



Министарство здравља и
социјалне заштите
Републике Српске

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FEASIBILITY STUDY
SHOCK-RESPONSIVENESS OF
THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA'S SOCIAL
PROTECTION SYSTEM WITH A
PARTICULAR FOCUS ON THE PROVISION
OF EMERGENCY CASH TRANSFERS





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November 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has been actively involved, alongside UNICEF in BiH, in implementing “Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for Sustainable Development in BiH,” a Joint Programme by the Government of Switzerland and the United Nations. The programme has resulted in significant advancements in building a shock-responsive social protection system. In coordination with partner UN agencies, UNICEF supported relevant institutions at both the entity and local levels in delivering the programme component aimed at enhancing the social protection system’s capacity for emergency preparedness, response and recovery. Furthermore, it has facilitated the creation of multisectoral links with other sectors and systems under an integrated DRR model in five municipalities and cities in RS: Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Prijedor, Trebinje and Srebrenica. Building on the Programme’s successful outcomes, subsequent efforts focused on advancing plans to enhance the system’s preparedness and resilience in response to crises and emergencies. This resulted in the formulation of the 2023-2027 Roadmap for Developing a Shock-responsive Social Protection System in Republika Srpska, with the aim of replicating good practices and experiences across other municipalities and cities in RS, while investing in systemic measures to integrate DRR into the social protection sector by enhancing the system’s legislative, strategic and budgetary frameworks.

Following the formulation of the Roadmap — which under Strategic Priority 1 envisages the regulation and integration of DRR into the RS social protection system through policies, strategies, laws and budget frameworks before, during and after emergencies to provide effective support to beneficiaries through a system of cash transfers and services — the RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, with the support of UNICEF, initiated the preparation of a Feasibility Study to assess the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system, with a focus on the provision of emergency cash transfers in RS, with the main goals listed as follows:

1. Assessment of risk and vulnerability to crises, including assessment of the current threat levels and adverse impacts on affected populations, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups of children and families;
2. Assessment of the legal, technical, operational and financial feasibility of the social benefits programme in RS, to ensure the provision of emergency cash transfers to beneficiaries;
3. Identification of potential opportunities and obstacles, and formulation of recommendations for providing emergency cash transfers through the social protection system in RS;
4. Comparative analysis of different financing options and development of clear financing scenarios for the use of cash transfers to meet the needs of social protection beneficiaries; and
5. Advocating for the integration and proper positioning of the emergency cash transfer mechanisms within the Republika Srpska’s social protection system.

This study is structured into five chapters. The first chapter offers an analysis of international literature on shock-responsive social protection systems. The second chapter provides a comprehensive overview of entity laws, policies, budgets and plans concerning cash transfers within the context of social protection and risk management in emergencies. The third chapter

examines the role of centres for social work (CSWs) during disasters/emergencies, with particular emphasis on the operation of social protection institutions during floods and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the availability of specific records and databases. The analysis of responses from the questionnaire provided supplementary data on how institutions function during disasters. These responses detailed the general situation in local self-government units (LSGUs) in connection with disasters, familiarity with acts of general application, regulations and planning documents, the role of CSWs during disasters, the existence of expanded rights in LSGUs, administrative and technical processes, communication with relevant subjects and preventive activities. The fourth chapter provides recommendations for opportunities and necessary interventions in LSGUs for building a shock-responsive social protection system and enhancing child protection, with the goal of reducing vulnerability arising from socio-economic status. The fifth chapter offers summaries of the key findings from this study.

1. ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

The review of international literature on shock-responsive social protection identified provisions from key global frameworks and agreements. These include¹: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2021), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and its framework protocols, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the European Social Charter (1961, revised in 1996), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, recommendations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference in Japan on 18 March 2015, is the most relevant international document related to social protection in emergencies. This framework outlines seven targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks. The seven global targets are:

1. Substantially reduce global disaster mortality, aiming to lower the average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020–2030 compared to the period 2005–2015;
2. Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower the average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020–2030 compared to the period 2005–2015;
3. Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030;
4. Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030;
5. Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2030;

1 International regulations do not include binding legal sources in the field of social protection.

6. Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of the

7. Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to people by 2030.

The four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks include understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in disaster risk reduction to enhance disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a comprehensive United Nations plan aimed at eradicating poverty, addressing climate change, ensuring peace and combating inequality. These interconnected goals form a cohesive framework, the achievement of which will enhance the quality of life and create a safer, more sustainable world. To realize these goals by the target year of 2030, active and dedicated participation from governments and institutions is essential, as well as partnerships with civil society organizations, citizens and the private sector.

The RS Government works closely with the UN and partner agencies to achieve the SDGs. In April 2019, the first Voluntary Review of the Implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina was prepared, systematically documenting the activities and results achieved in SDG implementation to date. In April 2021, the SDGs Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted, covering the period until 2023. The RS institutions were actively involved in the consultations, and the document was entirely prepared by a working group composed of representatives from all levels of government in BiH. The document does not serve as a strategy but provides broader development directions for monitoring and reporting on the Agenda’s implementation².

The Paris Agreement on Climate Change

The agreement addresses, among other goals, the call to keep the increase in global temperatures below 2 °C, aiming to limit this increase to 1.5 °C. It also focuses on increasing the ability of countries to adapt to climate change and establish low-carbon economies through NDC mitigation measures. The Paris Agreement clearly links the SDGs (to be achieved by 2030) with climate change. It is essential to intensify efforts in capacity-building and knowledge enhancement, with particular emphasis on educating experts at all levels so as to ensure that they are prepared to adopt new technologies emerging in response to the challenges of climate change.

Recommendations of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is tasked with producing climate change assessment reports, which compile the latest scientific evidence on climate change. The most recent Sixth Assessment Report, published in 2023, identifies social protection as an important system in achieving the goals of mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. The report indicates that the harmful impacts of climate change can be mitigated through targeted

² Further details about the SDGs Framework in BiH can be found at the following link: <https://zamisli2030.ba/sdgs-framework-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>

reforms (fiscal, financial, institutional, regulatory) and by incorporating climate measures into macroeconomic policies.

The 2021 UN “Human Rights and Climate Change” document identifies the human rights most at risk from climate change, including, inter alia, the right to life, the right to respect for economic and social development, the right to adequate food, the right to water for personal and family needs and the right to adequate housing. The document also lists vulnerable groups whose rights are most affected by climate change, such as socially, economically and otherwise vulnerable individuals and groups, as well as women, children and people with disabilities.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) guarantees, inter alia, that everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security with the support of the state and international cooperation, in accordance with the organization and resources of each State (Article 22). It also establishes that everyone is entitled to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and of their family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services. Furthermore, Article 25 provides that motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. In addition to these rights, the Declaration guarantees everyone the right to life.

The UN Human Rights Council, via its **Universal Periodic Review**, periodically reviews the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. It is increasingly focused on the linkages between climate change and human rights. A range of recommendations have been proposed, addressing climate change issues such as DRR and climate-induced displacement.

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and its framework protocols

Article 2 of the Convention guarantees that everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention is secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

The relevant provisions are contained in Articles 9 and 11. Article 9 recognizes the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance. Additionally, Article 11 affirms the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

The European Social Charter (1961, revised 1996)³

The right to social protection is regulated by Article 12, which stipulates that the Parties undertake to establish or maintain a system of social security at a satisfactory level at least equal to that envisaged by the European Code of Social Security; to endeavour to raise progressively the system of social security to a higher level; and to conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements in order to ensure equal treatment with their own nationals of the nationals of other Parties in respect of social security rights, as well as the enjoyment of social security rights by such means as the accumulation of insurance or employment periods completed under the legislation of each of the Parties. Article 13 of the Charter guarantees the right to social and medical

³ *“Official Gazette of BiH”, international agreements no. 8/08*

assistance, ensuring that everyone is granted adequate assistance, and, in case of sickness, the care necessitated by their condition, and that everyone has access to such advice and personal help as may be required to alleviate personal or family want. Article 30 pertains to the “Right to protection against poverty and social exclusion,” requiring the Parties to take measures and adopt a coordinated approach to ensure the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families. The Charter defines the “Right to housing,” detailing measures aimed at promoting access to housing of an adequate standard, preventing and reducing homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination, and making the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The relevant provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child mandate that in all actions concerning children undertaken by social protection institutions, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration. This means that these institutions are subject to competent supervision and must conform to the highest standards in terms of the number and suitability of their staff to ensure the safety and health of children (Article 3). Also, Article 6 of the Convention guarantees the right of every child to life, survival and development. Article 22 ensures that children who are considered refugees are provided with appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. Additionally, Articles 26 and 27 specify that every child has the right to social security and a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, moral and social development. In his report on the relationship between children’s rights and environmental protection, the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment emphasizes that “climate change and the loss of biodiversity threaten to cause long-term effects that will blight children’s lives for years to come.” In particular, climate change may have a serious impact on children’s enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, access to education, adequate food, adequate housing, safe drinking water and an adequate standard of living.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities establishes that all persons with disabilities have the right to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. This includes the development of inclusive climate change and DRR policies and mechanisms (Articles 5 and 6).

Recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a legally binding international treaty that requires ratifying nations to adhere to its provisions and fundamental principles. Implementation of the Convention is a process that centres on recognizing the needs of children at various stages of their development and providing effective systemic solutions, legislation, comprehensive strategies, clearly defined policies, measures and actions, along with timely and appropriate interventions by competent authorities. Successful implementation also relies on continuous coordination among all child protection stakeholders across all levels of government, coupled with regular monitoring of the Convention’s implementation and assessment of the impact of legal measures and policies on children, their rights and their best interests. Children hold inherent rights solely by virtue of their status as children, while the responsibility for ensuring the fulfilment of these rights rests with adults, who must facilitate the implementation of these rights in alignment with the child’s best interests, while also preparing them for adulthood and their future roles in society. In 2023, in response to the escalating climate crisis, the UN Committee on the

Rights of the Child for the first time defined the obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It explicitly confirmed the right of children to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, providing a comprehensive interpretation of member states' obligations under the Convention in combating climate change. General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change, specifies that beyond their responsibilities for the protection of children's rights from immediate harm, States bear the responsibility for foreseeable violations of children's rights in the future arising as a result of their acts or omissions now. Additionally, it underscores that States can be held responsible for environmental damage not only within their borders but also for adverse environmental impacts and climate change that occur beyond their borders. Special attention should be given to the disproportionate harm experienced by children in unfavourable socio-economic situations and conditions.

2. OVERVIEW OF ENTITY LAWS, POLICIES, BUDGETS AND PLANS PERTAINING TO CASH TRANSFERS IN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY RISK MANAGEMENT

In RS, the **Law on Social Protection**⁴ is the primary legislation governing social protection. It establishes social protection as an activity of general interest for RS, providing assistance to socially disadvantaged individuals and taking necessary measures to prevent such conditions and mitigate their consequences. It further specifies that social protection includes measures and activities aimed at facilitating the protective function of the family, promoting independent living and employment for those who are socially disadvantaged or activating them according to their abilities, and providing subsistence for individuals lacking financial security, those unable to work and other socially disadvantaged citizens, along with other forms of social protection. The Law defines social disadvantage as a condition in which an individual requires support to navigate social and other difficulties and to create conditions necessary for satisfying their basic life needs, especially when these needs cannot be met through other social security systems. Article 133 of the Law mandates that funds be allocated in the RS budget for emergency aid activities in response to exceptional threats to the lives and living standards of a large segment of the population arising from economic, social and humanitarian causes. The Law also covers the social protection of children. Articles 17 and 18 define beneficiaries of social protection as socially disadvantaged individuals, encompassing both children and adults. Specifically, a child beneficiary of social protection is one who is without parental care, has developmental disabilities, encounters developmental obstacles stemming from family conditions, is a victim of violence, a victim of child trafficking, exhibits socially unacceptable behaviour, is exposed to socially risky behaviours or requires social protection due to special circumstances. A beneficiary of social protection can also be an adult who is financially vulnerable, has a disability, lacks family care in old age, exhibits socially negative behaviour, is a victim of substance abuse, domestic violence or human trafficking, or requires social protection due to special circumstances. Point (a) subpoint 8) and point (b) subpoint 8) of Article 17 of the Law stipulate that beneficiaries of social protection include children and adults who require social protection due to special circumstances. According to point (a) subpoint 8) and point (b) subpoint 8) of Article 18, the special circumstances causing social disadvantage for a child or an adult include poverty, natural disasters, war-induced hardship, refugee status, migration, repatriation, the loss of one or more family members, prolonged medical treatment, discharge from residential care and other unforeseeable circumstances.

Under Article 11 of the Law, LSGUs are authorized to establish additional rights and services, beyond those specified in the Law, based on the needs of the local population. They are also permitted to define the conditions and eligibility criteria for accessing these rights. The additional (“expanded”) rights and services that LSGUs may establish include: personal assistance for individuals with disabilities, supported housing, sheltered housing, support for young adults discharged from residential or foster care, one-off in-kind assistance, soup kitchen services, educational support for children from socially disadvantaged families, assistance for the care and education of children with developmental disabilities, utility subsidies for low-income households, housing support for low-income families, funeral expenses for beneficiaries under the law, helpline services and any other rights or services as may be required based on local needs. While the cited legal provision enumerates the expanded rights, it also allows LSGUs to establish in their legal acts other rights and services based on their local needs. This provision offers LSGUs the legal flexibility to recognize targeted rights and deliver services to vulnerable populations in special circumstances or emergencies.

