

# GUIDANCE NOTE

## Using Social Work Interventions to Address Climate and Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean



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# **Using Social Work Interventions to Address Climate and Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Lucía Vivanco M., Andrea Villagrán A.,  
and Víctor Martínez R.

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1818 H Street NW

Washington DC 20433

Telephone: 202-473-1000

Internet: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

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# Contents

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Why It Matters .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Social Work in Social Protection Systems .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>3. Relevance of Social Work to Disaster Contexts .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. Application of Social Work Interventions in Adaptive Social Protection .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Application of Social Work Interventions to Support Disaster Risk Management.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Recommendations and Final Messages .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Annex 1: Bibliography.....	14
Annex 2: Additional Resources .....	15
Annex 3: Officials Interviewed .....	16
Annex 4: Endnotes .....	17



## Why It Matters

Disasters associated with adverse natural events (hereafter referred to as disasters) are increasing in both frequency and intensity, and in many cases, have severe impacts on countries and their populations, particularly those living in poverty and in socially vulnerable situations. Poor or limited access to both material and immaterial resources hinders the ability of these populations to confront the damages and losses caused by disasters, and thereby restore their material and psychosocial well-being in a timely and effective manner.

This note is particularly concerned with guiding countries in the design and implementation of methodologies typically used in Social Work, such as family support, case management, and other interventions, in disaster contexts in order to contribute to the construction of Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) systems. Social Work strategies can be employed within ASP systems to help identify and reduce risks, determine appropriate responses, and support strengthening the resilience of affected individuals and families.

Based on regional experiences and an exhaustive bibliographic review, the note provides an overview of how countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have developed strategies aimed at managing disaster risk and their role in generating Social Protection policies. Within this context, the note focuses particularly on the role of Social Work and the use of Social Work interventions, including strategies aimed at facilitating ***accompaniment of households and families, case management, and community interventions.***

Finally, we present a series of recommendations based on an integrated analysis of collected regional experiences, review of secondary data, and the actions or planned actions that countries have taken or intend to take to further strengthen Social Protection policies from an adaptive perspective. These recommendations are intended to assist LAC countries with designing or redesigning Adaptive Social Protection systems by designating a specific and unique role for Social Work, the strategies it uses, and its direct work with vulnerable populations.

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## 1. Introduction

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Adverse natural hazards and their devastating impacts generate an imbalance in the dynamics of affected populations, families, and communities, while the severity of these impacts can be exacerbated depending on the degree of poverty and vulnerability among these populations. Natural hazards may become disasters when some societies on one hand, do not generate clear and defined strategies, tools, or resources for dealing with natural phenomena and on the other, continue to engage in lifestyles or means of production that have a severe impact on nature.<sup>1</sup> Disasters can also be further exacerbated by the timeliness and efficiency of the support provided by the State.

Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries have been addressing poverty and vulnerability through Social Protection policies aimed at poor and vulnerable groups. In many cases, LAC countries exhibit established and robust SP systems that have incorporated strategies to address the conditions of poverty and vulnerability in an integrated way, including through a life cycle approach; addressing disability constraints; and holistic strategies to reduce poverty. Conversely, there are other LAC countries that still exhibit nascent Social Protection Systems (SPS), characterized by structural constraints (material, human, and technological resources (among others)) to improving the efficiency and performance of their SPSs, and further hindering their ability to ensure the adaptability of their SPSs. Consequently, countries such as Chile or Colombia have SPSs that are growing stronger in terms of both design and implementation, with good degrees of inter-sector coordination across different state actors and facilitating effective and efficient actions in emergency situations.

This note offers an analysis to guide and facilitate the development of Adaptive Social Protection Systems (ASPSs) through the use of Social Work (SW) interventions to address the five pillars of Disaster Risk Management (DRM): risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness, resilient reconstruction, and financial protection. Specifically, the note focuses on the following SW interventions: ***Accompaniment of Households and Families (or Family Accompaniment)***, ***Case Management***, and ***Community Interventions***.

Two aspects of the note should be considered. The first is that these three types of SW interventions are not the only ones employed in the implementation of Social Protection (SP) programs and services. However, they are the most frequently used, given their technical relevance to SP program objectives. The second aspect, which became further evident during the collection of primary data for this note, is that the use of SW interventions in the implementation of SP programs and services, are not always exclusively carried out by professionals trained in Social Work. Rather, in several countries, SW interventions and related activities with SP beneficiaries, are carried out by public employees or other professionals who may not have formal training in SW.

## 2. Social Work in Social Protection Systems

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**Social Work plays a relevant and strategic role in the implementation of Social Protection (SP).** As a discipline, SW plays a critical role in the implementation of SP policies, plans, programs and services, since it involves establishing direct, individualized, and sustained contact with the populations, groups, and families SP is intended for. These are

mostly individuals and populations characterized by poverty or other categories of vulnerability. In many countries, social workers are public employees or professionals who play a key role at the local level of program or policy administration, including in municipalities and local healthcare centers. They implement social programs, leveraging their training, knowledge of, proximity to, and interaction with, vulnerable populations. These professionals are valued in their communities and their tasks range from promoting family or community education; communicating relevant information to households; implementing accompanying strategies; developing individual and family competences and skills; and promoting autonomy and self-sufficiency among individuals, groups, and families.

