

## Quality Study Annex 3 Portugal case study

### At a glance:

- *Relatively few changes in regulatory framework in past years.*
- *One obligatory professional training certificate by the Institute for Work and Professional Training.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Local optional certification for certain social services elaborated by the Portuguese Institute of Social Security<sup>2</sup> based on ISO and EFQM certificates, is gaining popularity, though slowly.*
- *Varying assessments of utility of EQUASS certification and its diminishing popularity.*

## Regulation of social services

The majority of social care and support services in Portugal are either provided by public institutions or delivered by private organizations, with partial or full public funding. The Network of Social Services and Facilities, managed by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MTSSS), oversees the **majority of day care, living support, and long-term residential and respite care services**. Other social care and support services fall under different jurisdictions. **Early childhood intervention** is coordinated through joint management of the Ministries of Education, Health and MTSSS and delivered through multidisciplinary local intervention teams. Support to **students with disabilities in compulsory education** is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and provided by schools, relying on internal resources, sometimes with the support of external services or community resources.

The main actors in the **administration of the education and training system** are three Ministries: the MTSS, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES)<sup>i</sup>. Their intervention is made predominantly by three Directorates: Directorate-General for Employment and Industrial Relations (MTSS), Directorate-General for Innovation and Curricular Development (Ministry of Education) and Directorate-General for Higher Education (MCTES). Additionally, the National Qualifications Agency and Institute for Employment and Vocational Training perform an important role in the Portuguese VET system. Quality of VET is assured by different entities belonging to MTSSS and Ministry of Education.

Figure 1 Certified services

## Quality trends

There are **no obligatory certifications for social services in Portugal with the exception of those necessary for vocational education and training programs** (see further). For services performed under Social Security funding, since 2006 there is a voluntary certification, elaborated by the Portuguese Institute of Social Security, I.P. (ISS). The so-called “The Social Responses” certification<sup>ii</sup> is based on the ISO 9001 and on the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) models of excellence. The certification targets eight types of services or, so called “Social Responses,” (see Figure 1) and

There are eight certifiable Social Responses (social service sectors):

- *Temporary Reception Centre (CAT);*
- *Occupational Activity Centre (CAO);*
- *Day Centre (CDD);*
- *Nursery (CRH);*
- *Residential Facilities for the Elderly (ERI);*
- *Home for Children and Youngsters (LIJ);*
- *Residential Home (LRD);*
- *Home Support Service (SAD).*

<sup>1</sup> Certificado de Formação Profissional, <https://iefp.cv/certificacao/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.apcergroup.com/en/certification/standards-search/160/social-responses>



foresees three certifiable quality levels (A,B, and C) allowing for a gradual improvement of services. The certification is valid for three years and is issued by a private certification provider and auditor APCER. While this certification is free, the providers interviewed observe that its popularity is growing very slowly as while useful, it is completely voluntary.

#### Vocational rehabilitation and VET

Any organization that wants to offer **VET services is required to get a certification from the General Directorate for Employment and Industrial Relations (DGERT)**, under the MTSS<sup>iii</sup>. Education providers under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education are exempt from accreditation<sup>iv</sup>. The providers are regularly evaluated by the DGERT through audits, based on indicators of performance and results of their training activity. DGERT also has a right to revoke the certification.

The requirements for the certification of VET providers are divided into prerequisites (essential legal conditions) and quality requirements that refer to:

- the *internal structure and organisation* (human resources, facilities and equipment) of the provider;
- the *development process* of training programmes (planning, design, organisation, development and training assessment);
- the *assessment of outcomes and continuous improvement* (post-training follow-up, annual assessment of results, constant improvement measures)<sup>v</sup>.

The advantages of the accreditation include<sup>vi</sup>:

1. Recognition of quality of providers and training by the market;
2. Training is certified under the Portuguese national qualification system;
3. The provider has access to public financed programmes for VET;
4. The provider is exempt for the VAT on products and services related with VET;
5. Government deduces VET expenses in personal income tax.

The providers interviewed considered that the DGERT certification was sufficient for ensuring a good quality of VET.