⁴ “Official Gazette of RS”, nos. 37/12, 90/16, 94/19, 42/20 and 36/22

The Law on Child Protection⁵ establishes child protection as an activity of general interest for RS. It involves organized activities aimed at: supporting childbearing and balancing work and parenting, creating the necessary conditions to ensure all children’s developmental needs are met equally, assisting families with children in fulfilling their reproductive, protective, educational and economic functions, improving the financial situation of families with children and providing special financial support for families upon the birth of a third child. The Law establishes the right to child allowance, which is subject to a means test as prescribed by substantive law. Articles 17 to 25 of the Law specify that the mother is eligible for child allowance for the second, third and fourth children in the family, depending on the family’s financial situation, the birth order and the children’s ages. The Law also defines the conditions under which children’s guardians are eligible to claim this right.

The Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies⁶ governs the protection and rescue system in emergency situations, defining the forces and actors (stakeholders) involved in protection, as well as the rights and obligations of republic-level administrative and other bodies, local self-government bodies, corporate entities, other legal entities and citizens. It also defines emergencies and emergency response actions, the organization and operation of civil protection in the protection and rescue system, the elimination of the consequences of natural disasters and other accidents and the planning and financing of the protection and rescue system. Additionally, it regulates supervision, recognition, awards and other issues essential to the organization and functioning of the protection and rescue system. According to the 2017 amendments to the Law, “the protection and rescue system is part of the security system and an integrated form of managing and organizing primary stakeholders and forces within the protection and rescue system for the implementation of preventive and operational measures and execution of tasks related to the protection and rescue of people and property from natural disasters and other emergencies, including recovery measures to address the consequences of these events.” The Law defines an emergency as a situation in which the risks, threats or consequences of disasters, extraordinary events or other dangers to the population are of such a scale and intensity that they cannot be addressed by the regular actions of relevant authorities and services, thus necessitating the employment of special measures, forces and resources under a heightened response regime. In terms of the Law, the primary stakeholders in the protection and rescue system are the Ministry of the Interior, the Republic Civil Protection Administration, other republic-level administrative bodies, local self-government bodies, corporate entities, other legal entities, businesses, citizens, associations and professional and other organizations.

Only able-bodied citizens may engage in protection and rescue efforts, specifically men aged 18 to 60 and women aged 18 to 55. Exceptions include pregnant women, mothers and single parents with young children (one child under seven or two or more children under ten), guardians of orphaned children, those unable to participate due to incapacity and caregivers of the elderly or infirm. However, the Law also allows for voluntary participation in protection and rescue for men and women over the age of 15, granting them the rights and duties of members of civil protection units within the protection and rescue system.

The Law establishes provisions for providing care to vulnerable individuals, the injured, refugees and evacuees in emergencies. These measures encompass the provision of emergency accommodation/shelter, health care, food and water supplies, psychological support, family reunification and the creation of necessary living conditions. Since the Law on Social Protection establishes that both children and adults facing social disadvantage due to special circumstances

⁵ *“Official Gazette of RS”, nos. 114/17, 122/18, 107/19, 119/21 and 112/23*

⁶ *“Official Gazette of RS”, nos. 121/12, 46/17, 66/18 and 111/21*

are beneficiaries of the social protection system, with emergencies explicitly recognized as one such circumstance, and given that the Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies aims to create necessary living conditions during emergencies, these two pieces of legislation collectively provide for the possibility of providing assistance to vulnerable populations in emergencies through the RS social protection system.

To address the needs of populations affected by natural disasters and other emergencies, urgent activities and measures are implemented to provide shelter, food and other essential living conditions for vulnerable, injured and displaced people. According to Article 77 of the Law, the emergency response coordination teams (ERCTs, štabovi za vanredne situacije) and emergency protection and rescue coordinators directly manage relief efforts until the conditions are in place for the competent organizational unit of municipal or city civil protection to take over, or until specialized organizations and services are established for this purpose by a government decision. It is also stipulated that humanitarian and other organizations, along with citizens, assist and cooperate in providing relief and support to vulnerable, injured and displaced people.

The Law specifies that the costs of relief provided to vulnerable, affected and displaced population are reimbursed from the budget of the municipality/city where the relief is provided, from the RS budget and from solidarity and humanitarian aid funds. Additionally, individuals, companies and other legal entities whose material resources were requisitioned for the purpose of providing relief are eligible for reimbursement, determined based on the local daily retail market prices as of the handover date.

Article 17 of the Law outlines the activities carried out during the mitigation of disaster consequences, including the organization of aid supply and the provision of public services to restore normal living conditions. Article 75 specifies that, alongside the ERCTs, municipal and city services responsible for social protection also play a role in evacuation operations.

Practice has shown that social work service representatives play an important role in ERCTs established by LSGUs. In a number of LSGUs, these representatives are active members of their local ERCTs, which enables them to actively contribute to the development of assessments and plans, offer suggestions and integrate social protection-related activities into those documents. Article 9 of the Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies stipulates that members of the ERCTs are selected from among professional and emergency services (such as firefighting, medical, veterinary and other services), the competent organizational unit of the Ministry of the Interior, protection and rescue forces, following the sequence outlined in the LSGU's emergency action plan, as well as citizens and forces from neighbouring LSGUs and all other relevant forces in RS, based on needs and existing contracts and agreements.

Article 83 stipulates that owners and users of facilities designated for public water supply, production, transportation and storage of food, medicines and animal feed, public health and social services, childcare and education are required to ensure that means of protection are in place and implement prescribed RCB protection measures.

Under the Law, Civil Protection is financed through: the RS budget, municipal or city budgets, contributions, donations, gifts, international aid and other sources as stipulated by the Law. In their budgets, municipalities or cities are required to allocate 2% of special funds, with half earmarked for preventive activities and the remaining half for equipping and training protection and rescue structures.

According to Article 154 of the Law, the RS Government is responsible for funding: the organization, equipment and operation of the Republic Civil Protection Administration; the preparation, equipment, training and operation of the Republic Emergency Response Coordination Team and the specialized protection and rescue unit in the Republic, as well as the costs of participation in the implementation of protection and rescue measures; provision of material

assistance to protection and rescue forces, procurement of specialized equipment through the Republic Civil Protection Administration as feasible within available means and per the decision of the competent authority of the Republic, as well as the training of personnel in the use of this equipment; and other necessary protection and rescue needs.

Under Article 155, funding for the preparation, equipment, training and operation of ERCTs, civil protection units and teams, as well as emergency protection and rescue coordinators in municipalities is provided by the respective municipal/city authorities.

The Law on the Safety of Critical Infrastructures in Republika Srpska⁷ governs the critical infrastructures of RS, the critical infrastructure sectors in RS, the management of critical infrastructures, the obligation to develop risk analyses and security plans for critical infrastructure facilities, the roles of security coordinators and persons responsible for the management and protection of critical infrastructure facilities, cooperation in the area of critical infrastructure and the handling of protected data. Critical infrastructures are vitally important systems, networks and facilities whose destruction or endangerment can cause major disruptions in the free movement of people, transportation of goods and provision of services, as well as adversely affect internal security, public health and safety, property, the environment, external security, economic stability and the functioning of Republic authorities.

The Law identifies twelve sectors in which certain infrastructures may be designated as critical, including, inter alia: health (health care, production, transportation and supervision of medicines); communal services (communal infrastructure facilities, in particular water production and supply, wastewater treatment, production and supply of thermal energy, waste management); food and beverages (production and supply of foods and drinks, food and drink safety system, commodity reserves); public services, education and cultural and natural heritage (religious buildings, cultural monuments, cultural-historical sites, archaeological sites, historic landmarks, artistic works and historical artifacts, archival records, films, old and rare books, as well as protected natural resources under the Law on Nature Protection).

It follows that CSWs can also be designated as critical infrastructure, provided they undergo a proper critical infrastructure nomination and designation procedure. In this context, the Republic's administrative bodies responsible for these sectors—such as the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the case of social protection—are tasked with identifying responsible critical infrastructure operators and facilities that constitute critical infrastructure within their respective sectors. Following a proposal from the relevant Republic administrative body, the designation of the identified critical infrastructure is formally approved by the Minister of the Interior through a decision issued after a verification process. This decision is then communicated for implementation to the responsible critical infrastructure operators and the relevant Republic administrative body in charge of the designated critical infrastructure.

In cooperation with the competent Republic administrative body in charge of the specific critical infrastructure, the Ministry of the Interior regularly monitors and evaluates threats, and proposes operational and other measures to assess the level of critical importance of these infrastructures, including measures for their management and protection.

The Republic administrative bodies in charge of specific critical infrastructures, along with the Ministry, are responsible for identifying particular systems or their components as critical infrastructures, managing them and ensuring their protection. Operators of critical infrastructures are directly accountable for managing and ensuring protection of these infrastructures in all circumstances.

⁷ "Official Gazette of RS", no. 58/19

The process of identifying and designating critical infrastructures in RS, including the preparation of their threat assessments and security plans, is not yet complete and remains in progress. This should be considered when planning social protection activities.

The Decree on the Content and Method of Developing a Plan for Protection Against Natural Disasters and Other Disaster Situations⁸ regulates the preparation process for the Protection and Rescue Plan for Natural Disasters and Other Disaster Situations. This plan includes risk assessment of natural disasters and other disaster situations, as well as the development of a preventive action plan, a preparedness plan, a mobilization plan and an emergency action plan.

Companies and other legal entities operating in fields such as health care, veterinary medicine, housing and communal services, water management, forestry, agriculture, chemical industry, mining, construction, energy, transport, supply, catering, firefighting, hydrometeorology, seismology, ecology and other areas crucial for protection and rescue are required to prepare an assessment of their vulnerability to natural disasters and other disaster situations, as well as a plan for protection and rescue from such disasters. The responsibility for preparing the protection and rescue plan for a company or other legal entity lies with the respective company/entity itself, as outlined in the Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies. It is important to note that the mayor issues a decision identifying the companies and legal entities required to develop these assessments and plans. However, organizations engaged in educational, social, medical and other activities that involve the protection or care of a large number of people are required to prepare a vulnerability assessment for natural and other disasters, develop a protection and rescue plan, and implement necessary protection and rescue measures and tasks. Article 23 of the Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies mandates the preparation of threat assessment plans for all organizations involved in the protection or care of a significant number of people. This requirement clearly applies to CSWs and social protection institutions.

The RS Social Protection Strategy (2023–2029)⁹ serves as a vital strategic document guiding the development of the social protection system across its three key dimensions: social protection, child protection and family protection. The Strategy establishes the following strategic goals: 1. Promote the development of new services and enhance the quality of existing ones to better meet the needs of beneficiaries in the social protection system; 2. Continuously improve the child and family protection system, prioritizing the development of preventive support measures; and 3. Enhance the capacity in social, child and family protection, while strengthening intersectoral support and cooperation mechanisms.

Notably, under strategic goal 3, priority 3.4 “Strengthening international and intersectoral cooperation” includes measure 3.4.4, which aims to enhance cooperation among all protection stakeholders in crisis and emergency situations. Additionally, the SWOT analysis identified various crisis situations (including natural disasters, pandemics, etc.) as threats to the social, child and family protection systems that require efforts to eliminate or minimize their effects.

Across RS, a range of documents are available, including numerous local development strategies, CSWs’ risk assessments and protection and preparedness plans, Republic-level vulnerability assessment and reviews of the social protection system’s performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁸ “Official Gazette of RS”, no. 101/21

⁹ Adopted by the RS Government, Decision no. 04/1-012-2-4106/23, dated 7 December 2023 (“Official Gazette of RS”, no. 108/23).

2.1. Existing cash transfer programmes for vulnerable and excluded groups within the social protection system in RS

In accordance with the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Child Protection, and considering the possibility of expanding the scope of rights during emergencies, along with the projections of the financial implications on the system, the table below outlines the most important social cash transfers and the categories of beneficiaries eligible for them.

Table 1: Social Cash Transfers

SOCIAL PROTECTION	Law on Social Protection	<p>➤ RIGHT TO CASH ASSISTANCE</p> <p>An individual is eligible for cash assistance if they are unable to work, have no income of their own or their total income for self-support falls below the threshold set for cash assistance under this Law, do not have excess housing space, lack other property that can be used to secure funds for self-support and do not have relatives who are legally required to support them under the Family Law, or if those relatives are unable to support them due to their own disability or other objective impediments.</p> <p>A family as a whole is eligible for cash assistance under this Law if its members are unable to work, have no income of their own or their total income for self-support falls below the threshold set for cash assistance under this Law, do not have excess housing space, lack other property that can be used to secure funds for self-support and do not have relatives who are legally required to support them under the Family Law, or if those relatives are unable to support them due to their own disability or other objective impediments.</p> <p>➤ RIGHT TO ONE-OFF CASH ASSISTANCE</p> <p>The right to one-off cash assistance is available to individuals, family members or entire families who are temporarily facing social disadvantage, including <i>due to natural disasters</i>.</p>
CHILD PROTECTION	Law on Child Protection	<p>➤ RIGHT TO CHILD ALLOWANCE</p> <p>Child allowance is provided to mothers or other individuals eligible under the Law for the first, second, third and fourth children in the family, depending on the family's financial situation, the birth order and the children's ages.</p> <p>The right to child allowance is available until the child turns 15, provided they are enrolled in regular education.</p>

Table 2 below provides an overview of the total number of beneficiaries for each of the aforementioned rights under the Law on Social Protection for the period 2020-2023. The table reveals that that the largest group of beneficiaries is those receiving caregiver allowance, with this number steadily increasing over the observed period. Additionally, the number of beneficiaries of one-off cash assistance is also notable, while the number of beneficiaries of the other rights remains stable or even declines.

