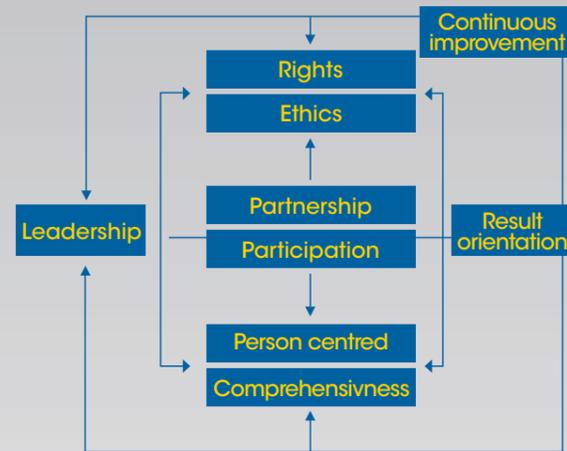


How does EQUASS work?

THE PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY AS THE OVERALL EQUASS FRAMEWORK



A European quality system for social services has to respond to legal, socio-economic and cultural differences in the different EU Member States. Therefore EQUASS certification is based on universal principles, key values, rather than on a prescriptive set of standards.

This value-based approach ensures compatibility and complementarity of the EQUASS certification scheme with existing national quality systems. Through national systems these values can be translated into national criteria and indicators, and adapted to the national context.



**Enhancing performance,
meeting needs**
In social service provision



EQUASS PROCESS

EQUASS certification uses well-defined criteria for all certification levels and works with specific procedures for self-evaluation and external audits. Based on the Principles for Quality, organisations must carry out an internal audit in the form of a self-evaluation followed by scoring and verification by external independent auditors. The performance on the EQUASS criteria for certification and the identified areas for improvement are reported to the applicant and to an International Awarding Committee. The Committee decides if an applicant will be awarded with EQUASS certification.

WHO ARE THE EQUASS CUSTOMERS?

EQUASS customers range from public to private and from profit to not-for-profit social service providers. The common characteristic among EQUASS applicants is their orientation towards results and continuous improvement. These organisations aspire to recognition and cooperation on a European level.

"A vital element in EQUASS is the multi-perspective approach. This means that the Principles for Quality reflect the interests of a wide range of stakeholders."

- Mr Frank Flannery, Chairman EQUASS Awarding Committee -

EQUASS AWARDING COMMITTEE

All processes are supervised by an Awarding Committee that includes many of the key European and international stakeholders in the sector such as service users, social partners, service providers, policymakers and funders.

- Council of Europe
- Employers' Forum on Disability
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
- European Disability Forum
- European Network of Social Authorities
- European Platform for Rehabilitation
- European Social Insurance Platform
- European Trade Union Confederation
- Rehabilitation International



For more information on EQUASS services please contact:

EQUASS Secretariat

15, rue de Spa, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 736 54 44; Fax: +32 2 736 86 22
Email: equass@equass.be; Website: www.equass.be



Why EQUASS?

EQUASS RESPONDS TO PROFOUND CHANGES IN THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

The modernisation of the sector

leads to an ever-increasing demand on behalf of social service providers for quality assurance and effectiveness. This ongoing development calls for a system of international benchmarking and bench learning as a pathway to continuous improvement in social services provision.

The introduction of a market approach

encourages increased competition between social service providers in order to achieve transparency and efficiency. National authorities and funders will include quality criteria in the tender specifications in order to select the appropriate service providers in this competition.

The creation of a European internal market

brings more intense cross-border service provision and calls for a quality recognition at European level, guaranteeing in an impartial way the quality for service users throughout the continent.

EQUASS MEETS THE EUROPEAN QUALITY REQUIREMENTS

The Communication of the European Commission on Social Services of General Interest (November 2007)

calls for a non-compulsory European quality framework for social services to set, monitor and evaluate quality standards.

