



## **REVES project "Territorial Quality Standards in Social Services of General Interest"**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations on Quality in Social Services of General Interest**

1. At European and international level, a number of declarations and norms exists that relate - even though not always explicitly - to quality in SSGI.

*Declarations* are often quite general, as their main task is to declare rights and resulting principles. **However, respect of these (fundamental) rights should play a crucial role in the establishment of any legislation and practice of service provision.**

*Norms* provide, generally speaking, precise directions. Yet, while often being very specific, they tend to generalize situations, notwithstanding differing conditions and circumstances.

2. Even though TQS partners welcome initiatives fostering social cohesion in Europe also by defining a common voluntary quality framework for SSGI, it should not be forgotten that **it is in particular at local level, where questions related to quality in SSGI have to be dealt with on a daily basis by public authorities and other actors that are active in the field of social services.**

3. Nowadays, the need to pay attention to the person (potentially) benefiting from the service is generally recognized. Yet, **existing legal frameworks are often in conflict with such a perspective, as rules are based, in general, on a perspective focusing more on the service as managerial process and “product” (responding to certain standards) rather than on the “person” and his/her real needs.**

In the coming years, **the objective for decision-makers at different level must be to place the person – who is the final beneficiary of rights and their application – in the centre of all measures, through an adaptation of legal frameworks and their concrete realization in daily life.**

**For this to happen, it is vital to pass to a territorial (local) vision on SSGI and quality, as it is the local level which is closest to the person and will also influence his/her needs.**

4. **When designing or reviewing a service, all persons and groups that might have a direct or indirect interest in the existence (or not) of this service (and its quality) have to be taken into consideration.**

**Quality expectations from the point of view of the beneficiary as well as those of the other persons/groups concerned (front-line staff, members of the local community, service provider...) have to be taken into account, even though a ranking of differing expectations might at a certain point be necessary and inevitable.**

It is here where the 'general interest' character of a service, its capacity to respond to the needs of a larger community and territory, while respecting fundamental rights of persons, will be shaped.

**A quality dialogue, which would involve not only service providers, beneficiaries and public authorities, but also other persons whose life might be directly or indirectly concerned by a specific service and its quality, should be established when designing a new service or reviewing existing ones.**

To date, the point of view of groups such as the local community in a neighbourhood, for instance, has been largely neglected.

Some good practices in this respect already exist. In a few cities and regions they were even made a condition for accreditation or a central criterion for selection in public procurement processes.

This way, the condition to identify expectations of different stakeholders and realize a proper quality dialogue sometimes also replaced complicated certification procedures that were required in public procurement (with standards that did not necessarily respond to the real needs of persons). **The latter make it often impossible for smaller service providers to participate in public tenders due to the high degree of bureaucratization. This situation leads to discrimination of these actors, which, in turn, represents a major obstacle for diversification of the service offer as another basis for quality.**

5. A number of member states still apply rules regarding public procurement and related fields which present an obstacle to above mentioned forms of dialogue and do not always correspond to EU legislation. The European Commission should facilitate and more strongly monitor the implementation of EU legislation at national level and foster exchange between member states on this.

6. Specific types of social service providers, in particular social economy enterprises, already involve beneficiaries, staff and (parts of) the local community in processes of service planning, implementation and evaluation. Participation, empowerment and co-operation are an intrinsic part of their philosophy and point of departure for their actions.

**Such added value and example should be more strongly recognized and enhanced.**

Moreover, knowledge of these actors with regard to local needs as well as their potential to mobilize different parts of the local population might help establishing and stabilizing new patterns of dialogue and multi-governance at local level.

**7. Quality in SSGI has to be considered the outcome of participation, dialogue and co-operation.**

The TQS methodology might help integrating and valuing already existing approaches to shaping quality of social services. It provides tools allowing to identify all those stakeholders that should be involved in the definition of quality of a specific service. The objective is thus not only to consider the expectations of (potential) service beneficiaries, but also those of other persons/actors that might (indirectly) be influenced *by* or have an impact *on* this specific service. The TQS methodology supports the identification of these persons/actors and of methods facilitating their participation in the process of defining service quality. Moreover, it provides methodological orientations on how (possibly differing) expectations of various groups could be ranked.

However, provided the central role of the person and the need for a local perspective it entails, it seems evident that **each methodology – also the one proposed by the TQS project - has to be adapted to the local context and point of view.** Also, it should be applied at the most appropriate

territorial level in order to ensure that those governance levels which actually have the competence to decide on service programming and provision are involved.

8. In order to foster a proper participative approach in planning and evaluating quality services, **all stakeholders should have the opportunity to further develop their capabilities in order to fully participate.**

9. **The promotion, through measures/programmes adopted at EU, national or regional level, of a proper experimentation of participation processes related to social services might help local and regional governments to overcome their hesitation regarding the application of new governance practices.**



This project receives co-funding from the European Community.