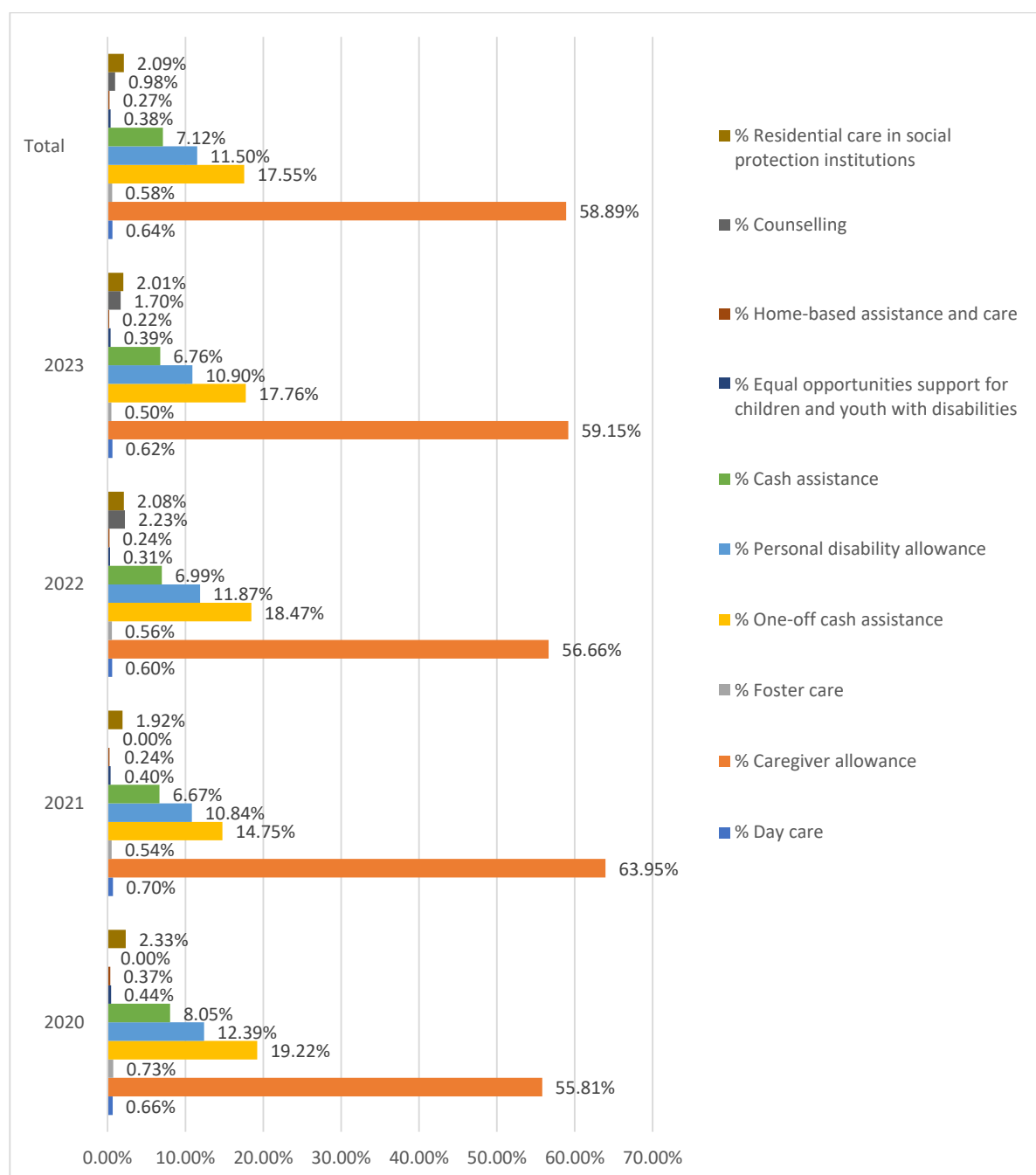
Table 2: Number of Beneficiaries of Rights under the Law on Social Protection in RS – by Year

Number of beneficiaries, by rights	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cash assistance	4,076	4,142	3,947	3,865
Caregiver allowance	28,270	39,691	32,007	33,831
Equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities	223	248	173	221
Residential care in social protection institutions	1,179	1,190	1,177	1,152
Foster care	370	333	314	285
Home-based assistance and care	186	152	137	125
Day care	335	433	338	352
One-off cash assistance	9,735	9,152	10,434	10,158
Personal disability allowance	6,278	6,727	6,705	6,231
Counselling	0	0	1,258	971
TOTAL	50,652	62,068	56,490	57,191

Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

Upon reviewing the percentage share of beneficiaries for each individual right within the total number of beneficiaries per year, it can be concluded that across the four observed years, over half (58.89%) of the beneficiaries received caregiver allowance, 17.55% received one-off cash assistance and 11.50% were entitled to personal disability allowance. The other seven rights accounted for 12.06% of beneficiaries across the four observed years. Chart 1 below illustrates the percentage breakdown of beneficiaries by individual rights, both annually and cumulatively for the observed four-year period.

Chart 1: Share of Beneficiaries by Individual Rights in the Total Number of Beneficiaries



Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

In RS, the social protection system is financed through the RS budget and the budgets of LSGUs.

The RS budget provides funding for: co-financing the right to cash assistance at 50%; co-financing the right to caregiver allowance at 50%; co-financing the beneficiary's health insurance at 50%; financing the right to personal disability allowance at 100%; financing the right to equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities; co-financing the residential care costs for beneficiaries placed by CSWs in government-established social protection institutions; financing the construction, adaptation, renovation, furnishing and part of the heating and upkeep costs for government-established social protection institutions; financing the maintenance of the

Republic social protection information system; financing development programmes aimed at improving the social protection system and financing the Republic’s emergency aid activities in response to exceptional threats to the living conditions and living standards of a large segment of the population arising from economic, social and humanitarian causes.

The LSGU budgets provide funding for: co-financing the right to cash assistance at 50%; co-financing the right to caregiver allowance at 50%; co-financing the beneficiary’s health insurance; financing the right to residential care in social protection institutions; financing the right to foster care; financing the right to day care; financing the right to home-based assistance and help; financing the right to one-off cash assistance; financing expanded social protection rights; financing the work of CSWs and other LSGU-established social protection institutions.

In 2023, the **combined annual allocations for social protection from both local and Republic levels** amounted to BAM 131,714,563.90, a 52.21% increase over the 2022 allocations, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Combined Annual Allocations for Social Protection from Republic and Local Budgets (2020–2023)¹⁰

RIGHT	2020	2021	2022	2023
	in BAM	in BAM	in BAM	in BAM
Cash assistance	7,936,918	7,200,214	8,281,017	10,944,935
Caregiver allowance	39,471,047	44,800,000	52,331,642	72,936,169
Equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities	333,479	259,746	228,711	315,736
Residential care in social protection institutions	8,197,788	8,391,498	8,854,651	17,822,441
Foster care	2,242,882	2,236,961	2,207,586	2,769,996
Home-based assistance and care	357,550	363,728	386,766	492,574
Day care	559,405	668,838	736,615	859,981
One-off cash assistance	1,661,461	1,730,434	2,226,739	2,362,002
Personal disability allowance	8,394,365	9,622,143	11,279,511	23,210,726
Counselling	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	69,154,895	75,273,562	86,533,238	131,714,564

Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

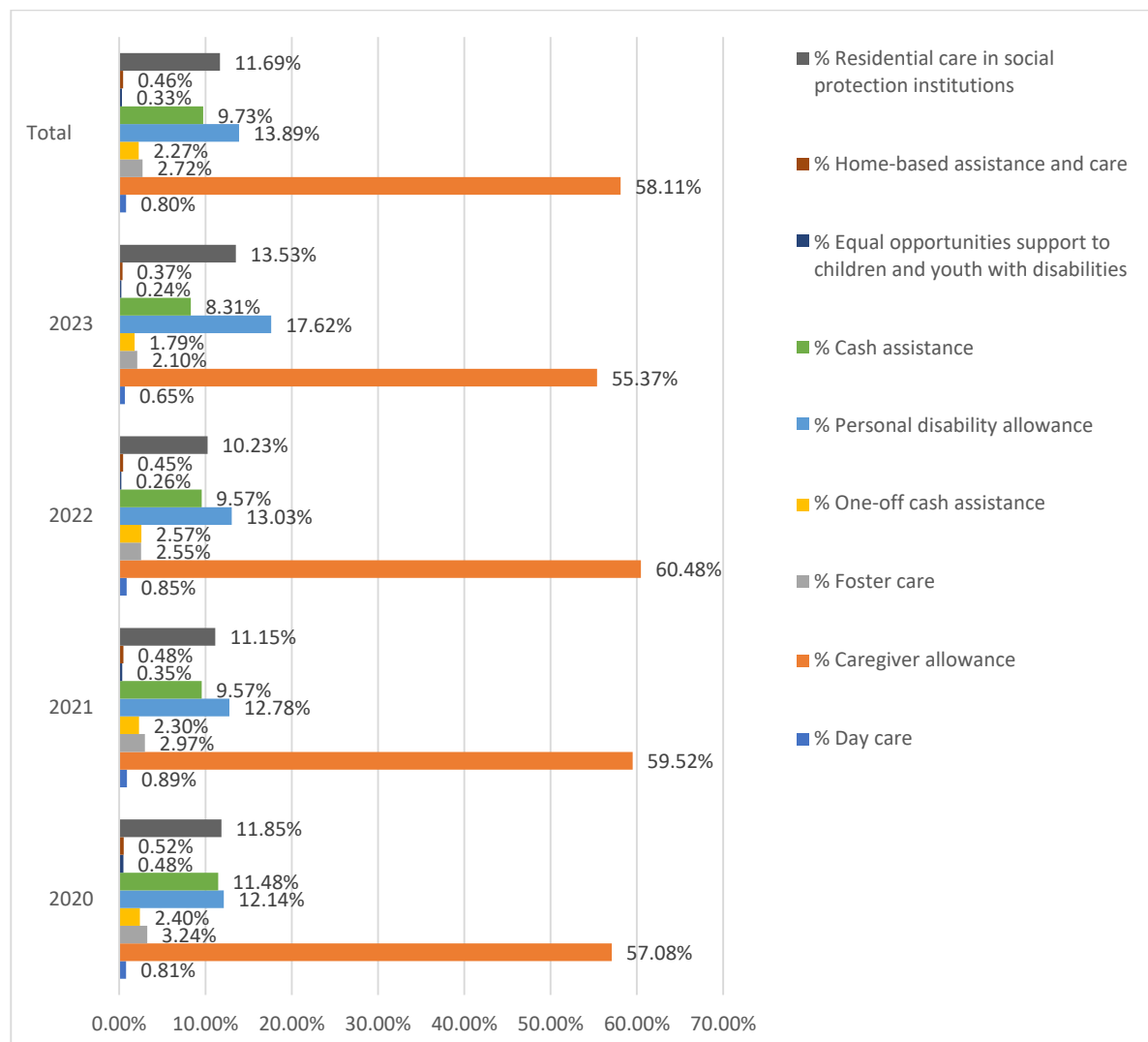
An analysis of the above allocations for the rights established by the Law on Social Protection reveals that the ‘right to caregiver allowance’ accounts for the largest proportion of funds (comprising over 50% of total allocations in 2023). This is followed by the ‘right to personal disability allowance’, albeit at a significantly smaller scale, and then by the ‘right to cash assistance’ and the ‘right to residential care in social protection institutions’, with these three rights collectively matching the allocation for the ‘right to caregiver allowance.’ Significantly smaller proportions are allocated to other rights, not due to a lack of demand, but likely owing to either the demographic structure of the population or the underdevelopment and limited availability of services in LSGUs.

Counselling, as one of the rights established by the Law, constitutes an integral part of the daily work of professionals who maintain direct and immediate contact with beneficiaries. It forms

¹⁰ Rights under the Law on Social Protection.

the foundation of the helping professions, including professional social protection workers. Counselling services are offered in various forms – informative, preventive, instructive, corrective, etc. These services do not necessitate additional financial allocations.

Chart 2: Share of Individual Rights in Total Social Protection Financing at the Republic and Local Levels (2020–2023)



Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

Chart 2 above shows the percentage share of annual allocations for each individual right within the social protection budget. Here, too, the data reveal that the caregiver allowance consistently accounts for the largest proportion, averaging 58.11% over the observed four-year period. This is followed by 13.89% allocated to personal disability allowance, 11.69% to residential care in social protection institutions and 9.73% to cash assistance. Together, these four rights constitute 93.42% of the total cash transfers within the social protection system from 2020 to 2023. The remaining five rights collectively account for just 6.58% of the total expenditure, distributed as follows: foster care (2.72%), one-off cash assistance (2.27%), day care (0.80%), home-based assistance and care (0.46%) and equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities (0.33%).

An analysis of the total allocations for financing social protection from the Republic level between 2020 and 2023 reveals similar trends to those observed in the combined local and

Republic-level funding. The largest share of funds is allocated to financing the right to caregiver allowance and the right to personal disability allowance. Notably, total funds for social protection from the Republic budget in 2023 were 57.46% higher compared to 2020. Table 4 below provides an overview of these allocations over the period 2020–2023.