**In any of the areas in which it intervenes, Social Work seeks to do so through pertinent and appropriate methodologies that directly impact or support individuals, households, and social groups with overcoming poverty and vulnerability.** Although the options for using SW interventions in SP vary, family accompaniment and case management are two methodologies that, through direct contact and shared analysis, promote processes to enable people (SW clients) to define goals and associated tasks to strengthen their autonomy. This in turn generates more significant outcomes for self-sufficiency and ultimately poverty reduction among the subjects/clients of SW interventions. Although these strategies are typically used in this way to strengthen family dynamics and promote changes at the individual and family levels, some Social Protection and social promotion activities are carried out at the community level, to facilitate integration and improve connections within broader social networks. The interventions that are the focus of this note include **Family Accompaniment** which is a type of counseling aimed at setting goals and modifying behavior to improve the safety and well-being of people, and is based on the established ties between the social worker and the family or individual (SW client). Secondly, **Case Management** involves the joint assessment of client needs and the amount and type of benefits or services required to achieve the goals set during a client's participation in a SP program or service, and monitoring and evaluating that participation. Additionally, case management includes guiding families to obtain benefits and services and supporting the development of the psychosocial skills they must acquire in order to do so independently. **Community Intervention**, on the other hand, is a process aimed at achieving the social well-being of populations with their direct and active participation in analyzing, raising awareness, and resolving the issues that affect the community. It therefore begins with the community itself and includes the use, empowerment, or creation of its resources,<sup>2</sup> and through its actions, helps strengthen the community's potential.<sup>3</sup>

**Latin America and Caribbean countries have developed extensive experience in the use of Social Work in Social Protection, particularly in the use of family accompaniment, case management, and community interventions. However, these are not exclusive interventions for social workers, nor is the field of Social Work exclusive to professionals trained in the discipline.** Although SW is understood as a professional discipline that relies on expertise based on specific academic training, it is also recognized as a practice aimed at generating changes in social contexts and contributing to achieving greater degrees of equity and social integration. Therefore, academically trained social workers not only have the capacity to directly lead SW interventions, but they can also play a significant role in planning and designing public policies aimed at social promotion and SP.

**Countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Colombia and many others in the Caribbean include social workers within their Ministries of Social Development.** In these countries, social workers carry out tasks such as monitoring client or beneficiary access to particular benefits or services; investigating cases of abuse and domestic issues; and supporting young people, children, and other vulnerable persons in complex legal and judicial situations. Furthermore, research reveals that the teams conducting social work interventions also consist of professionals from

other areas or technicians trained in social issues who play a role in administering some SW interventions or processes, including those for case management, family accompaniment, and community interventions. For instance, in some countries in the region such as the Dominican Republic, individuals who are not professionally certified in SW take on typical social work responsibilities, including supporting groups, communities, and families; providing guidance and information to clients; and liaising with local public professionals. Some countries such as Jamaica and Belize have both professional and certified social workers as well as other professionals who are not certified in SW, but who perform administrative and supportive roles in the field and with clients. Many of these countries do not have enough social workers with professional certification to meet the demands for assessment, monitoring, family accompaniment, case management, client follow-up, and so on. In these cases, administrative personnel support social workers in activities such as registering beneficiaries, reviewing documents, collecting data, supervision, and other basic aspects of client management. Finally, there are countries in the region where the establishment of SP systems is still very new, as is the use of Social Work for these purposes.

### 3. Relevance of Social Work to Disaster Contexts

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**Populations in situations of poverty and vulnerability are the priority of SPSs and are frequently more exposed to and affected by the occurrence of disasters.**<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, more progress can be made to incorporate specific DRM and emergency response actions in SPSs. Although SP programs, and social work professionals, often constitute the most appropriate channel for implementing household-level strategies to support DRM pillars (risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness, resilient reconstruction, and financial protection), the reality is that interventions to support these pillars have been traditionally focused on emergency response and reconstruction.

**Some LAC countries, (namely those that have advanced SP and DRM policies to manage risk), have created protocols which have incorporated SW actions in disaster response and civil protection.** In these cases, social worker actions are focused on, among other things, gathering data on household-level impacts through specific tools (such as the Basic Emergency Sheet (*FIBE*) used in Chile); managing and administering shelters; and organizing and supporting the delivery of post-disaster benefits and services designed to mitigate the effects of damages and losses caused by a disaster. Within this context, regular SW tasks to support SP programs (family accompaniment, case management, and community interventions) are suspended to make way for emergency response. Countries such as Chile and Colombia report that the professionals responsible for family accompaniment make contact with families given their professional ties to clients and provide them with referrals or information on benefits and services available in an emergency situation. However, these are often not actions that take place within the formal design, framework or guidelines of the program. In fact, according to the data gathered from the countries consulted for this note, neither the components of the SP programs nor the operational manuals formally establish specific actions aimed at risk management or emergency response. Also, while DRM protocols do establish formal disaster response guidelines, this is often not part of the formal operational processes of Social Protection programs.

