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Social Services in the Field of Child Welfare: International and Local Practices, and the Necessity to Establish a Social Work Institution for Child Welfare in Azerbaijan

Abstract

Objective: The aim is to compare Azerbaijan’s child welfare architecture with selected international practice (Canada) and to assess system gaps, producing actionable policy proposals for institutionalising social work in child welfare.

Research Design & Methods: Comparative qualitative content analysis of national/international laws, strategies, and administrative reports (UNICEF Azerbaijan, 2023; Social Services Agency Azerbaijan, 2024a, 2024b; TABIB/UNICEF patronage model files; Ministry of Education “Social Work in Education”) with basic descriptive statistics compiled into tables/figures. Coding covered 5 themes: protection; prevention/early intervention; family support; alternative care; institutional capacity.

Findings: Coverage remains narrow: e.g. “home-visiting patronage” has reached ~2,000 families; “Schoolchild’s Friend” flagged 3,494 crisis cases with 2,712 referrals completed; 11,872 initial assessments in 2024 identified 1,035 children at risk; repatriation since 2018 totals 544 persons (the majority being children). Preschool enrolment gains (+17 pp \approx +94% relative) still leave most 1–5-years-old children outside early education.

Implications / Recommendations: Addressing the challenges in Azerbaijan’s child welfare system requires a systemic and sustainable reform strategy centred on the institutionalisation of social work. Integrating professional social workers across education, health, and social protection under a unified legal and policy framework is crucial for effective service delivery. Expanding early childhood and preschool services through nationwide home-visiting and inclusive education programmes will enhance equitable access and early intervention. Embedding social workers in schools can shift the focus from crisis response to prevention, fostering stronger family engagement. Reforms should also prioritise the modernisation of case management and risk assessment through digitalised systems and the development of specialised services for vulnerable children. Adopting a comprehensive Child Welfare and Social Work Law – aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – as well as strengthening professional education and training will ensure a competent and sustainable workforce. Stable public funding, transparent monitoring, and strong accountability mechanisms are vital to achieve long-term effectiveness. Overall, institutionalising social work is both a strategic and moral imperative for building an inclusive, rights-based, and sustainable child welfare system in Azerbaijan.

Contribution / Value Added: We propose a staged institutionalization of social work: (1) nationwide ECD-SW (0–5) teams; (2) statutory school social work; (3) integrated case management across SSA–health–education–justice; (4) community foster care expansion; (5) data & M&E backbone. These steps translate international standards into local realities and can be sequenced over 3–5 years.

Keywords: child welfare, social work, early intervention, child protection, family support, Azerbaijan

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Introduction

Child welfare is a multidimensional concept that encompasses children's health, safety, development, and overall well-being. It refers not only to the satisfaction of children's basic needs such as nutrition, shelter, and health care, but also to their social, emotional, and mental development. As van Bijleveld and colleagues (2015) note, welfare policies and practices must ensure that children not only survive but thrive, enabling them to actively participate in social life and become well-adjusted adults. Therefore, modern approaches to child welfare emphasize the necessity of providing services that are preventive, developmental, and rehabilitative at the same time.

In most developed countries, child welfare systems are designed as institutionalized frameworks that bring together health care, education, and social services. Social workers in these contexts play a central role in protecting vulnerable children, supporting families, preventing child abuse and neglect, as well as ensuring stable and nurturing environments. Their responsibilities include investigating reports of children at risk, arranging foster or adoptive placements, supporting children ageing out of care, and working closely with communities to strengthen parental competencies. For example, in Canada, social workers operate under a comprehensive legislative framework that prioritises the best interests of the child and integrates child welfare with broader social policies. This approach allows for early identification of developmental delays and psychosocial risks, ensuring timely intervention before problems escalate.

By contrast, Azerbaijan's child welfare services remain fragmented and primarily project-based. While certain innovative models such as the universal-progressive patronage service and the 'Schoolchild's Friend' initiative have been introduced, they lack nationwide coverage and are not institutionalised within a permanent social work system. Studies conducted in recent years reveal alarming trends: in 2018, 34.2% of children classified as "typically developing" displayed developmental delays inappropriate for their age (Mirzayeva, 2025). Similarly, preschool education coverage, although improved from 18% in 2015 to 35% in 2023, still excludes the majority of children aged 1–5. This lack of access to early education increases the risk of long-term social inequality and disability, as children miss the critical window for early intervention.