Table 4: Total Allocations for Social Protection from the Republic Budget (2020–2023)

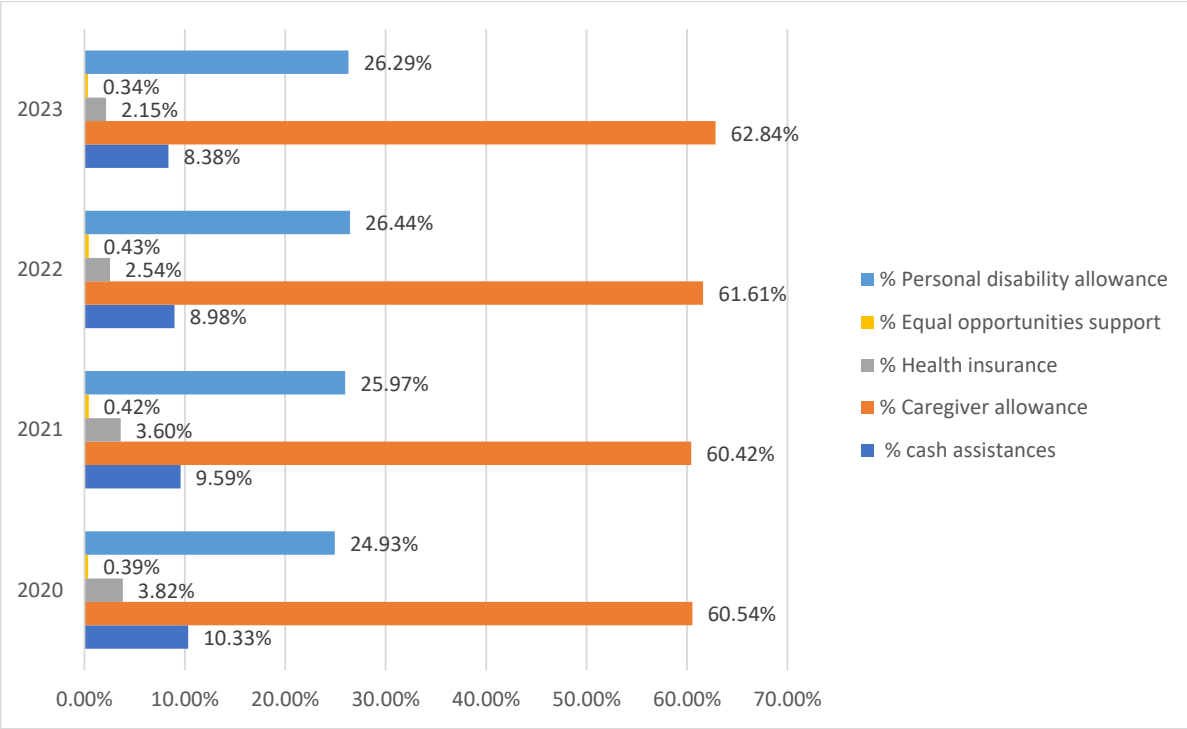
	2020	2021	2022	2023
RIGHT	BAM	BAM	BAM	BAM
Cash assistance	3,546,058	3,569,909	3,874,994	4,528,911
Caregiver allowance	20,772,746	22,497,617	26,582,138	33,954,667
Health insurance	1,310,118	1,340,615	1,096,880	1,160,549
Equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities	132,418	157,236	184,338	182,898
Personal disability allowance	8,553,286	9,670,427	11,408,550	14,204,296
TOTAL	34,314,629	37,235,805	43,146,902	54,031,321

Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

An examination of funds used to finance each individual right reveals that allocations for cash assistance increased by 27.72%, caregiver allowance by 63.46%, equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities by 38.12% and personal disability allowance by 66.07%. However, allocations for health insurance decreased by 11.42% in 2023 compared to 2020.

The financial structure of rights, as shown in Table 4 above, is largely dominated by the caregiver allowance, which grew from over BAM 20 million in 2020 to nearly BAM 34 million in 2023. Similarly, personal disability allowance rose from BAM 8.5 million to BAM 14.2 million over the same period. A more moderate rise was observed in cash assistance, which saw an increase from BAM 3.5 million in 2020 to BAM 4.5 million in 2023, and in equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities, which grew from BAM 132.4 thousand to BAM 182.8 thousand. Conversely, health insurance funding fluctuated and showed a slight downward trend, decreasing from BAM 1.3 million in 2020 to BAM 1.1 million in 2023.

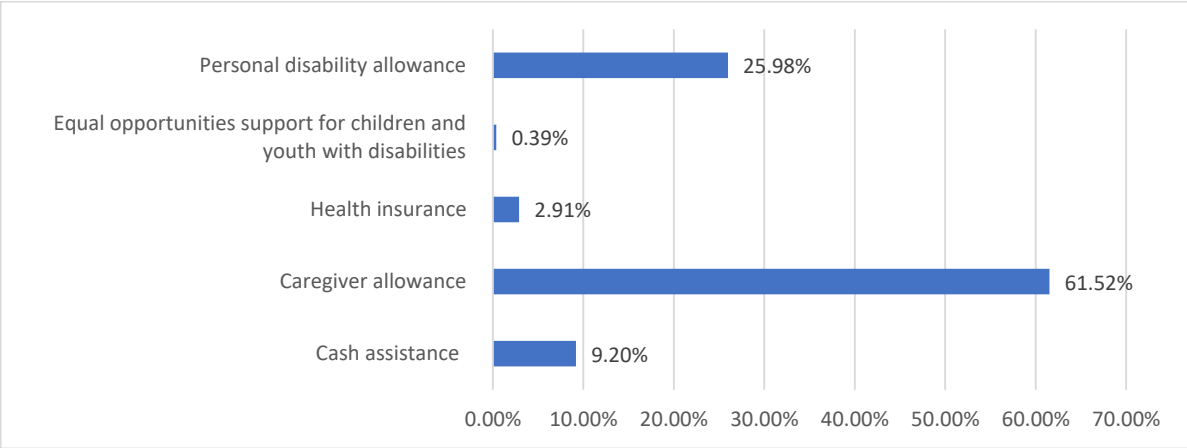
Chart 3: Share of Individual Rights in Total Social Protection Financing at the Republic Level



Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

When we examine the share of individual rights in the annual social protection allocations from the Republic level (Chart 3) and the average percentage distribution over the 2020–2023 period (Chart 4), we observe that the caregiver allowance accounts for the largest proportion of funds, averaging 61.52% across the four years. This is followed by personal disability allowance at 25.98% and cash assistance at 9.20%. The smallest shares are allocated to health insurance (2.91%) and equal opportunities support for children and youth with disabilities (0.39%).

Chart 4: Percentage of Social Protection Financing from the Republic Budget – by Rights (Average for 2020–2023)



Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

2.2. Financing of the child protection system in RS

An important aspect of analysing the functioning of the child protection system in RS is a review of its financing structure. Funds for financing child protection are sourced from:

1. child protection contributions as stipulated by legislation on contributions,
2. budgetary allocations from the Republic, used when the RS Public Fund for Child Protection cannot fully cover entitlements under the law through contributions alone,
3. the issuance or circulation of securities,
4. gifts, donations and contributions from individuals and legal entities,
5. the utilization of available funds and rights, and
6. loans and credit facilities.

Table 5 below summarizes the number of beneficiaries in the child protection system for the period 2020–2023. The figures indicate that recipients of child allowance constitute the largest group, with their numbers growing by 4,094 between 2020 and 2023, marking a 25.83% increase. When comparing the number of beneficiaries in 2023 to those in 2020, the greatest increases are observed in the right to wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care for a child under three years old (61.11%), the right to wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care and support for a child with developmental disabilities (55.86%) and the right to compensation for a parent-caregiver or caregiver (41.20%). The remaining rights have experienced either stable numbers or a gradual decline over the observed period.

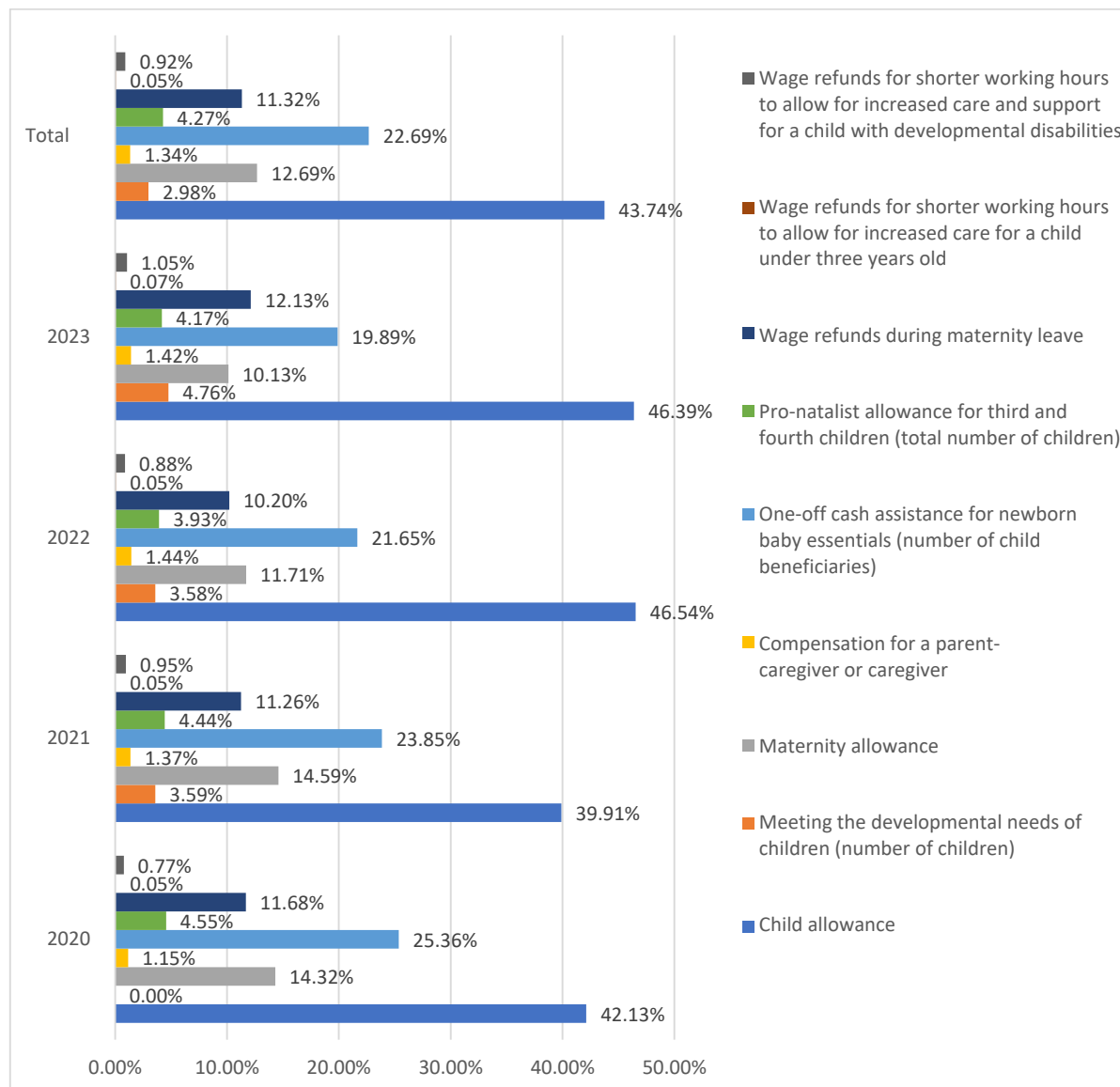
Table 5: Number of Beneficiaries of Rights under the Law on Child Protection in Republika Srpska – by Year

Number of beneficiaries by rights	2020	2021	2022	2023
One-off cash assistance for newborn baby essentials *number of child beneficiaries	9,539	8,707	9,420	8,550
Maternity allowance	5,385	5,329	5,096	4,353
Child allowance	15,848	14,572	20,251	19,942
Wage refunds during maternity leave	4,394	4,111	4,440	5,214
Wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care for a child under three years old	18	17	23	29
Wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care and support for a child with dev. disabilities	290	348	385	452
Meeting the developmental needs of children *number of children	-	1,310	1,559	2,046
Pro-natalist allowance for third and fourth children *total number of children	1,710	1,621	1,710	1,794
Compensation for a parent-caregiver or caregiver	432	499	625	610
TOTAL	37,616	36,514	43,509	42,990

Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

When analysing the percentage share of beneficiaries of individual rights within the total number of beneficiaries across the observed years, it is evident that nearly half of the total beneficiaries (43.74%) exercised the right to child allowance. The right to one-off cash assistance for newborn baby essentials accounted for 22.69% of beneficiaries, while the right to maternity allowance was utilized by 12.69%. The remaining 22.25% of beneficiaries exercised the other six rights during all four observed years. The percentage share of beneficiaries by individual rights within the total beneficiary pool, both by year and cumulatively for the observed period, is presented in Chart 5 below.