**Although the social work professionals who play a role in SPS programs are qualified or receive training to work in disaster contexts, they mainly focus their actions on emergency response.** Even when countries such as Colombia or Guatemala carry out risk identification and mitigation actions, these actions were initiated by other

sectors dedicated to well-being, such as housing in rural areas. In the countries where social workers are trained in disaster management, the focus is essentially on emergency response. They receive information to facilitate and guide evacuations, gather data, provide care in times of crises, and given institutional structures, make their services available to local administrations and municipalities, to respond to various needs that may arise.

**In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is wide variation in the use of Social Work and in the degree of maturity in using Social Work to support disaster response and to strengthen the resilience of households.**

In countries that have institutionalized SW in the implementation of SP programs, social workers often have specific DRM-related responsibilities, such as managing shelters, supporting the evacuation of vulnerable groups, assisting persons with disabilities and seniors, and assessing the needs of households affected by disasters. For instance, in Jamaica, social workers take on these roles working alongside the organizations in charge of DRM and more specifically, a Humanitarian Assistance Committee within the country's national DRM framework.<sup>5</sup> In other countries, agencies responsible for public safety or civil protection are mostly responsible for these actions.

**Many of the region's countries do not have sufficient human resources to deliver effective social work to all of the households and individuals that need these services, and these constraints are magnified in disaster situations.**

Given these diverse experiences, LAC countries have an opportunity to review the implementation of social work and consider how these types of interventions can be more effective in responding to the impact of disasters on the most vulnerable populations. Through family accompaniment, case management and community intervention, social workers must incorporate actions designed to promote coordination amongst the families they serve in order to optimize the community response in each of the DRM pillars for better and more appropriate disaster risk management. An overview based on the primary data gathered can be found in the table below:

**Table 1: Typology for Assessing Maturity in the Use of Social Work in Social Protection Systems and Disaster Contexts**

Level	Social Work in Social Protection Systems (SPS)	Social Work in Disaster Contexts
 <b>Nascent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP programs or initiatives are nascent or not well-established.</li> <li>• There is no formal institutionalization of Social Work (SW) in the SPS or as a function or strategy in SP interventions. There are no trained and certified social workers supporting SP programs or initiatives. Instead of social workers, the SPS relies on community agents, facilitators or other staff with a range of technical or professional training outside of the SW discipline.</li> <li>• Initiatives such as family accompaniment, case management, and community interventions are not offered through SP programs and services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP programs and services are not adapted to respond to the various DRM pillars.</li> <li>• There are not enough social workers or public employees working in SW roles to provide effective support to individuals, households, and communities in order to mitigate risks and recover from disasters in a resilient manner.</li> <li>• There are no programs aimed at working with families to identify and reduce disaster risk, and preparedness actions are not clearly communicated. Social Workers have no role in supporting these tasks.</li> <li>• Information is not collected about losses and material damage to households caused by the occurrence of a disaster, and if it is done, it is done in an 'ad-hoc' manner without collecting information on the state of the families, which makes it difficult to develop response actions directed to these groups.</li> </ul>
 <b>Emerging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP services and programs are more established, with reasonable coverage and tools for implementation and monitoring, but gaps remain in coverage, benefit levels, efficiency, and effectiveness.</li> <li>• There are specific and identifiable contributions to the SPS by SW, and training of certified social workers. Social work considerations are included in formulating and implementing SP policies, plans and programs.</li> <li>• Although SW is an important component of SP, there are not enough social workers to carry-out all SW roles and responsibilities. Social workers are therefore complemented by other public officers or technicians (agents/facilitators etc.) who are not formally certified in the discipline. In some cases, these professionals or technicians are supervised by social workers.</li> <li>• Family accompaniment and case management actions are included in the design of SP programs or initiatives, but they are not always offered to all of the beneficiaries who need them or not always delivered by certified social workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP programs and services have some protocols that make them adaptive to disaster response, but there are gaps in their application to other DRM objectives.</li> <li>• Some training is offered to the general public on mitigation actions and emergency response, but no training is offered by social workers aimed at the SP beneficiaries.</li> <li>• Social workers are trained in topics related to disaster-related risks to assist the population, but the training is geared to emergency response.</li> <li>• In emergency situations, the public officers or technicians responsible for family accompaniment in SP, carry-out accompaniment, support families and provide referrals for emergency response and recovery situations, but without previously designed or established guidance.</li> <li>• Social workers carry out emergency response actions but without specific roles aimed at supporting families.</li> <li>• There are instruments to collect information on losses and material damage caused by a disaster, but they do not necessarily have all the information on the state of the families to inform adequate household-level responses.</li> </ul>
 <b>Established</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP services and programs are established and fully developed, with broad coverage of the poorest and most vulnerable families. They include modern tools for implementation and monitoring.</li> <li>• The design, planning, and implementation of social protection initiatives and programs include social workers who are formally certified/accredited based on the training they receive and their experience with working with families and individuals in situations of poverty and vulnerability. The majority of the beneficiaries who need these services are receiving them.</li> <li>• Family accompaniment, case management, and community intervention actions aimed at promoting improved well-being and other SP objectives are carried out by certified social workers with knowledge of the field.</li> <li>• The SP system has sufficient human resources trained in social work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SP programs and services have protocols, policies, and institutional arrangements that make them adaptive to DRM objectives.</li> <li>• The programs that form part of the SPS are designed to include actions carried out by social workers aimed at informing the families and individuals they work with about disaster risk.</li> <li>• Social workers tasked with implementing or supporting SP programs are trained in DRM, particularly in tasks related to supporting families as a priority in the various stages of DRM.</li> <li>• The instruments used to collect information about the losses, damages, needs and impacts of disasters collect sufficient information on the state of the families to implement adequate household-level responses.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors

## 4. Application of Social Work Interventions in Adaptive Social Protection

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**Based on the literature reviewed and the information gathered from different Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) government representatives, it is apparent that countries in the region have made advances in strengthening their Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) policies to address the consequences of disasters.**

This is evident in efforts that have been strongly focused on provision of cash transfers and other subsidies aimed at mitigating material losses, housing damage, as well as the loss of sources of income for families. Some countries have incorporated resources to address emergency response and reconstruction costs into their national budgets. What is still nascent, with varying degrees of progress in different countries, is the development of strategies geared toward strengthening the participation of affected communities and individuals in ASP strategies from an inclusive people-centered perspective. The development of these strategies involves strengthening the direct work of social workers with individuals and families, and incorporating interventions to support family accompaniment, case management, and community interventions used in the implementation of regular SP programs to help guide individuals, families and communities in the development of actions to address risk situations and contexts; and to develop tasks to help reduce or mitigate these risks.

**Given that Social Protection is geared toward helping individuals and households manage risk, improve their well-being, strengthen resilience, and overcome poverty, the definition and design of SP programs and initiatives are fundamental, as is their effective implementation and evaluation.** Strengthening SP initiatives and programs should not only be focused on increasing payments or expanding services targeted to the families or individuals benefiting from SP programs, but should also be aimed at improving efficiency and helping beneficiaries better adapt, prepare for, and cope with disasters and their impacts.

**There is significant variability among LAC countries in how they have been able to improve the adaptiveness of their SP programs and policies.** Even so, the countries that have made the most progress, usually by improving intersectoral coordination and improving information management for SP programs and services, still have a long way to go. The gaps to effective development of ASP in LAC countries often includes limited incorporation of SW into SP programs and services, and failure to leverage social worker connectedness to households as well as their expertise in the implementation of *family accompaniment*, *case management*, and *community interventions* to support ASP objectives. It is worth noting that even in the absence of formal guidance and protocols, social workers who practice family accompaniment on a regular basis as part of SP programs, often develop actions to help individuals and families face and cope with emergency contexts.

Despite the substantial progress in developing strong SP systems in LAC, particularly related to the delivery of cash transfers and social safety net support, cross-country comparisons reveal that there is still a long way to go in the establishment of clear and concrete measures that leverage the use of SP programs and interventions to support DRM pillars, and particularly, SW interventions to support these objectives.

## 5. Application of Social Work Interventions to Support Disaster Risk Management

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**Social Work and its use of family accompaniment, case management, and community interventions to support Social Protection programs and services has facilitated positive outcomes in families and promoted resilience.** These SW interventions enable families to develop the capacity to achieve SP goals and avoid falling back into situations of vulnerability. To help achieve more efficient ASP policies and programs and improve SP's adaptability, SP must incorporate a more integrated approach to implementation beyond delivery of transfers and benefits. As such, the use of SW and its interventions must be considered strategic to helping SP programs promote and strengthen the resilience of families, help them to overcome poverty, and improve their overall living conditions. This also requires the development of SW actions to support Disaster Risk Management (DRM) pillars.

**The DRM pillars of risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness, resilient recovery and financial protection (see Chart 1) can help people and families to help strengthen their resilience, particularly through the use of social work interventions as part of Social Protection systems.** The potential roles for Social Work to support these objectives are as follows:

### *i. Risk Identification*

From a broad perspective, risk identification has to do with risk assessment and communication, particularly to understand hazards, exposure, and vulnerability in the context of DRM. Even though most LAC countries have risk management plans and have signed agreements such as the Sendai Framework,<sup>6</sup> these plans often suffer from deficiencies in communication to civil society and other groups. To contribute to risk identification, social workers could promote information access and awareness to families so that they have clarity on the risks they are exposed to.