The importance of early intervention is widely recognised in international literature. Negative childhood experiences – such as neglect, domestic violence, and poverty – are strongly correlated with physical and mental health problems in adulthood, reduced educational attainment, and increased likelihood of unemployment or criminal involvement (Przeperski, 2021). Effective social work in the field of child welfare is, therefore, not only a humanitarian necessity but also a crucial investment in social and economic development. Countries that fail to establish robust child welfare systems often face higher costs in the long run due to increased reliance on health care, social assistance, and criminal justice services.

Azerbaijan's growing international commitments, including its endorsement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have increased the urgency of developing an integrated child welfare system. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) explicitly obliges states to support parents in raising their children, establish institutions and services for child care, and implement measures to protect children from neglect or exploitation (Dagli, 2016). While Azerbaijan has taken steps to align its policies with these international standards, the absence of a formal social work institution dedicated to child welfare creates a structural gap that undermines the effectiveness of the existing initiatives.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the current state of child welfare in Azerbaijan, situating it within the broader context of international practices, and to highlight the urgent need for institutionalising social work. By comparing the Azerbaijani experience with the Canadian model, the research identifies key similarities and differences, maps systemic gaps, and develops evidence-based recommendations for reform. In doing so, it seeks to contribute not only to academic discourse on child welfare but also to policymaking efforts directed at strengthening the protection, development, and well-being of children in Azerbaijan.

Literature review

Child welfare has long been one of the central concerns of social policy and academic research. The concept covers a broad range of services designed to safeguard children's health, education, emotional well-being, and social integration. Internationally, scholars emphasise that child welfare systems are most effective when they are preventive, inclusive, and family-oriented (UNICEF, 2021). The evolution of these systems reflects growing recognition that protecting children from harm is inseparable from supporting parents and communities.

International perspectives. In developed welfare states – particularly Canada, the United States, and Scandinavian countries – child welfare services operate under comprehensive legislative and regulatory frameworks. These frameworks clearly define the responsibilities of child protection agencies, foster care systems, adoption services, and preventive programmes. For example, van Bijleveld and colleagues (2015) highlight the importance of children's active participation in welfare systems, noting that services should not only protect but also empower children and families. More recent studies have further developed this approach. Przeperski and Owusu (2021) emphasise that preventive services reduce the long-term social costs of child neglect and abuse by addressing risks early. Similarly, Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2019) argue that contemporary child protection systems increasingly combine risk assessment with family support, balancing control with empowerment. Research in the last five years underscores the centrality of early childhood education (ECE) and early intervention. For instance, Heckman (2020) demonstrates that investments in early childhood yield the highest returns for societies, both economically and socially. Studies by Eurochild (2022) and UNICEF Azerbaijan (2023) further reveal that countries with institutionalised social work achieve higher preschool enrolment rates and better developmental outcomes. Canada's indigenous child welfare services are another example of culturally-adapted models, showing how diversity-sensitive approaches improve inclusion and prevent marginalisation (Blackstock, 2020).

Child welfare in developing and transition contexts. Compared to developed countries, welfare systems in many developing states remain fragmented and underfunded. As Makhmudova (2021) points out, the absence of institutionalised social work leads to reliance on NGOs and temporary projects, which cannot address systemic problems. In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, child welfare reforms have often been driven by international organisations, but they lacked sustainability due to weak national ownership (Kolesnikova, 2022).

The Azerbaijani context. In Azerbaijan, child welfare research is still emerging. Mirzayeva (2023, 2025) has drawn attention to the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and developmental delays, showing that 34.2% of typically developing children in a 2018 study displayed delays inappropriate for their age. Arifoglu (2025) emphasises the protective, preventive, and intervention role of social work in child welfare and calls for institutional reforms. National

statistics also reveal structural gaps: preschool enrolment, though rising to 35% in 2023, remains far below international benchmarks (State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, 2025). Recent reports by UNICEF Azerbaijan (2023) and the Social Services Agency Azerbaijan (2024a) further underline the need for systemic change. For example, the Agency's 2024 report records 11,872 initial assessments with 1,035 children identified as at risk. Although innovative models such as the 'Patronage Service' (home visiting) and the 'Schoolchild's Friend' project have reached thousands of children, their project-based nature and limited geographical scope restrict long-term impact.