Chart 5: Share of Beneficiaries by Individual Rights under the Law on Child Protection in the Total Number of Beneficiaries – by Year



Source: RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

When comparing 2023 to 2020, the total financial allocations for child protection rights increased by 49.60%. It can be observed that allocations increased for all rights, except for the maternity allowance, which saw a 19.14% decrease in the last year compared to the first year observed. An overview of the total allocations for child protection from the budget of the RS Public

Fund for Child Protection for the period 2020 to 2023, broken down by rights, is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Total Allocations from the Budget of the RS Public Fund for Child Protection

RIGHT	2020	2021	2022	2023
One-off cash assistance for newborn baby essentials	2,384,750	2,176,750	4,709,500	4,275,000
Maternity allowance	26,163,405	25,896,510	24,766,965	21,155,175
Child allowance	12,816,387	14,062,647	29,081,584	34,859,032
Wage refunds during maternity leave	57,133,428	59,791,738	65,773,139	81,137,721
Wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care for a child under three years old	57,152	97,189	121,582	142,659
Wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care and support for a child with dev. disabilities	2,403,096	2,837,561	3,199,434	4,232,699
Meeting the developmental needs of children	0	923,877	1,174,992	1,469,147
Pro-natalist allowance for third and fourth children	986,250	932,250	979,500	1,019,700
Compensation for a parent-caregiver or caregiver	362,588	781,168	4,042,798	4,755,590
TOTAL in BAM	102,307,056	107,499,690	133,849,494	153,046,723

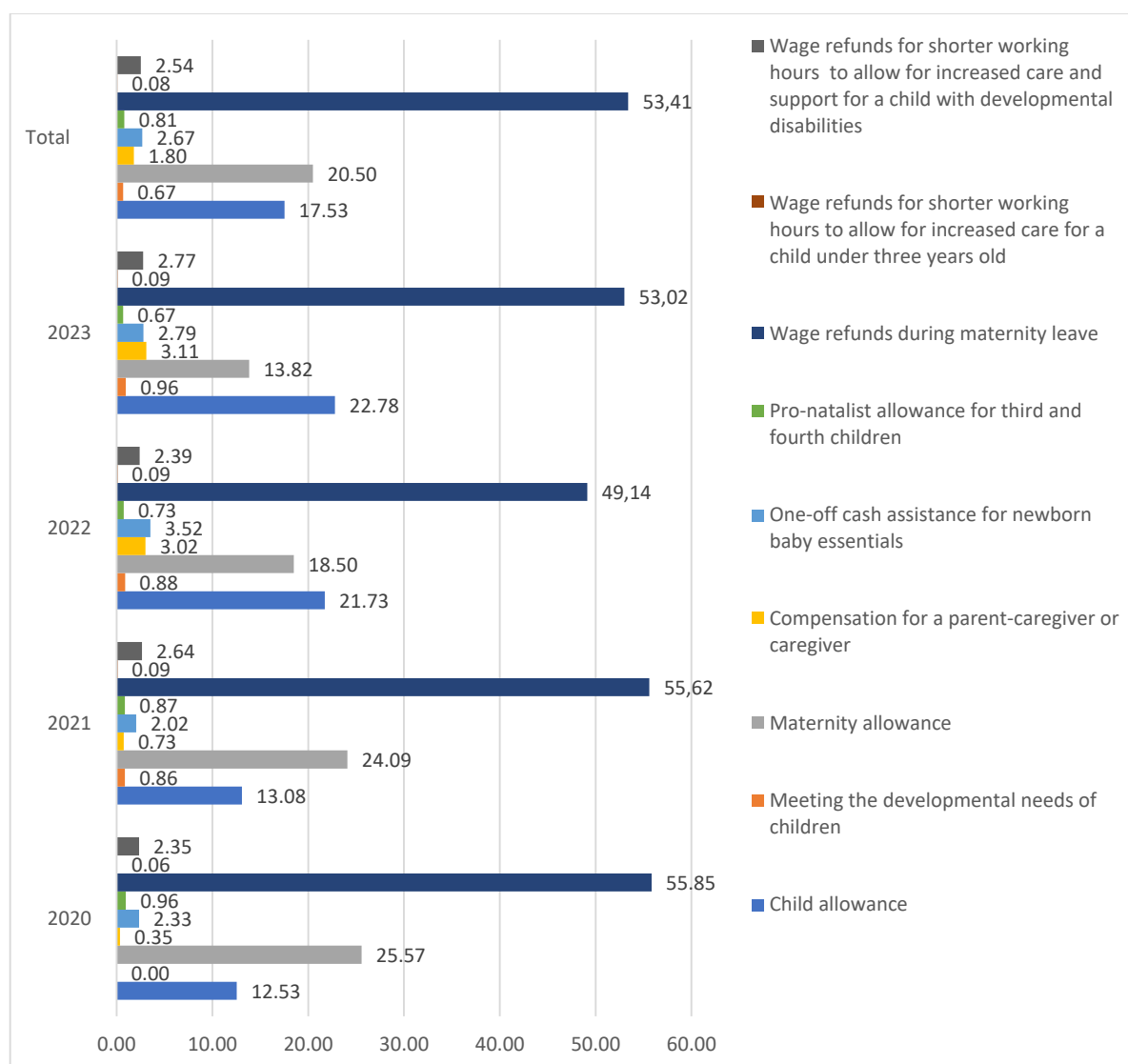
Source: RS Public Fund for Child Protection

In the financial structure of rights, the largest portion of funds was allocated to wage refunds during maternity leave (over BAM 80 million in 2023), child allowance (nearly BAM 35 million in 2023) and maternity allowance (BAM 21 million in 2023). Other rights received significantly smaller allocations in the financing of child protection¹¹. Individual allocations for one-off cash assistance for newborn baby essentials, compensation for a parent-caregiver or caregiver and wage refunds for shorter working hours in 2023 each exceeded BAM 4 million. Additionally, the total amount for pre-natal allowances for third and fourth children and the socialization of children in RS ('meeting the developmental needs of children') in 2023 exceeded BAM 1 million.

An analysis of the distribution of financial allocations by rights reveals that that, in 2023, 53.02% of the total annual budget for child protection was allocated to wage refunds during maternity leave, 22.78% to child allowance and 13.83% to maternity allowance. The smallest share of the Fund's total budget in 2023 was allocated to wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care for a child under three years old, amounting to just 0.09%. Over the four-year period from 2020 to 2023, there was an increase in the allocation of financial resources for all rights, except maternity allowance, which saw a reduction of 19.14% in 2023 compared to 2020. The share of individual rights in the total financing of child protection from the budget of the RS Public Fund for Child Protection from 2020 to 2023 is presented in Chart 6.

¹¹ The implementation of the "Socialization of Children in RS – 2020" project was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the allocation for the right to meet the developmental needs of children in 2020 is shown as zero.

Chart 6: Share of Individual Rights in Total Child Protection Financing from the Budget of the RS Public Fund for Child Protection (2020–2023)



Source: RS Public Fund for Child Protection

When analysing the average percentage share of individual child protection rights in the total budget of the RS Public Fund for Child Protection over the observed four-year period, the conclusions align closely with those drawn from the analyses of absolute values and annual shares of individual rights in total child protection funding. Specifically, the right to wage refunds during maternity leave accounts for the highest average percentage share in the observed period (53.41%), followed by the right to maternity allowance (20.50%) and the right to child allowance (17.53%). Conversely, the right to wage refunds for shorter working hours to allow for increased care for a child under three years old has the lowest average percentage (0.08%).

3. THE ROLE OF CSWs DURING DISASTERS/EMERGENCIES

As part of the Feasibility Study on the Shock-responsiveness of the Republika Srpska's Social Protection System with a Particular Focus on the Provision of Emergency Cash Transfers, the RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare gathered and analysed data related to the operation of the social protection and child protection systems during emergencies. The objective was to optimize the functioning of these systems and ensure the most effective emergency cash transfers. In preparing the study, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to gather the necessary data and to prepare a report outlining potential scenarios and options for the operation of the social protection and child protection systems in RS regarding provision of emergency cash transfers.

Data collection took place during March and April 2024 via a questionnaire distributed to CSWs. This questionnaire, consisting of 40 questions, focused on CSWs' operations during disasters and sought feedback and recommendations to aid relevant institutions in improving disaster preparedness. The goal was to develop robust legislation for effective implementation in emergencies. The questionnaire was distributed to 51 CSWs across RS, with 47 CSWs submitting completed questionnaires based on the data available to them. This represents a completion rate of 92.16%. This was followed by an analysis aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the positioning of emergency cash transfers within the social protection system of RS.

The RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare also organized round-table discussions with professionals, managers of social protection institutions and representatives from the Republic Civil Protection Administration¹². During these meetings, data collected through the questionnaires were analysed and additional information was gathered to better identify and address the needs of CSW beneficiaries regarding emergency cash transfers.

Professionals, heads of CSWs and representatives of the Republic Civil Protection Administration identified several issues and proposed solutions related to handling emergencies and reducing disaster risks. These focus areas include the following: legally defining categories of persons who require emergency cash transfers or additional financial support in emergencies through the social and child protection systems; formally establishing a budget reserve for emergency cash transfers provided through the social protection and child protection systems; ensuring CSWs are actively involved in decision-making processes during emergencies rather than only after decisions are made; and emphasizing the importance of timely inclusion of CSWs in all relevant processes.

3.1. Analysis of responses to the questionnaire on the functioning of CSWs during disasters

The questionnaire was structured to group responses under the following themes:

1. General situation in LSGUs related to the occurrence of disasters, hazards, emergencies, etc.;
2. Familiarity with acts of general application, regulations and planning documents;
3. The role of CSWs during disasters and emergencies and the support they provide;
4. The existence of expanded rights in LSGUs;
5. The functioning of CSWs during past floods;
6. The social protection system's support for beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic;

¹² On 4 June 2024 in Istočno Sarajevo, on 11 June 2024 in Banja Luka and on 17 June 2024 in Bijeljina.

-
7. Adequacy of administrative and technical processes for disaster response; and
 8. Communication with relevant stakeholders during disasters and preventive activities.

3.1.1. General situation in LSGUs related to the occurrence of disasters, hazards, emergencies, etc.

When asked about hazards that frequently impact their LSGUs, the CSWs provided the following responses:

- 63.83% of CSWs reported being affected by floods,
- 44.68% by fires,
- 38.30% by epidemics.

Additionally, 29.79% of the CSWs reported being affected by landslides, 23.40% by droughts, 12.77% by earthquakes and 10.64% by landmines and unexploded ordnance. Some CSWs also mentioned storms (strong winds) and snow disasters.

Regarding hazards causing significant socio-economic losses in their LSGUs, the CSWs primarily identified floods, flash floods, storm winds, landslides, epidemics and earthquakes as risks that pose substantial socio-economic losses and threats to human lives. Fires were less frequently mentioned as a type of hazard encountered in their local areas.

3.1.2. Familiarity with acts of general application, regulations and planning documents

In terms of strategic documents, the following were listed as priorities in the strategies, policies and programmes of LSGUs in the field of social and child protection for achieving a high standard of service provision within the social protection system: maximum protection and provision of support through expanded rights provided by LSGUs (birth rate incentives, one-off in-kind assistance, one-off cash assistance for funeral expenses for beneficiaries of cash assistance, assistance for the care and education of children with developmental disabilities), including survey to collect data on a representative sample using a standardized methodology to inform the establishment of expanded rights; improvement of the quality of existing services; improvement of the family protection system; improvement of activities in response to crisis situations; training and professional development of professional and other staff in CSWs; promoting multisectoral cooperation among stakeholders involved in protection. The policies, strategies and programmes prioritize the protection of fundamental human rights and safeguarding the lives of fellow citizens, with particular emphasis on children and the elderly.

In response to the question about their institution's mission and vision regarding the safety of vulnerable groups, especially children, during disaster management in social protection, most CSWs highlighted their readiness to provide rapid and adequate support to vulnerable groups; their dedication to providing services to vulnerable groups; their dedication to the safety of vulnerable groups through the provision of physical, psychological, psycho-social, material and housing support and ensuring kinship support; professional support; preventive programmes across all areas of professional work; the development of material and human resources for protecting life and property; the relocation of children from disaster-affected areas; the creation of new integrated support services based on needs; and carrying out ERCTs' instructions.

One of the CSWs reported that it has adopted its Medium-term Social Protection Programme, which prioritizes groups such as children and the elderly and infirm, adding that the mission and

vision of both the CSW and the city are to create conditions for a safe environment through Action Plans that will address the social needs of citizens via various help and support mechanisms.

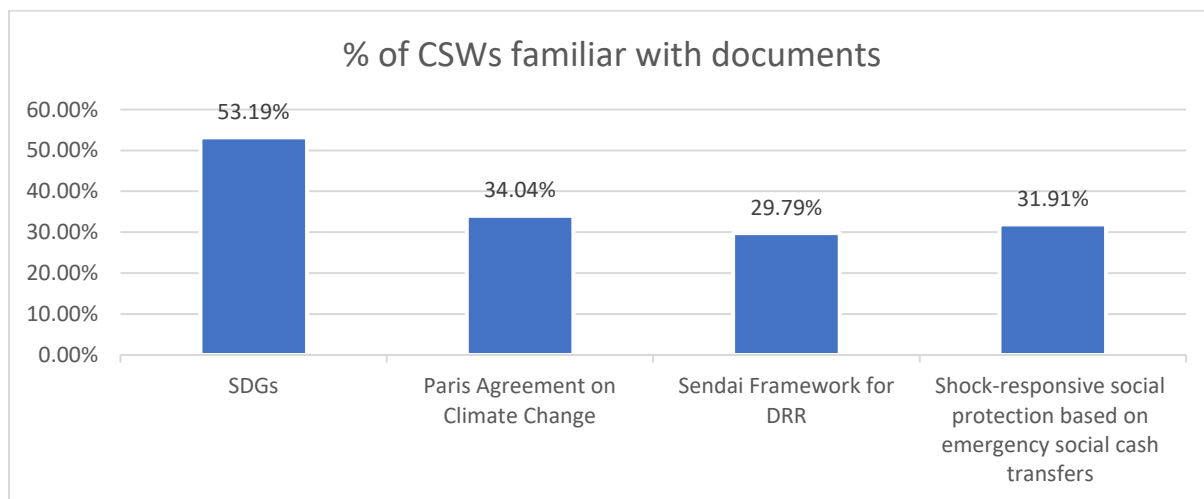
When asked whether acts of general application applicable to the social protection system in LSGUs incorporate DRR content, 50% of CSWs answered affirmatively, while the remaining 50% responded negatively.