The position paper on quality of the High Level Group on Disability (October 2007)

presents quality principles and criteria agreed and ratified by all EU Member States and the European Commission. EQUASS Principles for Quality are fully compliant with these principles and criteria.

The Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for Vocational Education and Training (VET)

is validated to be compatible with the EQUASS approach on quality assurance.

"Every service provider in Europe should go for EQUASS: join now and be ahead of the game - or join later and be seen to lag behind."

- Susan Scott-Parker, Employers' Forum on Disability, UK -

The UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (December 2006)

starts from an underpinning human rights approach which requires empowerment as a pre-condition for participation. EQUASS can help public authorities as well as sectoral stakeholders with the practical implementation of the UN Convention.

The Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 of the Council of Europe (April 2006)

identifies quality of services as a vital element of any implementation strategy at national level, and requires continuous improvement.

EQUASS ENHANCES THE PERFORMANCE OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

The set of recognised Principles for Quality and associate criteria

integrate the views of service users, service providers, social partners, funders and policy-makers having as an ultimate goal the improvement of the service provision and of the Management Systems.

The comprehensive self-assessment process

provides organisations with both a template for evaluating their current performance and identifying areas of improvement, and a methodology for drafting an Action Plan on the implementation of the Principles for Quality.

The formal certification

allows service providers to distinguish themselves in the market, while being in line with national legislative requirements.

The range of supporting services

is available exclusively to organisations awarded with EQUASS certification, including customised site training, advice and guidance.

The benchmarking process

gives organisations that achieve EQUASS Excellence the opportunity to work together with like-minded organisations to achieve better outcomes and processes.

"After gaining ISO 9001 certification, we consider the achievement of EQUASS Excellence as 'the roof on our House-of-Quality'."

- Jurij Svajger, Institute for Rehabilitation, Republic of Slovenia -

What are the EQUASS services?

The European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) is an integrated sector-specific system of certification, training and consultancy activities in the field of quality. EQUASS aims to enhance the social sector by engaging service providers in quality and continuous improvement and by guaranteeing service users quality of services throughout Europe.

EQUASS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMMES

EQUASS certification offers impartial recognition of quality at European level. EQUASS Assurance, EQUASS Excellence and EQUASS Award are based on the same Principles for Quality and each level is a stepping stone for the next one.



Quality Assurance in Social Services (EQUASS Assurance)

EQUASS Assurance guarantees quality of service provision by certifying compliance with 38 criteria based on the Principles for Quality. It can be viewed as a fundamental requirement for operating social services, having a feasible threshold in terms of costs, efforts and feasibility. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Assurance criteria is certified for a two year period.



Excellence in Social Services (EQUASS Excellence)

EQUASS Excellence is awarded to any service provider that can demonstrate achievements and continuous improvement on all nine Principles for Quality from three different perspectives: approach, deployment and results. The results of the certified organisations are published in order to facilitate benchmarking and bench learning. An organisation that meets the EQUASS Excellence criteria is certified for a three year period.



Outstanding Performance in Social Services (EQUASS Award)

EQUASS Award is granted once a year to an EQUASS Excellence awarded organisation that takes part in a voluntary competition and proves outstanding performance on the Principles for Quality compared with the other service providers.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

- Information seminars on quality in the social sector and on all aspects of the EQUASS quality certification programmes
- In-depth training in writing a self-evaluation report
- Training of auditors and consultants who after the successful completion of training are engaged in EQUASS activities

"EQUASS provides NGOs with a framework for improving the quality of services, both on the political as on the practical level."

- Extract from Report on Stakeholders' perceptions of EPR's Public Affairs activities -

CONSULTANCY SERVICES

- Support to individual service providers in the implementation of EQUASS Excellence and EQUASS Assurance
- Internal review for EQUASS Excellence applicants and a 'Quick Scan' for identifying current performance on the criteria of EQUASS Excellence
- Advice to public authorities throughout Europe

"To improve our services we have to learn from each other and exchange different practices and approaches. EQUASS provides an excellent way to do so."

- M. Crowley, the Rehab Group, Ireland -