Thanks to social workers' proximity to target populations of SP programs and services, they are well-positioned to learn about the needs of individuals and families in situations of poverty and vulnerability, many of whom are often located in geographic areas characterized by higher hazard and climate risk. Therefore, the more complete, standardized, and comprehensive the assessments performed by the social workers are, the more efficient the tasks of identifying affected populations will be. Actions that can help improve the use of Social Work interventions to support risk identification include:

- The assessment instruments used to evaluate clients and collect information from affected households and families are standardized, and social workers are sufficiently trained in their application.
- SP systems have enough certified social workers at their disposal to cover the highest possible number of poor families and those vulnerable to disaster impacts.
- SP systems have well-defined service standards and established supervision mechanisms for performing household assessments and collecting information from affected households, even when the officials performing these tasks are not necessarily certified SW professionals.
- The information collected from household assessments is supported by established and interoperable information systems, facilitating efficient and timely ASP decision-making.

## **ii. Risk Reduction**

To adequately contribute to improving the resilience of families, it is not enough to identify contexts that may cause a disaster or increase exposure, but it is also critical to identify and employ measures to minimize risk. Although it was not possible to identify documented experiences of using SW for this objective, we were able to identify some country-level experiences during stakeholder interviews. For example, in Chile, preventive education is carried out as part of a regional plan and comprises a regional committee that has an objective of establishing and expanding a network of trainers to support **education in risk reduction**. In the Dominican Republic, the officials performing social work functions **identify and train vulnerable households and communities in risk reduction**, by promoting and facilitating collaborative ties within communities, together with the identification of community leaders who have a leading role in mitigation and support actions in the response phase. Some social work actions that can contribute to risk reduction are:

- Creating safe spaces to establish strategies aimed at generating behavior change among individuals and families.
- Facilitate risk reduction strategies through creation of networks, case management, intermediation, and access to resources.
- Recognize the family as part of a community, and promote connecting spaces to develop collective risk reduction strategies, for example, by maintaining adequate household waste management practices to minimize disaster risk.

## **iii. Preparation**

The preparation objective is especially important in minimizing the negative impacts of disasters. Actions associated with this objective include evacuations before the event occurs; preparation of relief supplies for households and families; preparation of shelters, among others. In some LAC countries, social workers have very important roles in this phase, while in others, civil protection is the entity that leads these processes. For example, in Jamaica, social workers play an important role in the preparation and management of shelters and relief distribution. By including social workers in this phase, preparedness actions can help address the different types of vulnerabilities faced families and households at risk. Some social work actions that can contribute to preparation include:

- Social workers currently performing roles in SP programs should incorporate an educational dimension in their work with the individuals, families, and communities they support, to enable them to incorporate protocols, measures, and actions to adequately prepare for disaster events, and therefore reduce the probability of accidents, deaths, or material losses.
- Include social workers in disaster preparedness actions, to leverage their experience with vulnerable individuals, families, and groups. In this sense, social workers and social work interventions can support the identification of vulnerable individuals and families for evacuation or other preparedness actions before an event, and provide awareness regarding essential preparedness actions that addresses the needs of vulnerable groups such as the disabled, children, and the elderly, as well as gender-related considerations.

## **iv. Resilient Reconstruction**

Even when the effects of a disaster have been minimized by aggressive identification, mitigation, and preparedness actions, it is equally necessary to assess the nature and magnitude of the damage, the severity of the impacts, and the needs of those affected in order to develop strategies aimed at facilitating recovery and rehabilitation of affected families in a resilient manner. Social workers should be efficient in managing the SP services and benefits aimed at

providing relief to affected families. Resilient reconstruction is applied in several phases from immediate or humanitarian response to medium to long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation. Social workers or officials assigned this role are especially important to supporting this pillar.

In the immediate phase, social workers play a key role in gathering information on the ground, and applying assessment instruments with different levels of specificity and detail in different countries. In general, these instruments are geared toward measuring the level of structural and material damage, loss of life and injury, loss of livelihoods, impacts on well-being, as well as collecting data on the most urgent needs among affected populations. In the countries where these instruments are applied, the information is used to organize and guide household-level disaster response, including post-disaster benefits or services provided by the SP systems. Social workers that provide family accompaniment for SP programs seek to address the needs of the families they work with regularly, as a strategy to facilitate rapid recovery. Some experiences from the region on the application of SW in this context include:

- **In Chile**, the Ministry of Social and Family Development created the Basic Emergency Sheet (FIBE). The purpose of this instrument is to expedite assessment and ultimately support to populations affected by disasters. Since 2015, the form has been the tool used to enable fast and precise assessment of the social vulnerabilities faced by affected populations. Its application enables the identification of individuals who are disabled, elderly, migrants, from indigenous communities, or chronically ill among those affected. This form helps to facilitate ‘an x-ray’ of the family in the post-shock context, including identifying which family members have been affected, the impacts on sources of labor and basic services, damage to the dwelling, and assets losses. The instrument enables families to report their needs first-hand, and guides government action to address those needs. The FIBE and its associated information system includes interoperability and cross-referencing with Chile’s social registry (*Registro Social de Hogares*), enabling the provision of key data for the humanitarian response. The FIBE identifies different levels of damage severity and priority lists are drafted according to the damage level experiences by communities and families. In this phase, social workers, together with municipal officials from the Departments responsible for emergencies and municipal works are the first to provide support to affected families while implementing immediate protection and rescue measures, such as evacuating people to shelters or safe sites. The Ministries responsible for delivering benefits to those affected by disasters (Social Development, Health, Housing, Labor, Education) manage the delivery of benefits until the emergency is considered under control. These temporary benefits include transfers and subsidies activated when the emergency begins (food vouchers, emergency housing support, utility subsidies, lease subsidies) and the redistribution of resources from regular programs to the affected regions, provinces, and municipalities. Social workers make up a key part of the local teams that implement resource redistribution measures and temporary benefits. On one hand, they provide specific background information on the families they support, and also perform benefit delivery with families in a personalized manner.<sup>7</sup>
- **In Jamaica**, the Household Damage, Impact and Needs Assessment (JHDINA) form is applied on-site by teams led by social workers and comprised of Humanitarian Assistance Committee members within the country’s national DRM framework. The committee is led by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) and includes different ministries, members of Parish (municipal) councils and non-governmental organizations, including the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Furthermore, the MLSS provides food and other relief items for persons in shelters and offers case management where necessary, particularly to those whose homes were completely destroyed. Social workers play especially important roles in relief distribution and other responses to persons and families affected by a disaster. Additionally, other humanitarian agencies also provide family support, case management, and other social work initiatives.

- ***In Belize***, the activation of a national action protocol triggers the application of Social Protection actions to address disaster response. Social workers or other officials that perform SW roles coordinate and support humanitarian actions. They also gather information through a family assessment form that covers the physical characteristics of the homes, assets, and needs of family members (including children, infants, and pregnant or new mothers), as well as impacts to the family's financial situation.
- ***In Colombia***, even though an explicit role that assigns tasks to social workers or officials that perform SW roles in the SP sector (such as social agents) is not established for post-disaster contexts, they set-up shelters for affected families, and support case management and family accompaniment. However, they do this without established guidance. There is, however, a psychosocial care manual that provides guidance for those who carry out family accompaniment. In Colombia, there is a basic form applied by mayor's offices that registers victims and damages after disasters, which informs the delivery of aid.<sup>8</sup>
- ***In the Dominican Republic***, the national action protocol triggers Social Protection response actions to disasters. Reuniting families, caring for vulnerable populations, disseminating information, and socio-emotional counseling and support are provided, among other activities. The Dominican Republic has a Single Beneficiary System (SIUBEN) where information provided by field liaison teams is uploaded. Field liaison teams are comprised of volunteers who perform social work functions in the communities. They are assigned to specific geographic areas and each officer has a specific number of families are assigned to them. Work with the community is viewed very positively in the country because a large percentage of the persons performing social work functions are voluntary community agents and leaders who have strong connections to their communities.

Together with providing relief from the effects of disasters and supporting recovery, social workers should focus their tasks on two principal lines of action (which does not imply abandoning other duties):

- a. **Family Support**: Social workers are in charge of performing social assessments of the families under their charge and evaluating their situation after receiving post-disaster support. This implies, for example, the psycho-emotional state of family members, actions regarding funerals of deceased family members, or the status of hospitalized family members, living conditions, return to school for the children, and recovery strategies designed to generate income etc. These tasks require that the social workers have a trusting bond with families to enable them to recover as quick as possible, return to their daily routines, and minimize the risks of negative post-traumatic impacts.
- b. **Network and Resource Management**: Social workers must report the results of their interventions with families to upper-level management along with the concrete resources required to carry out the recovery plans that have been drafted with the families as soon as possible.

Examples of the role of social workers supporting these activities in the region are:

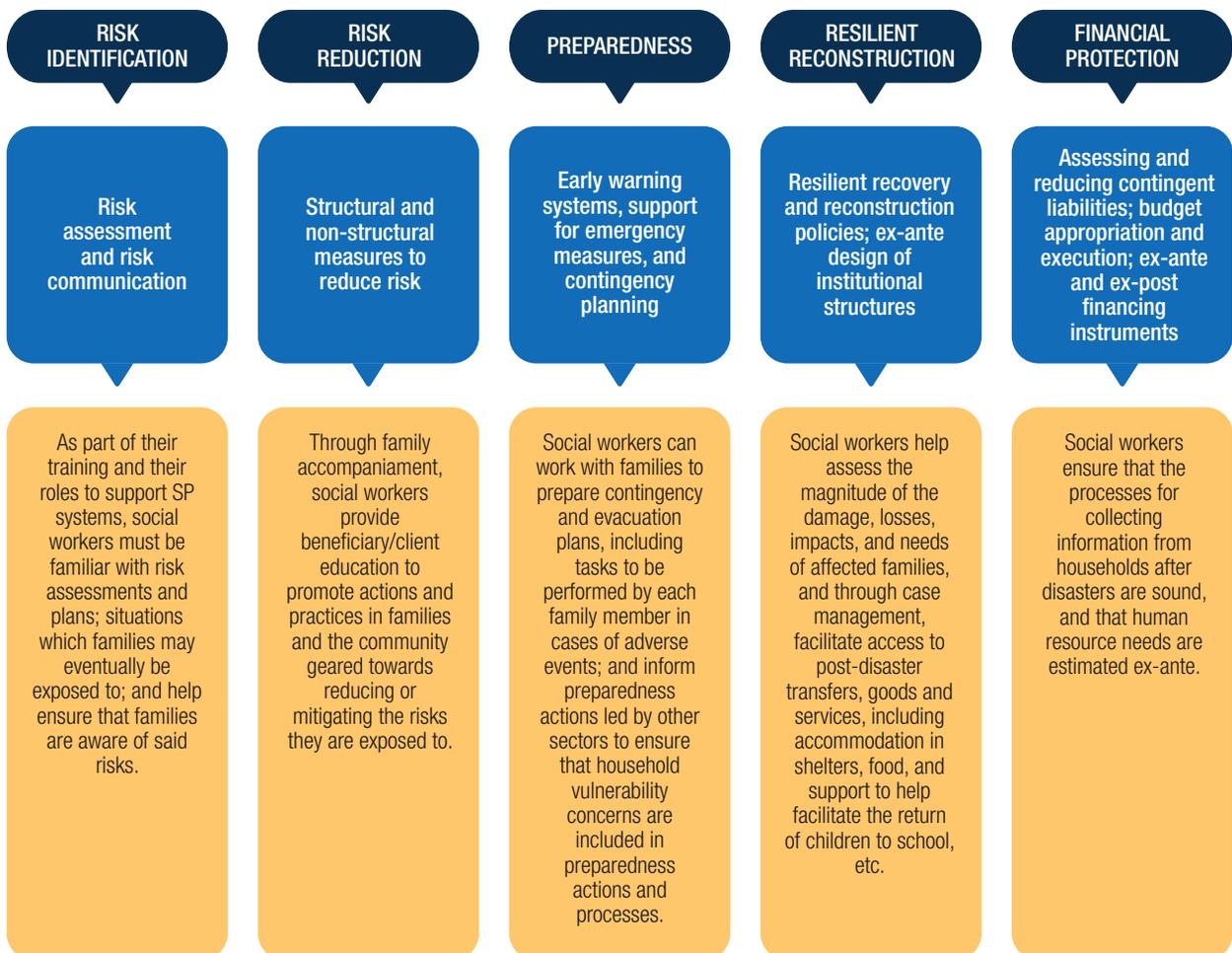
- ***In Colombia***, family agents continue to accompany families once the emergency is under control, in order to facilitate continued care and delivery of benefits.
- ***In Jamaica***, the Ministry of Labor and Social Services has a Rehabilitation Program that provides emergency grants for income-generating activities, medical and funeral expenses, and minor home repairs for the needy and vulnerable populations. In this case, it is the social worker who identifies and reports the needs and ensures that benefits reach the families.

- **In Chile**, during this phase, social workers associated with SP programs focus their work on family accompaniment to the families assigned to them, and support resource management by delivering their reports and assessments.

#### v. Financial Protection

One important objective of DRM is financial protection. In ASP, financial protection implies the availability of resources and the establishment of contingency financing instruments to provide Social Protection benefits after disaster occurs. Although this objective is especially important to ASP, its direct links to Social Work interventions are not strong. It is important to note that the information compiled by the social workers on-site after an event is crucial to the process of assessing the resources that will be needed for response. It is also important to note that financial protection strategies for SP actions must consider human resource needs, since countries will need to increase the provision of Social Work interventions for households and individuals affected by these events.

**Figure 1: Disaster Risk Management Pillars and Social Work**



## 6. Recommendations and Final Messages

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Social Work is a key discipline providing support to vulnerable and at-risk individuals, families, and communities. Social Protection (SP) systems and programs in Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries are generally mature and well-established, with years of experience providing SP benefits and services to poor and vulnerable populations. However, the degree of institutionalization of Social Work, particularly within SP systems, varies widely among LAC countries. In some countries, Social Work interventions are central to SP systems, while in others, the implementation of these interventions in SP systems relies on officials or technicians that lack formal Social Work certification and training. In some countries, Social Protection systems are primarily focused on the delivery of benefits, and the use of Social Work as part of such systems is still incipient or underutilized. Beyond its use to support regular SP operations, Social Work interventions can be very important to supporting DRM pillars of risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness, resilient reconstruction, and financial protection, particularly through actions directed to vulnerable individuals, families and communities. For these reasons, it is important that LAC countries consider incorporating Social Work interventions into SP systems in a more formal and comprehensive way in order to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable populations. The following recommendations for improving the use of Social Work interventions to support strengthened Adaptive Social Protection systems in LAC are summarized below and based on the country experiences and literature reviewed for this note.