When asked about the safety of vulnerable groups and disaster management in the field of social protection, the CSWs stated that improvements in general and planning documents within local self-government units could be achieved by strengthening the social protection system, including by: involving CSW professionals in the preparation of these documents; organizing a multisectoral approach to crisis governance and management during disasters within local self-government units; better mapping of extremely vulnerable residents; creating reliable and transparent databases on target groups (as well as by expanding social protection rights during disasters; ensuring the operation of systems that protect children, families and vulnerable individuals; adopting disaster response regulations with clearly defined disaster response roles for each stakeholder; regularly coordinating activities in disaster management situations; adopting individual strategic plans for each vulnerable group; and ensuring regular monitoring of the implementation of these plans).

Risk assessments and emergency action plans have been completed by only 12 CSWs (25.53%), while 35 CSWs (74.47%) have yet to prepare such assessments and plans.

Regarding their awareness of and familiarity with key documents in the field of shock-responsive social protection (Chart 7), the majority of CSWs (53.19%) reported familiarity with the SDGs, followed by 34.04% with the Paris Agreement on climate change, 31.91% with the Shock-responsive Social Protection Instrument based on emergency social cash transfers and 29.79% with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Chart 7: Familiarity of CSWs with Key Documents on Shock-Responsive Social Protection

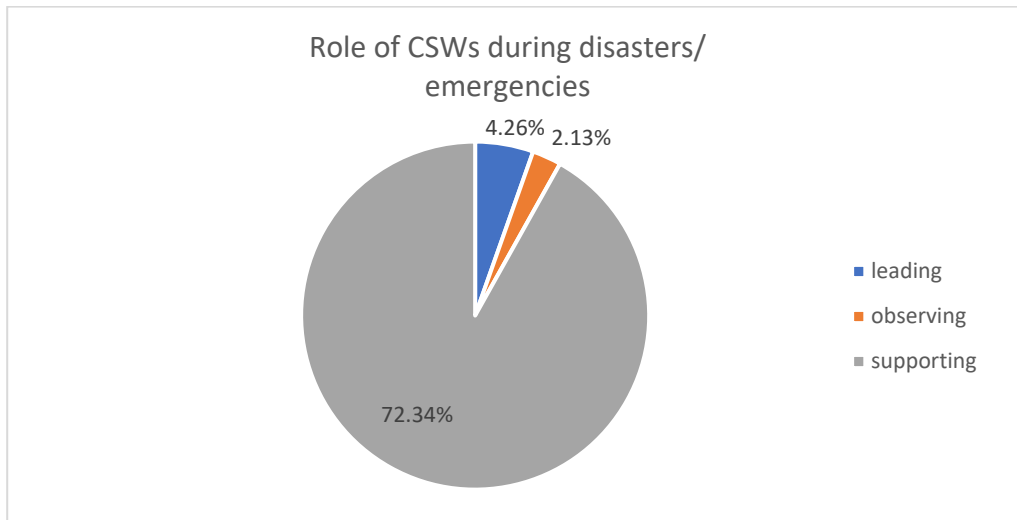


Source: Survey questionnaire

3.1.3. The role of CSWs during disasters and emergencies

With regard to disasters and emergencies, 70.21% of CSWs reported participating in the activities undertaken, with their roles being predominantly supportive (72.34%), and to a lesser extent, leading (4.26%) or observing (2.13%).

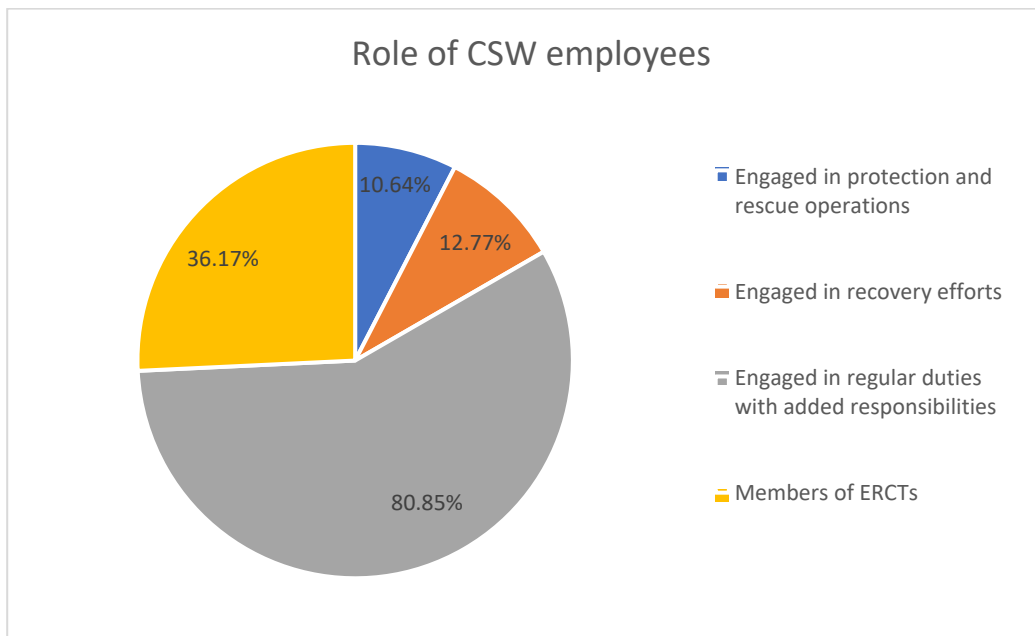
Chart 8: Role of CSWs during Disasters/Emergencies



Source: Survey questionnaire

Regarding the roles of CSW employees, the majority (80.85%) were engaged in regular duties with added responsibilities, slightly over one-third participated as members of local ERCTs or similar bodies, while 12.77% were involved in recovery efforts and 10.64% in protection and rescue operations.

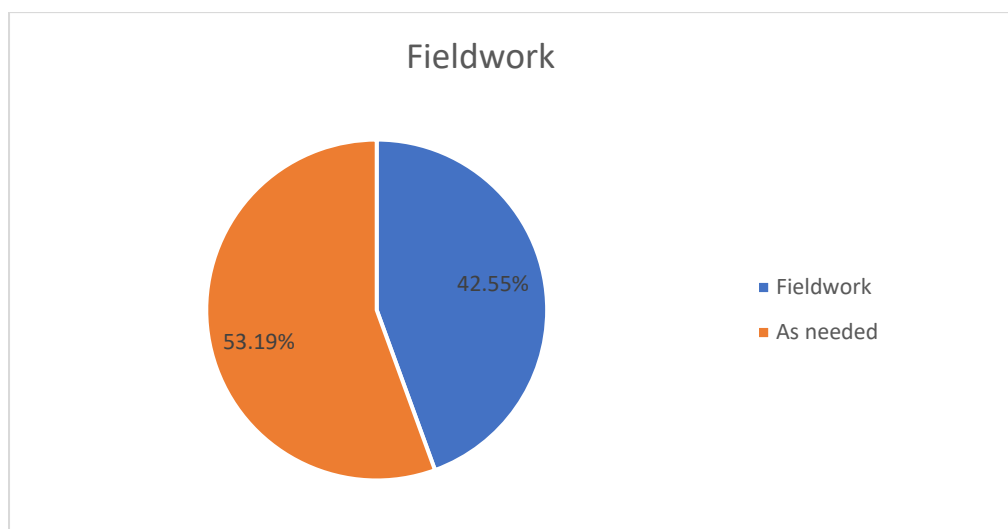
Chart 9: Role of CSW Employees during Disasters/Emergencies



Source: Survey questionnaire

During emergencies and disasters, most CSWs (72.34%) adjusted their activities based on needs, with 42.55% actively working in the field and 53.19% engaging in fieldwork on an as-needed basis.

Chart 10: Percentage of CSWs Engaged in Fieldwork



Source: Survey questionnaire

The **concrete support** provided by CSWs to beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems during disasters included psychosocial support, care, provision of essential needs, data gathering and support to local ERCTs.

The CSWs' role in providing support was implemented through introducing on-call duty and providing emergency aid to flooded households (care); conducting surveys on flooded households; participating in data processing; distributing humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations; providing food aid; providing cash transfers in accordance with the Law on Social Protection and the Decision on Establishing Expanded Rights in the respective LSGUs; participating in recovery efforts; processing requests from beneficiaries; taking a social history of at-risk family households; submitting lists to civil protection; making provisions for the evacuation of elderly people; engaging in media campaigns to promote solidarity towards people who live alone and need support; appealing to citizens to report people living in abandoned buildings; visiting social protection beneficiaries; working within emergency and mobile teams; and coordinating the establishment of services to support elderly persons without family care.

The role of CSW staff in providing support encompassed a wide range of activities, including participation in protection and rescue efforts as per the schedule issued with the mobilization order, fulfilling on-call duty responsibilities, working directly with beneficiaries, delivering psychosocial assistance and support, field support, distributing food, hygiene supplies and medicines and organizing vaccination efforts.

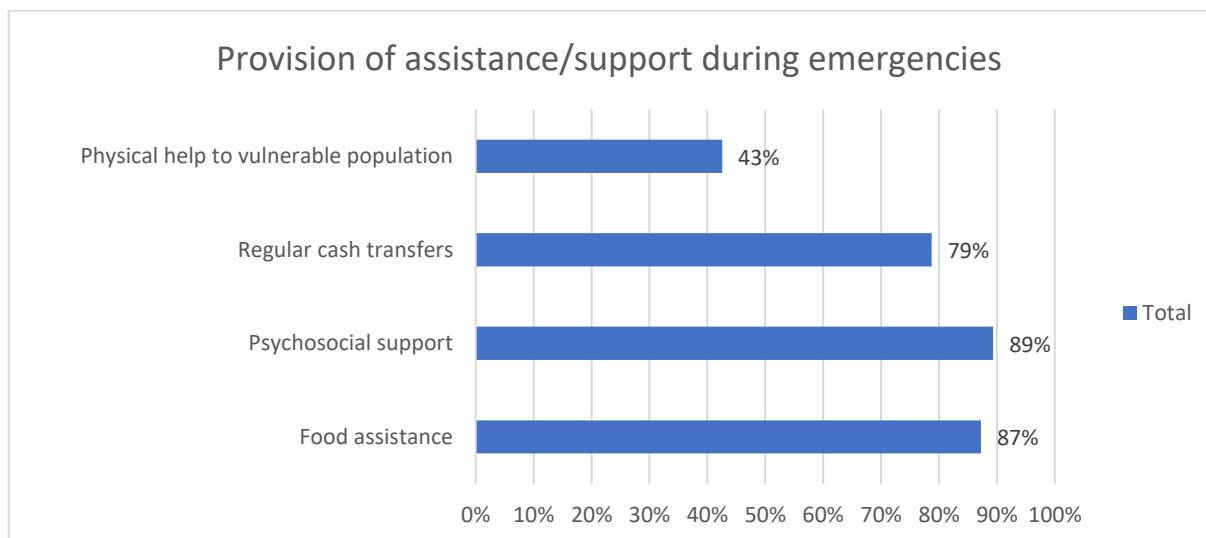
Regarding their operational approach to preparedness, communication with other protection stakeholders and fieldwork, CSWs reported engaging in direct work with beneficiaries; implementing emergency work plans, which included organizing staff schedules and readiness protocols; collaborating in field operations with other protection stakeholders; participating in the ERCT; submitting reports on actions taken to the ERCT; and adapting regular work to comply with safety measures during emergencies (COVID-19 epidemic). Some CSWs also noted that support could not be provided in cases where locations were extremely remote and inaccessible, particularly during heavy rainfall, when vehicles could not reach beneficiaries and telephone lines were often inoperative.

Negative experiences encountered in the performance of their work during disasters, as reported by CSWs, included the absence of emergency response protocols, excessive workload

and fatigue from continuous engagement, beneficiaries' lack of understanding about the scope of CSW actions in emergencies, heightened anxiety among vulnerable individuals, limited resources to support assistance efforts, inability to provide proper care for vulnerable families, difficulties in distributing food (due to limited financial and human resources amidst increased workload) and specific demands made by beneficiaries.

The support provided by CSWs during crises contributed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems. This assistance primarily included psychosocial support (89.36%), food assistance (87.23%), regular cash transfers (78.72%) and physical help to vulnerable population (42.55%).

Chart 11: Forms of Support during Disasters/Emergencies



Source: Survey questionnaire

CSWs played a role in child protection during emergencies in 36% of cases, undertaking tasks such as emergency child care, providing psychosocial support to children and their families, ensuring protection from violence and neglect, coordinating kinship care for temporary shelter following incidents such as house fires, arranging shelter for children from high-risk areas, placement in kinship care, etc.

When asked whether a representative of their CSW is a member of the local ERCT, 34 CSWs (72.34%) confirmed they are and 13 (27.66%) stated they are not.

3.1.4. The existence of expanded rights in LSGUs

Emergency cash transfers provided by the social protection system to individuals or families in LSGUs (as prescribed by the law and decisions on expanded rights) include cash assistance, one-off cash assistance, housing, in-kind support, food and medicine aid, assistance for the care and education of children with developmental disabilities, funeral expenses, medical treatment aid, aid for individuals with developmental disabilities, firewood purchase support, subsidies for utilities (water, electricity, heating), transportation subsidies for students from low-income families, construction material assistance, financial support for landslide rehabilitation, financial support for house upgrades, etc.

