while the *multidisciplinary nature of topics* provided a comprehensive insight into various aspects of working with marginalized groups, such as migrant children and individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The first School of Social Work and Social Pedagogy marked a significant step in strengthening social cohesion and developing the profession in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The event provided a unique platform for connecting professionals from various disciplines, enabling experience exchange, learning through practical examples, and exploring innovative solutions to key challenges in social protection.

The evaluation highlighted the high relevance of topics, particularly those related to supervision, professional identity, and working with specific populations. Quality organization and a multidisciplinary approach further contributed to the success of the event, while discussions and interactive workshops inspired participants to improve practices in their institutions.

The need for continued work on themes such as organizing supervision, burnout prevention, and self-care methods for professionals was recognized. Special interest was shown in strategic initiatives, including public education, advocacy for better positioning of helping professions, and the development of preventive programs. These guidelines clearly indicate the direction of future schools and professional gatherings, ensuring the continuous contribution to the development of social pedagogy and social work in the region.

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