



Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion

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Romania 2010

Achieving excellence in social service provision

Short Report



On behalf of the
European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



A Peer Review meeting took place in Bucharest, Romania on 29-30 June 2010, on the theme of *Achieving excellence in social service provision*, hosted by the Romanian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. The participating peer countries were Belgium, Croatia, Estonia and Lithuania, with representatives from two stakeholder organisations, Eurodiaconia and the European Social Network (ESN). Concetta Cultrera participated on behalf of the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, and the Thematic Expert was Flip Maas from the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna.

1. The policy under review

In 2003 and 2004, Romania launched a reform of its social services aimed at improving the quality of provision by defining services and providers, introducing the idea of quality standards, and applying an accreditation system for both public and private social service providers. In 2005, the Ministry of Labour approved 'general quality standards for social services'. These are based on the European Principles of Excellence developed in 2001 by the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), with specific reference to services for disabled people.

The standards centre on nine principles, with five quality standards to meet for each one. Romania's accreditation system is modelled on the EQUASS (European Quality Assurance for Social Services) framework. The quality standards are relevant to all services and apply three different perspectives: approach, development and results.

The accreditation procedure is devolved to county-level Commissions, made up of representatives from ministries, county councils, and public and private service providers. Users may be invited as observers. There is also a national Commission within the Ministry of Labour, to coordinate the activities of the county bodies.

Providers who obtain at least 108 points out of 225, from at least two assessors, obtain an accreditation certificate which must be renewed every three years. Certification is necessary for receiving certain types of funding.

2. The key issues

The Peer Review meeting offered an opportunity to evaluate the role of accreditation systems and quality standards in improving social service provision, including the questions of how to formulate them, how to apply and monitor, and how to involve stakeholders and users. It also contributed to the debate on the feasibility of developing EU principles of excellence for social services. Peer countries and stakeholders addressed five main questions:

1. The current situation in their own country concerning the assessment, control and improvement, as well as the management, of quality in Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs).
2. Ways to move from accreditation to excellence, i.e. going beyond structural quality development towards process quality (quality management) and outcome-oriented continuous improvement.

3. How to include stakeholders, including users, relatives and communities in the development of quality social services.
4. How to evaluate quality of services while at the same time taking account of regional and local differences, and how such evaluation can contribute to the continuous improvement of quality.
5. Whether the existence of different social sectors means different types of criteria are needed to assess quality, and different sectoral commissions established.

It appeared from the information provided and from the following debate that Romania suffers from a shortage of social services, especially for disabled people and those with psychological problems. Provision for children is more advanced. Current austerity measures are putting additional strain on service provision in many Member States, and participants raised concern about maintaining and improving services in the current economic climate.

3. Lessons, conclusions and recommendations

- The need for social services will increase in Europe in the future, due to a number of factors including ageing population, plus the fall-out from the economic crisis.
- It is important to maintain a vision of how we want social welfare to develop in our society, bearing in mind that we are all (potential) users of social services, whether for ourselves, our children or our parents. We all have an idea of what services we would like, depending on our backgrounds and culture, and we may also find we have complaints. But one vital element for all of us is respect: for autonomy, dignity and human rights.
- Involving and empowering users, including families and communities, is essential but is not easy and there is no single model. It is made more difficult by the fact that users are not always aware of what they can ask for, and may be afraid of withdrawal of services if they complain. Skills and awareness development at all levels is key. Social services are crucial to supporting families in what they do, as well as providing jobs in local communities.
- There are differences in how people see 'quality': how can the goals of State, users and providers be reconciled?
- It may be possible to learn from practices adopted in other sectors. For example the logical framework methodology works by identifying problems, formulating specific goals and expected results, and identifying the actions needed to achieve these. This could be adapted to improving quality, where a step-by-step approach is best.
- Romania's plans are not yet fully fledged. Minimum standards do not amount to quality standards. To avoid that 'achieving excellence' is considered to be over-ambitious as an objective, it might be more realistic to develop a vision based on how services can be continually improved.
- It is a major challenge to ensure that what is written on paper becomes a reality. Inspections are one method of monitoring quality, although there was disagreement

about how frequent and intrusive they should be. Complicated administrative procedures may also take up time that could otherwise be dedicated to service users.

- Employment creation: It is important to show that investing in quality has a positive impact also on employment. Social and health services account for 9.8% of employment in the EU-27 and are the second largest economic sector after finance.
- Despite the difficulty of identifying principles of quality at European level, and even more so locally, a common language of quality in social service provision is emerging, incorporating users' rights, continuity, comprehensiveness and participation.
- The Commission is working actively on the issue, and has launched eight projects to identify tools for development, in which Romania is well-represented. The Social Protection Committee is developing a voluntary European quality framework, which will be presented and discussed during the third SSGI forum, which will take place in Brussels in October 2010, under the Belgian EU presidency. Furthermore, quality will be the theme of the second biennial report on SSGIs to be published by the end of 2010.
- As for the application of EU rules to SSGI, in 2008 the Commission published in 2007 two FAQs documents respectively on State aid and public procurement rules and, in 2008, created an interactive information service. At present, the Commission is updating its 2007 FAQs.