CSWs lack a dedicated budget line for emergency support. Among the CSWs that sent their responses, 15 reported the absence of prescribed expanded rights in their LSGUs, while 35 stated that these expanded rights are in place.

The nature of the support provided by CSWs involved addressing immediate challenges caused by disasters, emergencies and other events, organizing mobile teams to provide support and distribute necessary resources to individuals facing social disadvantage due to emergency, providing basic life necessities for individuals unable to secure them independently during crises (especially food and medical treatment), financial support (which was not uniform across LSGUs) and providing food, medicine and hygiene items to address the primary needs of the emergency-affected population.

Target groups include all individuals in a state of social disadvantage, with a focus on children, the elderly, the sick and persons with disabilities; beneficiaries of cash assistance, those without monetary income, individuals under guardianship, those who have undergone assessment and, generally, individuals experiencing social disadvantage, lacking financial security and unable to meet their basic life needs independently, as well as minors and adults in education or training and persons in a state of social disadvantage.

Support in the form of one-off cash assistance was provided to individuals or families in social disadvantage, addressing their most immediate needs in a given situation. The main advantage of this form of assistance over other support types (such as food and clothing parcels) is that it allows the money to be used for most pressing needs (such as specific food items, medicines, fuel for transportation to health facilities, specialist examinations and other justified expenses). In conclusion, this type of support aims to provide financial assistance for covering costs incurred due to disasters, such as support with construction materials (e.g. sand, tiles, etc.). It also aims to mitigate damage as effectively as possible and to target individuals who are socially disadvantaged due to circumstances such as natural disasters, war, refugee status, migration or other unforeseen events. Additionally, the expanded right to one-off in-kind assistance is designed to support cash assistance beneficiaries and other socially vulnerable individuals who struggle to meet their basic needs. The amounts of cash transfers provided by LSGUs to beneficiaries of the social protection system (based on the decision on expanded rights or other relevant decisions) varied widely across municipalities, ranging from BAM 50.00 to BAM 5,000.00. These transfers were allocated for various purposes, such as procuring food and hygiene supplies and financing construction works, with the latter observed in municipalities that allocated larger amounts. Such cash transfers were predominantly one-off, although a smaller number of CSWs reported instances of recurring support.

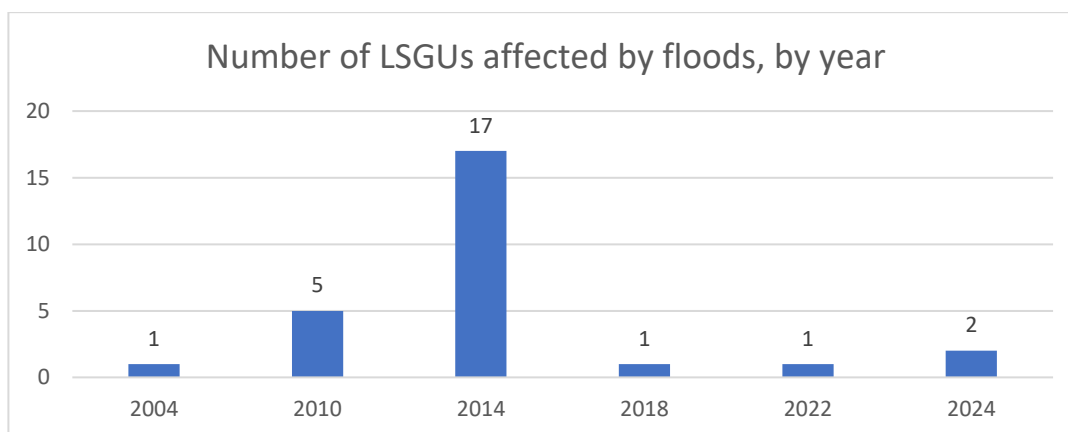
An analysis of the total number of beneficiaries of the social protection system (cash assistance, caregiver allowance, personal disability allowance) indicates that the number of beneficiaries generally aligns with the average figures for those who have exercised such rights. However, total budget allocations at the local level vary significantly, ranging from several thousand BAM to several hundred thousand BAM, though not all CSWs supplied the requested data.

In terms of expanded rights, CSWs most frequently cited assistance with housing, compensation for placement in one's own family, assistance for single parents-caregivers, provision of firewood, subsidizing utility costs, support for young adults discharged from residential or foster care, one-off in-kind assistance, soup kitchen services, health insurance, compensation for funeral expenses, purchase of school supplies and textbooks, free transportation for students, purchase of medicines, one-off financial assistance, assistance for education and vocational training of youth without parental care, provision of essentials for beneficiaries placed in foster care, covering costs of transportation, food and accommodation services for students with disabilities receiving primary education.

3.1.5. The functioning of social protection institutions during past floods

When asked about the support provided by the social protection system to its beneficiaries during floods, one CSW reported that floods affected its LSGU in 2004, five CSWs in 2010, 17 CSWs in 2014, one CSW each in 2018 and 2022 and two CSWs indicated 2024 as the year of flooding.

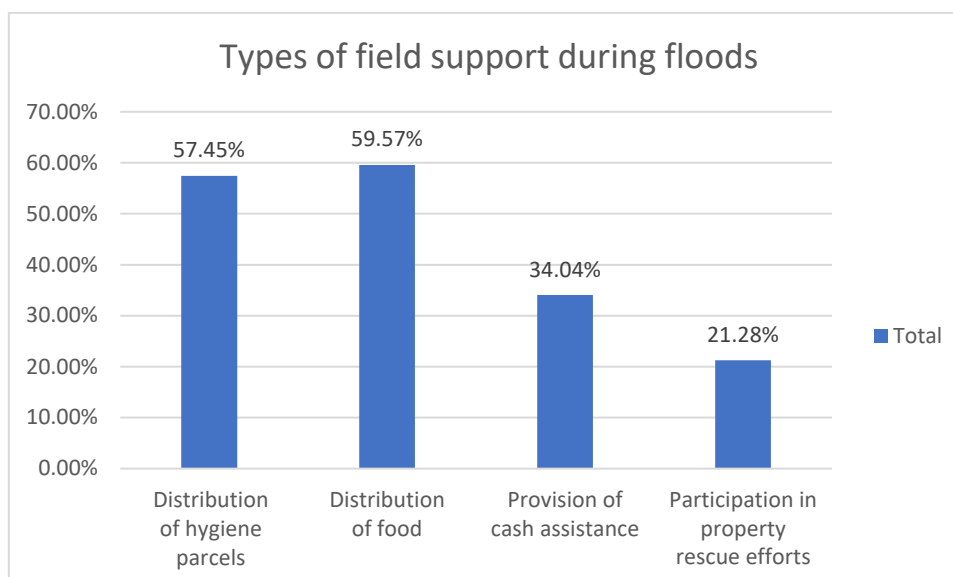
Chart 12: Number of LSGUs Affected by Floods



Source: Questionnaire analysis

In response to the question about the support provided by the social protection system to its beneficiaries during floods, it was reported that activities included the distribution of food (59.57%), distribution of hygiene parcels (57.45%), participation in property rescue efforts (21.28%), cash assistance (34.04%) and psychosocial assistance.

Chart 13: Support Provided by CSWs during Floods



Source: Questionnaire analysis

Other activities undertaken by CSWs to assist the flooded population included: collaboration with ERCTs, establishing on-call duty, implementing mobilization decisions, documenting the social profiles ('social card') of socially vulnerable population, arranging shelter in reception centres, assistance to individuals from other municipalities or countries who were present in their LSGUs during floods, mediation in arranging shelter for individuals without family care, visiting beneficiaries and providing assistance, developing a database of all flooded households for subsequent institutional aid, cooperating with the police and primary health care centres, as well as other preventive and operational activities based on identified needs.

3.1.6. The social protection system's support for beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic

In response to the question regarding the support provided by the social protection system to beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was reported that 11,870 beneficiaries received COVID-19-related assistance in 2020 under decisions on expanded rights as stipulated by the Law on Social Protection. This figure declined to 11,391 in 2021 and further to 3,338 in 2022.

The activities undertaken to protect beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems during the COVID-19 pandemic primarily involved implementing the directives issued by the local and Republic ERCTs, as well as adhering to the guidelines provided by the RS Institute of Public Health.

As part of the aforementioned activities, the largest number of responses from CSWs highlighted the following tasks: providing psychosocial support; distributing food parcels, water, medicines and hygiene items; supplying personal protective equipment (disinfectants and facemasks); delivering books, school supplies and resources for remote learning; assisting in organizing remote learning; donating tablet devices; mediating to facilitate contact during lockdown with biological relatives in residential care institutions; performing routine and social protection tasks to support vulnerable populations under altered circumstances while adhering to protective measures; recognizing the right to one-off cash assistance for the population whose livelihoods were jeopardized by the pandemic and providing in-kind aid; facilitating access to health insurance, which was granted to all RS citizens during the emergency; collaborating with humanitarian organizations and municipal Red Cross branches to manage donations; cooperating with primary health care centres to ensure that social protection beneficiaries who were ill received necessary therapies and examinations; establishing a service for providing support to social protection beneficiaries without family support, comprised of CSW and Red Cross representatives; addressing reports of domestic violence; arranging contact between parents and children; and preventing the abuse of the emergency situation.

When asked about the most common challenges encountered in the performance of their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, CSWs cited insufficient intersectoral cooperation, limited financial resources, limited human and technical resources, problems due to the inability of clients to come to the CSW premises, placement of beneficiaries in social protection institutions and field visits by CSW professionals.

When asked about the most frequent challenges faced in their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, CSWs identified insufficient intersectoral cooperation, constrained financial resources, limited human and technical capacities, difficulties arising from clients' inability to visit CSW premises, challenges related to placing beneficiaries in social protection institutions and difficulties associated with conducting field visits by CSW professionals. The problems cited included a heightened risk of social disadvantage and domestic violence due to social distancing, the prolonged stay of family members in confined spaces, movement restrictions and stress caused

by potential financial losses. CSWs also reported difficulties in ensuring full professional teamwork during lockdown. Other challenges encountered during the pandemic involved organizing meetings of first-instance professional commissions for assessing the functional state of beneficiaries, organizing meetings of first-instance professional commissions for evaluating and guiding children with developmental disabilities, holding hearings and meetings involving multiple parties in the procedures and maintaining personal contact with minors under CSW supervision.

Situational Analysis of the Social Protection System in Republika Srpska with Particular Focus on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The survey 'Situational Analysis of the Social Protection System in Republika Srpska with Particular Focus on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic' was developed and conducted by the RS Association of Professional Social Workers in collaboration with the RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and with support from UNICEF in BiH. Its primary objective was to provide insights into the current state of social protection, the capacities of social protection institutions in terms of the number, structure and needs of beneficiaries, the availability and requirements of social services and the extent of social service funding. The analysis was conducted across six regions of RS, based on the organizational and territorial divisions of regional associations of professional social workers. These regions included Prijedor, Banja Luka, Doboј, Bijeljina, Istočno Sarajevo and Hercegovina. Within each of the six regional associations, three CSWs from each region were included in the sample, resulting in a total of 18 CSWs.

The findings from the analysis were compiled into a document that grouped recommendations into the following categories: planning and development, laws governing social protection, budgeting, databases, institutional capacities (human, technical and material), intersectoral cooperation, the introduction of new services and social protection beneficiaries. The key recommendations relevant to this study, within the framework outlined above, include the need to: establish legal frameworks for fast-track and urgent procedures, as well as introduce new methods of communication with users in the implementation and utilization of social protection rights, particularly in the context of protection of families with children during emergencies (Section II: Laws Governing Social Protection); ensure, where possible, that budget allocations for social protection are not reduced during emergencies (Section III: Budgeting); prioritize the collection of data on the situation of beneficiaries during emergencies (Section IV: Database); facilitate the continuous professional development of managers and professionals through accredited training programmes and new communication methods, especially in handling emergencies (Section V: Institutional Capacities), etc.

Energy Support Package for Energy-Poor Consumers/Vulnerable Households: Following the completion of the relevant procedures, the RS Government determined that more than 67,000 households in RS are eligible for cash assistance to cover heating costs. This energy support package, funded through the EU pre-accession aid instrument IPA 3 for 2023, aims to provide financial assistance to vulnerable households by allocating cash for heating costs. The objective of this assistance is to alleviate the negative socio-economic impacts of the energy crisis. The cash assistance per household amounted to BAM 476.46.

The RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare disbursed funds to beneficiaries entitled to cash assistance under the law governing social protection; to beneficiaries of child allowances under the law on child protection; and to individuals aged 65 and above in accordance with the conditions outlined in the Decision on the Implementation of the Energy Support Package for

Energy-Poor Consumers. These beneficiaries were selected based on a list compiled following the public call procedure.

The RS Ministry of Labour, War Veterans and Disabled Persons' Protection disbursed funds to unemployed veterans from the first to fifth category under the age of 60, who are entitled to monthly cash income under the Decision on the Payment of Monthly Cash Income to Socially Vulnerable Unemployed Veterans of the Defence-Patriotic War of Republika Srpska (first to fifth category); veterans from the first to fifth category over the age of 60, who, according to updated records from the Ministry of Labour, War Veterans and Disabled Persons' Protection, are in a state of social disadvantage; and pension beneficiaries (excluding proportional pensions) whose pension amount does not exceed half of the lowest salary determined by the Decision on the Lowest Salary in Republika Srpska for 2023.