Gaps in the literature. Despite growing attention, several critical gaps remain. First, few studies provide a comparative analysis of Azerbaijan's child welfare practices against established international models. Second, there is limited empirical work using statistical data to assess outcomes of the existing services. Third, recent academic sources (2019–2025) have highlighted the necessity of integrating social work into national policy, yet Azerbaijan still lacks a formal social work institution dedicated to child welfare. Addressing these gaps is essential not only for aligning with global standards but also for ensuring sustainable improvements in child development and protection.

Research method and materials

Research design

This study employs a comparative qualitative research design complemented with descriptive statistics. The design allows for the systematic examination of Azerbaijan's child welfare services alongside international best practices, with Canada selected as the primary reference country. The comparison highlights both structural similarities and systemic differences, enabling the identification of gaps and the formulation of policy recommendations tailored to Azerbaijan's context.

Methodological approach

The study applies content analysis as its main methodological tool. National and international reports, legislative documents, and statistical datasets were reviewed and coded along key thematic dimensions:

1. child protection services (legal frameworks as well as reporting and investigation mechanisms);
2. preventive and early intervention programmes (home-visiting, preschool enrolment, early childhood education);
3. family support and parental education (counselling, financial support, reintegration measures);
4. alternative care services (foster care, adoption, institutional care);
5. institutional capacity and workforce (the availability of social workers, the scope of coverage, regional reach).

Two rounds of coding were made – descriptive coding to organise data into categories first, as well as pattern coding to identify recurring themes and systemic gaps.

Data sources

The analysis relied on a combination of official reports, national statistics, and international datasets:

- national sources – the Social Services Agency (2024a, 2024b), the Ministry of Education, TABIB and UNICEF documentation of the ‘Patronage Service’, and statistics from the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan (2025);
- international sources – UNICEF (2021, 2023), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Canadian child welfare policy documents, including reports on indigenous child welfare and early intervention services;
- academic literature – articles and books published between 2015–2025, including recent studies by Gilbert and colleagues (2019), Blackstock (2020), Eurochild (2022), Kolesnikova (2022), as well as Przeperski and Owusu (2021).

Data analysis strategy

The study followed a four-step strategy:

1. document review and the coding of national and international materials;
2. the extraction of descriptive statistics (e.g. preschool enrolment rates, the number of children reached by services, repatriation figures, risk assessments);
3. comparative analysis between Azerbaijan and Canada to evaluate the extent to which Azerbaijan’s practices align with or diverge from international standards;
4. synthesis into policy recommendations and mapping identified gaps to proposed reforms in the Azerbaijani context.

The presentation of results

To ensure clarity and accessibility, the study’s findings are presented through a structured narrative analysis. The results provide a comparative overview of preschool enrolment trends in Azerbaijan over the period 2015–2023 in relation to OECD averages, highlighting key disparities and progress over time. In addition, the analysis examines the scope and effectiveness of existing child- and family-oriented social services in Azerbaijan, including patronage support mechanisms, school-based assistance initiatives, risk assessment practices, and repatriation measures.

Furthermore, the findings address the regional distribution of Social Service Centres across the country, with particular attention to territorial imbalances and planned developments aimed at improving service accessibility. Finally, the results synthesize identified systemic gaps in Azerbaijan’s social protection and early childhood education frameworks and align them with relevant international best practices, proposing actionable policy and institutional reforms to address these shortcomings.

Quality assurance

To address comments, additional academic sources from the last five years were incorporated, the methodology was fully detailed, and the inclusion of a discussion chapter was planned.

Results and discussion

Internationally, social workers in child welfare are responsible for working within the framework of their jurisdiction's Child and Family Service Acts as well as related laws, standards, and regulations regarding the services they provide. Despite some legislative differences across countries, all social workers adhere to the same principle, namely that the child's best interests are paramount. Ideally, children have better welfare outcomes when they remain with their families, supported and strengthened by community resources. For example, Canada's child welfare system consists of government and private services aimed at protecting children and promoting family stability. It is primarily regulated by provincial and territorial laws, and defines the roles of various agencies responsible for child welfare. These agencies investigate cases of child abuse and neglect, and take necessary steps to ensure that children remain in safe and supportive environments. The key components/services of child welfare agencies include:

- child protection services;
- preventive and support programmes;
- foster care;
- adoption;
- indigenous child welfare.

The overall goal of the system is to protect children's rights, promote their welfare, and, whenever possible and safe, reunite families (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2025).