**1. National Disaster Risk Management (DRM) plans and Social Protection systems should strategically incorporate Social Work.** Social Work as a discipline should be incorporated in DRM plans to support operational processes and a stronger role in SP systems to contribute to achieving DRM and ASP objectives. Specific recommendations include the following:

- Promote and make Social Work *visible in public policies aimed at addressing disaster situations.*
- *Establish processes for introducing the experience, knowledge, and skills of social workers into risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness, and resilient reconstruction protocols, particularly to ensure that these processes consider the specific vulnerabilities of diverse populations.*
- *Effectively incorporate family accompaniment and case management interventions in the methodologies of SP programs.*
- *Train both professional social workers and other agents/technicians/officials who work with individuals, families, and communities in family accompaniment, case management, and community intervention methodologies.*
- *Hire more social workers to support SP programs, particularly to ensure the provision of case management and family accompaniment to vulnerable families and communities.*

**2. Identify, enhance, and strengthen the capacity of professionals (social workers and other agents/ technicians) providing family accompaniment or case management.** The technical capacities of those providing SW support are critical. It is therefore critical to assess their skill levels and to implement training, both targeted to professional social workers and the other officials/technicians and agents who perform Social Work functions. This capacity strengthening will help ensure the effective incorporation of Social Work interventions in SP programs and systems.

**3. Social Work strategies to support ASP and DRM pillars should be principally aimed at strengthening the capacities of families and households.** SP program operations should include a risk management-oriented social work module aimed at helping individuals, families and communities learn to manage risk autonomously, and to lead their own prevention, response, and recovery processes.<sup>9</sup> More specifically, it is also suggested that SP programs incorporate protocols for case management and family accompaniment.

- 4. Incorporate a family and community perspective in SP plans, programs, and services to promote adaptive strategies.** Grassroots organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and both formal and informal community groups, are key resources that operate in close proximity to vulnerable individuals and families, particularly to help with coping in times of disasters. The methodological approach aimed at strengthening family and community resilience is a form of comprehensive case management that not only focuses on managing institutional networks for individuals and families, but also manages community networks in areas where vulnerable families live.
- 5. Operationalize SP support to all five DRM pillars at regional and local levels, adjusting guidelines and processes at the macro-level to regional and local realities.** Actions to support this include:
- *Establish coordination arrangements at the regional and local levels between SP programs to strengthen social work with families and communities, including training, simulation exercises, etc., and taking into account the cultural, geographical, and social characteristics of each region, province, town, etc.*
  - *Ensure that SP actors are trained in case management, family accompaniment, and other community interventions.*
  - *Provide technical support to social workers that support SP programs in their work with individuals, families, and communities.*

Each country can prioritize the improved use of Social Work to contribute to Adaptive Social Protection depending on their level of maturity. It is recommended that countries with nascent systems incorporate professional Social Work interventions at the individual, family, community levels, in SP design and operations. At the same time, these countries can also incorporate activities to contribute to the DRM pillars in Social Work interventions. Countries with emerging systems should continue to strengthen Social Work's contribution to the design and implementation of SP, with an emphasis on strengthening ASP outcomes and to promote risk identification, risk reduction, preparedness and resilient recovery among individuals, families, and communities. Where these countries face a shortage of professional social workers, they should provide training to officials who perform Social Work functions in order to develop their skills and improve the use of Social Work interventions to strengthen the resilience of individuals, households, and communities. Finally, countries with more established systems should continue to strengthen ASP, through stronger involvement of Social Work in program design and implementation to support all five DRM pillars.

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## Annex 2: Additional Resources

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## Annex 3: Officials Interviewed

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- Jacqueline Shepherd, Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Jamaica.
- Andrea León, Family Welfare Institute, Colombia.
- Francisco Socias, Deputy Minister for Social Services, Ministry of Social Development, Chile.
- Úrsula Martínez, Social Protection Consultant, World Bank.
- Jürgen Schubelin, Director, Department for Latin America and the Caribbean, Kindernothilfe, Germany.
- Dalma Andreina Hernández Florián, Specialist in Monitoring and Evaluation of Strategic Operational Plans and Projects, Dominican Republic.
- Ezequiel Volquez, Director, Social Subsidies Administration, Vice Presidency of the Republic, Dominican Republic.
- Mark Antrobus, Social Planner, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, Belize.

# Annex 4: Endnotes

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- 6 <https://www.gfdr.org/en/publication/sendai-report>
- 7 Interview with Francisco Socías, Head of the Department of IT Project Management and Processes, Social Protection and Promotion Division, Under-secretariat of Social Services, Ministry of Family and Social Development.
- 8 According to an interview with Andrea León, social agents are the professionals who perform family support in programs that form part of the Social Protection System.
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