

EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence for persons with disabilities Input of the Taskforce on Quality of Services

Draft Short Version – October 2022





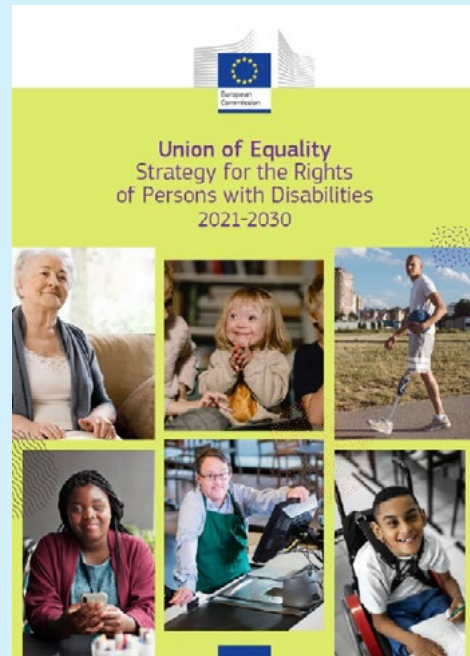
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Rationale

In March 2021, the European Commission launched the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, outlining different initiatives that they will undertake over the years to come. One of these flagship initiatives, is the development of an **EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence for Persons with Disabilities**. More specifically it is stated that “Building on the existing voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services, the Commission will present, by 2024, a specific framework for Social Services of Excellence for persons with disabilities, to improve service delivery for persons with disabilities and to enhance the attractiveness of jobs in this area including through upskilling and reskilling of service providers.”

The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities believes that the effective implementation of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires partnerships, innovative ideas, and local know-how. Therefore, EASPD set up a taskforce to support in developing input for the European Commission on the development of the EU Framework of Social Services of Excellence. With this taskforce, EASPD wishes to follow a **co-production approach**, by working together with representatives of service providers, of persons with disabilities, of public authorities, international networks, as well as researchers and other relevant stakeholders.



The outcome of this taskforce is this draft paper that provides a first reflection of the key elements that an EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence needs to include. This will support social services **move forward** towards better quality, empowering and person-centred forms of support, aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter UN CRPD). This document is the Executive Summary of the more thorough first reflections paper that can be found by scanning the QR code at the end of the document. This is a draft version of the document which will be finalised and published at the end of 2022.

Introduction

Support services play a crucial role in further enabling people to fully enjoy their human rights and in empowering people to improve their quality of life. However, services face significant challenges, including those related to the underdevelopment of person-centred and community-based services, poor funding rates and tools, outdated infrastructure, staff shortages and poor working conditions. Additionally, the sector often offers unattractive work opportunities or work opportunities that are seen as “unattractive”.

Consequently, persons with disabilities and other support needs may not have adequate access to support services based in the community and are deprived from fully realising their human rights. However, access to support services alone is not enough. Access to **quality** support services needs to be a priority. This requires both the transition of services from institutional forms of support to person-centred services based in the community and the reorientation of policies and resources towards this goal. It also requires having sufficient number of skilled staff to implement these changes.

Additionally, measuring the quality of services for persons with disabilities is a challenging mission for most service providers. The challenges arise from the lack of a mutually agreed definition on what quality is but also on how it can be measured and how this process can further support services to improve. However, with this European initiative, among others, there seems to be a general interest, also on the EU level, to improve the quality of services and the assessment processes followed nationally.



Key recommendations for the development of the EU framework on Social Services of Excellence

Setting up the foundations of the framework

The EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence should encourage the development, improvement and delivery of services focusing on a human-rights approach in line with the rights and principles of the Convention. It should apply equally to public, not-for-profit and for-profit service providers. When assessing the quality of the service the main priority should be to assess the impact that the service generates on the quality of life of the people it supports based on rights established in the UN CRPD. This is in line with human rights standards where services are focused around the needs and preferences of the people they support.

There are multiple innovative frameworks developed and implemented in Member States which are combined in a recent study commissioned by EASPD on “Innovative Frameworks measuring the quality of social services for persons with disabilities”. The Quality of Life model and the Quality of Life Supports Model specifically, focus on an outcomes oriented and person-centred approach when assessing the quality of services. It is generally agreed that the values of the Quality of Life model align with the values of the Convention.

» Therefore, the EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence should:

- encourage the development and delivery of services **in line with human rights principles as enshrined in the Convention;**
- **be outcomes-oriented, focusing on the impact that the service has on the quality of life of the**



people it supports primarily. These outcomes need to be based on rights established in the UN CRPD and centred on the quality of life concept;

- include indicators that look at the **structures of a service**, such as the resources available, staff ratio, equipment, facilities, as well as **processes** such as the way support is provided.

» The Framework should start with **common quality principles, and a common definition of services of excellence, following the principles of the UN CRPD.** This will facilitate existing support services improve but also in setting out the right foundations for the development of new ones, across the EU.

Social services of excellence are part of a wider system

The reality is that there are very few examples of legal frameworks in full compliance with the mandates of the Convention across Europe. In many cases the funding procedures are restricting services from responding to the evolving needs and wishes of persons with disabilities. These, along with the workforce issues, such as staff shortages, non-attractive job opportunities, low wages, hinder the process of transformation of services towards Social Services of Excellence. With this basis, we aim to emphasize that for an EU Framework for Social Services of Excellence to become a reality there are certain facilitating conditions that need to also be considered:

» Social services **need clear and facilitating legal frameworks** that enable and empower them to provide support in line with the Convention.