As noted, although child welfare systems in different countries share similar concepts, they vary depending on the country's socioeconomic status as well as cultural and religious diversity. Research shows that children from poor families in some countries face higher risks of welfare problems (van Bijleveld et al., 2015, pp. 129–138). Also, poor and developing countries, compared to developed and wealthier ones, often lack some resources needed to support children and families. Additionally, cultural attitudes towards parenting, physical punishment, and other forms of violence can exacerbate these problems in different parts of the world (Przeperski, 2021, pp. 127–130).

Internationally, social workers in child welfare recognise and respect diversity. They understand the culture, history, and current disadvantages of indigenous peoples and communities subjected to racial discrimination. When necessary, they advocate for the protection of children and families, and oppose racism, sexism, and other harmful discrimination. For example, in Canada, indigenous child welfare is a special area requiring cultural adaptation. Social workers in this field not only operate with legal and social knowledge but also take into account indigenous communities' history, culture, traditions, and values. The goal is to ensure that indigenous children grow up safe and within their cultural environment (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2025).

Child welfare in the Azerbaijani context

As Azerbaijan's international standing has grown, so has its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes developing new policies, legislation, standards, and service models for children. For a better world, all children have the right to live, develop, and realise their potential (UNICEF Azerbaijan, 2023). However, since the institution of social work in the field of child welfare has not yet been formed in Azerbaijan, many areas – especially the problems of the early childhood age group – remain neglected. Various problems occurring

within the family during this period lead to the occurrence of various health problems in children in their lives not only at that time, but also in the distant future (Mirzayeva, 2023, pp. 78–86).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's approach to the child's right to protection (Art. 18) states that the primary responsibility for ensuring the child's enjoyment of the existing rights, upbringing, and development lies with his/her parents or legal representatives. The state has three important obligations regarding the protection of children: (1) supporting the parents of the child to fulfil their obligation to raise the child as well as ensure the development of the child; (2) establishing institutions, activities, and services related to the care of children; and (3) implementing legal, administrative, social, and educational measures to prevent the child from being neglected or exploited while in the care of his/her parents (Dagli, 2016, p. 8).

When viewed from the Azerbaijani context, the mere lack of parents' parental skills often leads to the emergence of a dangerous situation for the development of the child. A study that we conducted in Azerbaijan in 2018, when examining the occurrence of developmental delay among children considered typical, demonstrated that 34.2% of children had developmental delay that was not appropriate for their age (Mirzayeva, 2025). This makes it impossible to benefit from the many advantages that early detection and early intervention provides, and results in the vast majority of these children are considered as individuals with disabilities who need multiple intervention programmes in the future.

Today, everyone knows how important Early Childhood Education is in the development and well-being of a child. However, one of the current problems in Azerbaijan is poor access to Early Childhood Education services for children between the ages of 1 and 5. According to a study conducted in 2015, the percentage of preschool education enrolment was only 18%. Owing to a number of measures implemented, this figure reached 35% in 2023, which, although it shows a significant increase, still does not cover all children. (UNICEF Azerbaijan, 2023). Examples of reasons include the lack of the accessibility of institutions, parental ignorance, the lack of an inclusive approach, etc.

We would like to note that according to 2023 statistics, the number of children aged 0–5 in Azerbaijan is 646,000 in total (Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee, 2025). The fact that parents are unaware of early childhood education, child development, disability, and early intervention – that when they encounter developmental delays, they usually take a wait-and-see attitude until the child is 3–4 years old, and, most importantly, the lack of a social work institution that works with and guides children and their families in this age group – all play an important role in the emergence of these problems.

Child welfare patronage services in Azerbaijan

In addition to what we have listed above, when talking about the existing services in the field of child welfare in Azerbaijan today, it is important to emphasise that a number of services are provided or projects are implemented in this field by both state and non-state agencies as well as international organisations. One of these, the universal-progressive patronage service model – implemented together with UNICEF, TABIB, and ITSDA – is a model that has been implemented in order to improve the quality of primary medical and sanitary services provided to the population. It also covers minors, newborn babies discharged from maternity hospitals, and children up to 3 years old. This model also includes the activities of a kind of social worker by carrying out a number of activities in the environment where the child lives – such as assessing

the health and development of children, family evaluation, etc. – through home visits. Therefore, the specialists providing this service are people who have undergone detailed training on early childhood development, the new role of nurses in patronage services, primary health care and proper nutrition, promoting fathers' participation in child development, a safe and secure environment, violence, etc. According to TABIB, more than 2,000 families and children in Azerbaijan have benefited from this new home-visiting model to date (UNICEF Azerbaijan, 2025).