The **“Bosnia and Herzegovina Emergency COVID-19 Project”** focused on strengthening the provision of health care and the health system, enhancing the detection and reporting of infection cases and contact tracing, supporting the implementation of distancing measures, supporting preparedness for communication and activity, supporting the protection of animals and the environment and facilitating cash transfers to vulnerable individuals economically affected by the pandemic. Under Subcomponent 1.2, the project supported, through the provision of credit facilities, the strengthening and expansion of the social care and social protection systems in RS, allowing for the delivery of additional temporary social support and cash assistance to households and individuals in need. A total of €3,277,470.64 (BAM 6,410,175.74) was disbursed to beneficiaries of social assistance and to CSWs through this project component. The activity concluded on 30 June 2022, benefiting a total of 23,000 individuals receiving social protection rights related to COVID-19. A total of €3,709,625.49 (BAM 7,255,396.82) was allocated for Subcomponent 1.2. During the implementation of the project, several indicators exceeded the initially planned values. These included a higher number of acute health care institutions with isolation capacity, an increased number of intensive care beds equipped with ventilators, a greater volume of cash payments to an increased number of social protection beneficiaries (including persons with disabilities, residents of social protection institutions and recipients of one-off cash assistance in RS) and a larger number of laboratories in RS adequately equipped with diagnostic equipment, test kits and reagents for SARS-CoV-2 rtPCR testing.

3.1.7. Adequacy of administrative and technical processes for disaster response

In terms of their capacities regarding human resources and the necessary equipment to respond to an increased number of beneficiaries in emergency situations, CSWs highlighted the need for: new official vehicles for fieldwork, computer equipment, the engagement of volunteers during emergencies, technical resources (such as masks, disinfectants, boots, raincoats, etc.), training on emergency response actions, shelters for vulnerable users, increased funding to meet the rising needs of the population, official mobile phones, etc.

Regarding the functionality and operability of the social protection database (SOTAC) for targeting users in emergencies, 23 CSWs (48.94%) reported that the database is functional and operational, while 24 CSWs (51.06%) stated that it is not.

Of the total responses received, 18 CSWs (38.30%) indicated that upgrades are necessary, noting that the records from the SOTAC database can only be used tentatively due to the lack of data cross-referencing capabilities, and adding that CSWs are introducing supplementary records to address this.

CSWs highlighted the need to establish a system for controlling and operationalizing data entry when records are entered for each case. They proposed introducing the option to scan documents

and upload them into the database, as well as recording the geographic location of families in areas at risk of floods and landslides. It was stressed that these issues should be clearly defined within the SOTAC database to enable both financial interventions and the professional provision of services.

3.1.8. Communication with relevant stakeholders during disasters and preventive activities

Regarding the implementation of preventive measures or actions to build readiness during disasters to protect beneficiaries, 31.91% of CSWs confirmed that they implemented such measures, whereas 51.06% stated that they did not.

The preventive measures included the creation of strategic and action documents and plans, the regular updating of the CSWs' Disaster and Emergency Risk Assessments and the protection and rescue plans; raising user awareness about the risks of natural disasters and other emergencies; improving communication with the media, beneficiaries and other legal entities; the development of programmes and projects aimed at reducing the risks of disasters and emergencies; establishing a notification and early warning system for beneficiaries and partner organizations; development of software and IT solutions; organizing regular and planned training for beneficiaries; training in emergency crisis handling and reporting; creating an internal emergency response plan; and addressing the need for the procurement of generators and equipment for CSW workers.

Out of all the responses provided by the CSWs, approximately 50% indicated that no preventive measures or actions to build readiness were undertaken during disasters to protect beneficiaries. The analysis of these responses highlights the importance of cooperation with other institutions in emergencies, which, from the perspective of the CSWs, is deemed satisfactory.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations regarding the necessary interventions and feasibility of shock-responsive social protection and improved child protection in LSGUs, as well as at the Republic level, aimed at reducing vulnerability based on socio-economic status, have been grouped into four categories:

4.1. Recommendations for improving the targeting of user needs within the social and child protection systems during emergencies,

4.2. Recommendations for introducing new or revising existing primary and secondary legislation of RS, as well as the acts of general application of LSGUs,

4.3. Recommendations for ensuring additional financial resources, and

4.4. Recommendations for ensuring adequate support to professionals in the social and child protection systems.

4.1. Recommendations for improving the targeting of user needs within the social and child protection systems during emergencies:

- Ensure greater engagement of local community councils with CSWs,
- Inclusion of CSW staff in the network of protection stakeholders (participation in disaster management bodies),
- Ensure that a CSW representative is a mandatory member of the ERCT in the LSGU,
- Map vulnerable population groups by mobilizing local community representatives,
- Regularly update user records to include all relevant information and form professional teams for user protection, etc.,
- Increase awareness of the rights available through the social and child protection systems and the procedures for exercising those rights,
- Provide education to parents on disaster response, alongside education for children and child care institutions' staff in procedures to follow in the event of disasters,
- Secure commodity reserves and allocate additional funds for emergency financial aid to affected populations,
- Plan for the provision of shelter to disaster-affected individuals and ensure food and medicine supplies for the elderly and infirm,
- Ensure the availability of protective equipment for social protection institution employees,
- Design and implement psychosocial assistance programmes for vulnerable groups,
- Increase the availability of existing helplines and open additional phone lines to disseminate critical information during disasters,
- Provide soup kitchen services,
- Enhance or establish support systems for individuals at risk of or experiencing domestic violence.

4.2. Recommendations for introducing new or revising existing primary and secondary legislation of RS, as well as the acts of general application of LSGUs:

- Revise legal provisions to clarify the competences of CSWs, including granting special powers and specifying their operational responsibilities during emergencies in terms of

resources (human, spatial and technical) and their obligations in disaster response scenarios,

- Create standardized legal provisions to ensure continuous emergency cash transfers for beneficiaries whose livelihoods are at risk or who face social disadvantage due to an emergency, even if they were not previous beneficiaries of social protection,
- Adopt the RS Law on the Social Map and establish the RS Social Map to support evidence-based social protection planning,
- Enable online submission of assistance requests for particularly vulnerable beneficiaries/groups during emergencies,
- Ensure active participation of CSW representatives in assessing the vulnerability of LSGUs to natural and other hazards,
- Ensure active participation of CSW representatives in developing protection and rescue plans for LSGUs,
- Amend legal provisions to equalize the status of all institutions whose operations are disrupted due to emergencies,
- Adopt protocols or similar acts at the local community level to ensure effective responses to disasters, prioritizing the protection and support of vulnerable beneficiaries,
- Enact a decree to standardize the reporting system of CSWs for both emergency and regular activities.

4.3. Recommendations for ensuring additional financial resources in emergencies:

- Plan for funds in the Republic's budget to facilitate response aid,
- Establish a budget reserve specifically for disaster interventions, both at the Republic and LSGU levels, ensuring availability of funds once an emergency is declared,
- Implement procedures for the immediate allocation of funds during emergencies to procure food and essential supplies for first aid to vulnerable populations.

4.4. Recommendations for ensuring adequate support to CSW professionals:

- Conduct an assessment of vulnerability to natural and other hazards within CSWs,
- Formulate protection and rescue plans in CSWs,
- Provide training for CSW employees on the emergency protection and rescue system in RS,
- Organize training for CSW staff on preparing applications for various national and international projects, including those at the level of Republika Srpska and BiH,
- Ensure post-emergency support for workers in the social and child protection systems (including both material and psychosocial assistance),
- Regularly implement supervision in social protection institutions to prevent professional burnout,
- Conduct training on crisis management in emergencies for social protection institutions,
- Ensure familiarity with risk maps in their LSGUs,
- In pandemic situations, and as needed, allow the issuance of movement permits for employees in social protection institutions,

-
- Offer incentives to employees in social protection institutions who are exposed to daily risks in specific situations, such as during a pandemic,
 - Improve the flow of information and increase the level of communication,
 - Enhance technical capacities (including all-terrain vehicles, IT equipment, etc.),
 - Standardize and improve the reporting system for CSWs during both regular activities and emergency situations.



5. SUMMARY

The Study, as well as an analysis of individual questionnaires and insights gathered from meetings with representatives of social and civil protection institutions, highlighted the need for a systematic approach to addressing care for beneficiaries of social and child protection systems during emergencies or disasters. The findings underscored the necessity of preventive efforts by both the social and civil protection systems, aimed at raising public awareness and educating the population on the importance of timely response during emergencies and cooperation with protection and rescue stakeholders to ensure better protection for beneficiaries of social and child protection services.

The Study also aligns with the strategic commitment of the RS Government, highlighting the necessity for systemic action through enhanced collaboration among all stakeholders involved in emergency protection and rescue, while taking account of past experiences and crisis events (such as the pandemic, natural disasters, etc.).

The RS Social Protection Strategy (2023–2029) outlines the measure “Enhancing cooperation among all protection stakeholders involved in crisis and emergency situations” under the priority “Strengthening international and intersectoral cooperation” and Strategic Goal 3: “Enhance the capacity in social, child and family protection, while strengthening intersectoral support and cooperation mechanisms.” This measure aims to strengthen multisectoral collaboration with all protection and rescue stakeholders in crisis and emergency situations, enhance the capacities of social protection institutions and service providers in building resilience to crises and emergencies, and foster joint, proactive action among all protection stakeholders to raise public awareness about the roles of the social, child and family protection systems. These provisions reflect the alignment and comprehensiveness of the strategic document, serving as a foundation for further initiatives, while the Study complements this framework by identifying specific requirements the system must address to improve protection for beneficiaries.

The implementation of the recommendations proposed by social protection institutions and compiled in this Study would strengthen institutional resilience by laying the groundwork for improving the social, family and child protection systems in responding to crises and emergencies. Additionally, it would promote greater collaboration with protection and rescue stakeholders at the Republic and local community levels, thereby enhancing the overall protection of beneficiaries.

To improve the targeting of user needs during emergencies, it is essential to recognize that the number of beneficiaries in the social protection system generally increases sharply in emergencies. Depending on the nature and scale of the disaster affecting a LSGU or the broader territory of RS, individuals who were not previously socially disadvantaged may find themselves in such a state during the emergency and often for a period afterward. Moreover, existing beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems often experience a worsening of their already vulnerable situations.

To mitigate the vulnerability of beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems—particularly minors, persons with disabilities, the elderly and the infirm—it is essential to implement systematic and urgent measures. These measures should ensure an adequate response that prioritizes the comprehensive protection of beneficiaries, upholds their integrity and dignity and avoids any form of discrimination, always acting in their best interest.

In terms of introducing new or revising existing primary and secondary legislation of RS, as well as the acts of general application of LSGUs, it is essential to enact the Law on the Social Card. Additionally, updates to current legal regulations governing the social protection system are also required to clarify the responsibilities and powers of protection stakeholders in LSGUs and civil

protection units. Furthermore, revisions to the Law on Protection and Rescue in Emergencies should be implemented to ensure the mandatory participation of CSWs in local ECRTs.

There is a need to redefine the competences of CSWs and standardize the special powers and responsibilities of social protection institutions during emergencies and disasters. Additionally, a clearer and more efficient framework for intersectoral cooperation in emergencies should be established. LSGUs should adopt new legislation and amend existing acts of general application to better clarify the actions and mutual cooperation of competent authorities during emergency events.

To ensure the provision of additional financial resources in emergencies and disasters, it is crucial to increase the amount of one-off cash assistance for existing beneficiaries of the social and child protection systems by recognizing the right to one-off cash assistance for citizens who find themselves in a temporary state of social disadvantage due to an emergency.

A budget reserve should be established to ensure that funds for cash assistance are readily available on a daily basis during such emergencies.

In terms of ensuring adequate support to CSW professionals, in addition to the powers granted to CSWs under the Law on Social Protection, CSWs serve as a key social protection institution through which many of the psychosocial, protective and other needs of citizens and beneficiaries already within the social and child protection systems are addressed.

In their regular activities and during emergency situations, CSWs identify and monitor the social needs of the population and issues within the field of social protection, take action to address the social disadvantage of the population, implement appropriate forms of social protection and provide relevant services. Additionally, as needed, they carry out preventive activities that contribute to the prevention and mitigation of social problems, particularly during emergencies. Furthermore, to enhance the protection of beneficiaries within the social and child protection systems, CSWs provide professional assistance and maintain records of the services rendered and the measures taken. However, there is a lack of standardization in the way records are kept, leading to discrepancies in the reporting on the forms of protection provided across different CSWs.

In addition to the above, service providers, including CSW professionals and other staff, are frequently exposed to various pressures and face work-related challenges that demand efficient and effective responses. To enable them to perform their duties as efficiently as possible, it is recommended that various forms of education, support and supervision be made available, particularly for those who experienced increased workloads during emergencies.

6. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the analysis of the data obtained during the preparation of this Study, it is evident that funding must be allocated in the RS Budget to ensure the full implementation of Article 133, paragraph (1), point z) of the Law on Social Protection, which mandates that funds be allocated in the budget for the Republic's emergency aid activities in response to exceptional threats to the lives and living standards of a large segment of the population arising from economic, social and humanitarian causes

In the course of preparing this Study, it was observed that the implementation of Article 11 of the Law on Social Protection by LSGUs was inconsistent. Specifically, not all LSGUs issued a Decision establishing expanded rights or defined the eligibility criteria for these rights in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned article. To ensure equal access to expanded rights for all RS citizens, especially in emergencies, it is essential that all LSGUs allocate funds in their budgets for the implementation of these rights. Additionally, they should adopt a Decision establishing expanded rights and define the eligibility criteria for their exercise during emergencies. These Decisions should also provide for a fast-track or urgent procedure to address and establish the expanded rights for both existing and prospective beneficiaries of social protection in the event of a disaster or emergency.