» It is imperative to identify **alternative funding models** to public procurement that fully consider the needs, wishes of people with disabilities, and partnership approaches with not-for-profit social services, while ensuring the sustainability of the services.

» The implementation of the Convention relies on the sector's ability to **recruit, retain, and train the growing pool of workers with the required skills**.

The ecosystem within which services operate plays an important role in either supporting or hindering the development and improvement of services. This needs to be included in the Framework.

Design principles and pilot implementation of the Framework

» The design, development and implementation of the framework should be guided by a **co-production approach**, with a diverse range of stakeholders and centralised around the “nothing about us without us” principle.

» The Framework should be designed in a way that can be **integrated or cross-referenced** in their existing ones, since this may encourage Member States with existing Quality Frameworks in place to uptake the EU Framework and its principles.

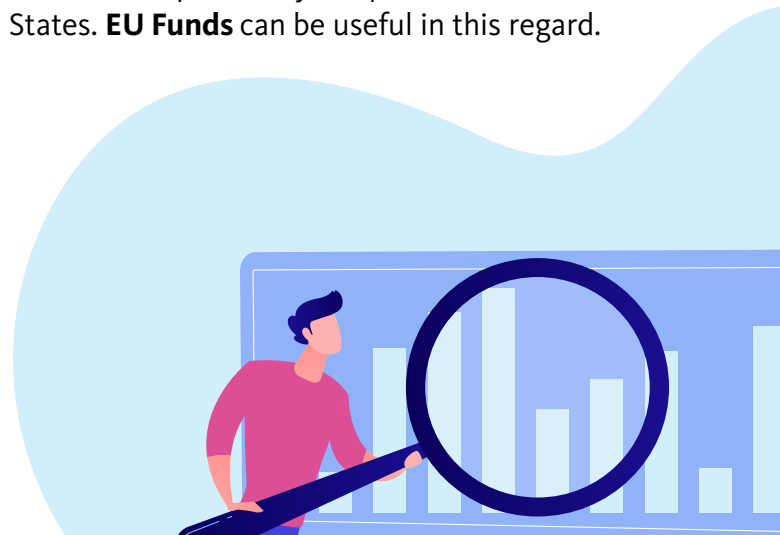
» The Framework should also provide **comprehensive principles and indicators** that any tool should include. This will increase the awareness of stakeholders on what quality is. It should also be accompanied by good practices on quality systems/ frameworks for services.

» The Framework should also highlight that any tool that will be used, needs to be useful for informing service improvement – not just measuring quality.

» The adoption of the framework and toolkit by the respective entities should not add a bureaucratic element to the operation of services but be based on **partnership, dialogue and collaboration** with all relevant stakeholders.

» The Framework needs to be **piloted** by service providers in different EU countries.

This will raise awareness on the framework and increase the possibility of uptake from Member States. **EU Funds** can be useful in this regard.



Recommendations to the European Commission for the uptake of the EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence

- » The EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence initiative should be **interlinked with other initiatives** (existing and upcoming), such as the EU Care Strategy and the Guidance towards Member States on Independent Living and Inclusion in the Community.
- » A mechanism to facilitate and support the implementation of the Framework needs to be developed. This can be further promoted by the creation of a working group within the Disability Platform or the Social Protection Committee. This working group can also facilitate in **monitoring the progress of the implementation of the Framework in different Member States**.
- » **EU funds could be used to facilitate the take up of the Framework**. This could initially start through an EU funded project piloting it in social services in several European Countries, resulting in recommendations for scaling and take up throughout the EU. Following this, the **European Social Fund+ and the Structural Reform Support programme** can be used by managing authorities to support the implementation of the Framework in a more medium term, before transitioning to national and regional funding programmes.
- » A **dissemination and exploitation strategy from the European Commission** may also support in increasing the awareness of the Framework among Member States and other relevant stakeholders.
- » **Additional research is needed at EU level**, to better understand the development of services across Europe. Research grants that can also be used to enhance collaboration between different stakeholders, including people with disabilities, targeting the improvement of the quality of services. This can be financed under the Horizon Europe programme for research and innovation, together with the creation of a Knowledge Hub for exchange and transferability of good practices.
- » The European Commission can support Member States by providing them with **practical recommendations**, such as:
 - » how to develop **the assessment of quality of services in Member States not only as an overarching objective but also with definitions and methodologies specified**, following the principles and indications of the EU Framework of Social Services of Excellence.
 - » implementing **training programmes** on the framework, its principles (aligned with the UN CRPD), and indicators to accomplish its uptake within Member States at different levels, national, regional, and local. Erasmus+ can be supportive to reach this objective.
 - » developing and implementing a **dissemination and exploitation strategy** to raise awareness and encourage the uptake of the framework by public authorities and service providers.
 - » **integrate the EU framework in the higher-education curricula** to raise awareness, support and adequately train future professionals in the social services sector.
 - » setting up a **coordination agency within the relevant Ministry** encouraging cooperation between Ministries and between central and local authorities. This can support and promote the EU Framework on Social Services of Excellence, while ensuring the provision of high-quality services nationally.
- » The European Commission can also support in **highlighting the added value that the Framework can bring in the Member States**, including for Authorities and Service Providers.

Access the more detailed draft version of the first reflections paper by scanning the QR code below.



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