The model is one of the most effective ways to provide the best practices for early childhood in the Azerbaijani environment today. It is expected to be useful both in combating Adverse Childhood Experiences – such as child truancy, neglect, harmful habits, etc. – as well as in the prevention and early detection of childhood obesity.

Social services in child welfare

The main work in the field of social services in child welfare falls on the Social Services Agency. The institutions, care centres, day care centres, group homes, foster and adoption services, etc. existing in the country are directed by the Agency. In addition, in order to determine the needs of persons with disabilities under the age of 18, regular assessments are carried out, risk cases are identified and work is carried out, as well as information is provided on the rules for using educational tools (websites and mobile applications) to increase the parental responsibilities and skills of families as well as to support the development of children. The 2024 report by the Social Services Agency (2024a) states that 11,872 people were initially assessed in the current year, and during the initial assessment, 1,035 of the children were assessed as at-risk cases. It is emphasised that various types of social-consulting services are provided to families in high-risk cases. This includes the following: the appointment of targeted social assistance to the family; the provision of social psychological support to children; referral to educational services such as the Pedagogical-Medical Commission, Special Education School, a sanatorium resort, self-employment programme, DTSERA, the Children's Rehabilitation Centre, the Social Support Centre, the Social Rehabilitation Centres operating on the basis of social orders of the Social Services Agency, etc.

Also today in Azerbaijan, the social reintegration and social rehabilitation of repatriated children within the country is carried out by the Social Services Agency. It is known that from 2018 to date, 544 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan have been repatriated to the country, the vast majority of whom are children (Social Services Agency, 2024a):

- out of 299 people repatriated from the Republic of Iraq, 290 are children;
- out of 240 people repatriated from the Syrian Arab Republic, 187 are children;
- out of 4 people repatriated from the Republic of Turkey, 3 are children.

In order to ensure their social integration and social rehabilitation, a detailed assessment of their socio-psychological situation is carried out, an individual development plan is drawn up, and monitoring visits are carried out to families in order to monitor the reintegration process of repatriated persons. It is known that 159 families were visited in 2024. Also, psychologists from the Social Services Agency provide social and psychological assistance to people in need of psychological assistance within the framework of socio-psychological assistance for repatriated persons. Such assistance was provided to 124 people in 2024 (Social Services Agency, 2024a).

In order to implement social rehabilitation-oriented activities, relevant branches of the Social Services Agency – Social Service Centres – have been operating since 2021. Qualified social

workers, psychologists, social pedagogues, speech therapists, and active therapists operating there conduct an assessment to determine the criteria for the need for rehabilitation services of the persons applying. According to the results, social rehabilitation services in these centres are provided to persons aged 0–18. In accordance with the requirements of subparagraph 8.0.12 of Article 8 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Social Service”, each Social Service Centre also provides social and psychological assistance services to persons (families) who have been subjected to various types of violence and are in need of social services, and to repatriated persons who have been released from prison, conditionally released from prison, or whose sentence has been suspended by the court, in order to enable them to participate in the society on an equal basis with other persons (Social Services Agency, 2024a). Currently, four Social Service Centres and one Social Service Cabinet in Sabunchu, Yasamal, Narimanov, Absheron, and Sumgayit are carrying out social rehabilitation work. Necessary measures have been taken to establish the next centres in the regions of Agdam, Goychay, and Hajigabul, and they are expected to start operating in 2025.

Child protection and social work – the “Schoolchild’s Friend” project

Also, together with other institutions working in the field of child protection (State Committee for Family, Women, Children’s Issues, the Ministry of Science and Education), the Social Services Agency implements many projects in the field of child welfare. One of them, the ‘Social Work in Education’ service – implemented within the framework of cooperation between the Ministry of Science and Education and the Social Services Agency – aims to promote attention and care for children in the field of social work in schools, prevent mistreatment and violence against them, raise awareness in this area, ensure the protection of children, and provide social services to schoolchildren and their families through case management tools to support the social success of students. Children at risk of falling into difficult life situations are identified and socio-psychological work is carried out with them (Social Services Agency Azerbaijan, 2024b).

According to the information provided by the Agency, within the framework of the service, the Agency’s social workers organised a visit to 635 secondary schools across the Republic for the first time this year. In total, the number of schools visited within the framework of the service since 2023 has reached 726, and 3,494 children were presented to the Agency by those schools as persons in crisis. The work with 2,712 people was completed by referring them to psychologists for various measures taken by social workers to improve the socio-psychological situation of families, and to the State Employment Agency to ensure employment, the State Social Protection Fund to strengthen family social protection, as well as to other related institutions and services (Arifoglu, 2025).

Social work with children can be understood more clearly from the perspective of children’s rights, because children often need special care and protection that adults do not need. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have standards and rights provided by international legal documents called Children’s Rights. Although the projects we mentioned above are aimed at protecting the rights of children and improving children’s well-being in general, there are many areas of activity to be undertaken in this direction.

One of the projects carried out by the Agency is a project implemented jointly with the Probation Service of the Ministry of Justice, where social workers of the Agency are involved in the process and carry out social work with beneficiaries receiving probation services. It should be noted that according to statistics for 2023, the number of children aged 14–17 who committed crimes

was 494, and 310 of them were convicted. This shows that it is essential to have a social worker in the Probation Service and to have social workers working with children after their release.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that Azerbaijan's child welfare services remain fragmented, project-based, and heavily dependent on external support. Despite notable progress, such as the introduction of the 'Patronage Service', the 'Schoolchild's Friend' project, and the establishment of Social Service Centres, these initiatives are limited in scope and lack systemic sustainability. International comparisons, particularly with Canada, reveal that Azerbaijan faces significant gaps in legislation, institutionalisation, early childhood education, and the integration of professional social workers into welfare structures.

The study confirms that the absence of an institutionalised social work system prevents early detection of developmental delays, reduces access to preventive services, and increases the long-term risk of disability, neglect, and social exclusion among children. Current services reach only a fraction of the child population: 2,000 families benefited from patronage services; 3,494 children were identified in crisis in schools; and 1,035 children were classified as at risk during social assessments in 2024. While these interventions are valuable, they cannot substitute a nationwide, legally-mandated system. The recommendations include:

1) The Institutionalisation of Social Work in Child Welfare

- establishing a dedicated National Institute of Social Work in Child Welfare with a clear legal mandate, operating under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection;
- integrating social work into all levels of child welfare, including health care, education, and justice systems.

2) The Expansion of Early Childhood Services

- scaling up the 'Patronage Service' from pilot districts to nationwide coverage, ensuring universal access to home-visiting programmes for families with children aged 0–5;
- increasing preschool enrolment to at least 60% by 2030 – aligning with international benchmarks – through state investment in kindergartens, subsidies for low-income families, and the promotion of inclusive education.

3) The Integration of Social Workers in Schools

- institutionalising the 'Schoolchild's Friend' project by creating permanent school social worker positions across the country;
- shifting the focus from crisis management to prevention: regular screenings, counselling, and family engagement programmes should be introduced.

4) Strengthening Risk Assessment and Case Management

- expanding the Social Services Agency's assessment tools and ensuring that case management systems are digitalised, integrated, and monitored for accountability;
- developing specialised services for high-risk groups, including children with disabilities, repatriated children, and those exposed to violence or neglect.

5) Legislative and Policy Framework

- adopting a comprehensive Child Welfare and Social Work Law that harmonises health, education, and social protection services under one framework;
- aligning national legislation fully with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring clear state obligations to support parents and protect children.

6) Workforce Development

- establishing accredited social work education and training programmes at universities to produce professional workforce equipped for child welfare;
- providing continuous professional development for the existing practitioners (teachers, nurses, psychologists) to work effectively alongside social workers.

7) Funding and Sustainability

- securing stable state budget allocations for child welfare services, reducing dependence on international donors;
- introducing public-private partnerships to expand service capacity and community-based initiatives.

8) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

- developing a national Child Welfare Monitoring Framework with indicators on early childhood, education, protection, and family support;
- ensuring transparent reporting mechanisms, including annual child welfare reports accessible to policymakers, professionals, and civil society.

The institutionalisation of social work within Azerbaijan's child welfare system is not only a policy necessity but also a moral imperative. Without systemic reforms, developmental delays, neglect, and inequality will continue to hinder the potential of thousands of children. By adopting international best practices and tailoring them to the Azerbaijani context, the state can build a robust, inclusive, and sustainable welfare system that guarantees every child's right to protection, development, and well-being.

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Research Ethics Committee

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Conflicts of Interest

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Data Availability Statement

All data will be available and shared upon request.