Employment and Vocational Training Institute (“**Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional**” – IEFP) is the national body responsible for the implementation of vocational rehabilitation policy by developing actions that favour the vocational integration of people with disabilities in the mainstream work market. The services themselves are delivered by public or non-profit organizations, accredited by the IEFP.

While regulatory tendencies have been rather stable in the past years, the providers interviewed pointed out that **clients are increasingly exigent in terms of the quality of the services they receive**, their availability and affordability, making institutions worry more about the stakeholder satisfaction, how and how well they provide services. The providers interviewed foresee that this trend is going to continue into the future. In the words of one interviewed provider, quality is no longer an optional factor and has become a priority in the

*Quality is becoming omnipresent <...> across all sectors and activities. This implies a higher level of expectations from consumers and authorities, a continuous scrutiny of delivery and lower tolerance regarding*



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management of social organizations, representing their responsibility, ethics and respect for their citizens. Moreover, according to an interviewed provider, technologies are also changing both the understanding and management of quality as it is gets disrupted by social media, mobility, analytics and the cloud. Certifications in this changing environment might play an important role in assuring stakeholders that the organization is moving to the right direction. Also, organizational marketing and communication can take advantage of it to reach consumers and other stakeholders.

Overall, the interviewees **felt that Portuguese regulations of quality of social services are generally sufficient**. As a weakness of the system they mention an overly complex bureaucracy that overshadows the quality. On the other hand, some consider obligatory certifications as “somewhat narrow,” indeed the majority of providers interviewed held other optional certifications, such as ISO, EFQM, EQUASS or the Portuguese ISS.

### Place of EQUASS in the overall system

Portuguese social service providers opt for optional certifications in order to develop their management processes, achieve credibility, as an impetus for internal reorganization and for better engagement of relevant stakeholders in the design of services and their provision.

*EQUASS implementation creates a more client-focused approach, an increased awareness of service users' rights, an increased involvement and empowerment of service users in provided services, a systematic enhancement and promotion of quality of life and an increased motivation of staff to contribute and to improve the quality of their daily work.*

Despite a boom in EQUASS certifications in Portugal as a consequence of the public financing programme Arquimedes a decade ago, the number of EQUASS certified organisations in is diminishing in 2019. Both the providers and academic articles (the implementation of EQUASS certification in Portugal has been studied by Melão 2016<sup>vii</sup> and Melão, Guia, and Amorim 2017<sup>viii</sup>, 2018<sup>ix</sup>) point out different benefits of EQUASS certification: impact on the quality of services, higher user satisfaction, enhanced communication with stakeholders, and improved image. One interviewee also made an

emphasis on the so-called “humanistic approach,” as EQUASS integrates ethics, human rights, participation and client orientation into work organization. Another interviewed provider said acquisition of EQUASS gave credibility to their services and guaranteed uniformity in how they are provided. The majority of the providers interviewed considered that there is a market for EQUASS.

Despite positive reviews, some providers interviewed felt that **EQUASS failed to evolve and was struggling not only in Portugal but also in other markets where external support for certification was absent**.

According to one interviewee, EQUASS did not evolve enough to be able to compete with other certification systems, and may find it hard to achieve a place in the market by its own means.

*EQUASS <...> is still too “amateur”, too specific and yet didn't yet find its final own identity (in terms of its scope).*



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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.eqavet.eu/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/portugal>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.apcergroup.com/en/certification/standards-search/160/social-responses>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/lt/news-and-press/news/portugal-certification-training-providers>

<sup>iv</sup> DGERT (2019). Vocational education and training in Europe – Portugal. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports 2018, pp. 42-43. <[https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/2018\\_CR\\_PT.pdf](https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/2018_CR_PT.pdf)>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/portugal-certification-training-providers>

<sup>vi</sup> DGERT (2019). Vocational education and training in Europe – Portugal. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports 2018, pp. 42-43. <[https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/2018\\_CR\\_PT.pdf](https://www.refernet.de/dokumente/pdf/2018_CR_PT.pdf)>

<sup>vii</sup> Melão, N. (2016), "The Impacts of EQUASS Assurance on Social Service Providers: Results from a Survey," Managerial Report, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu.

<sup>viii</sup> Melão Nuno Felipe, Guia Sara Maria, and Amorim Marlene (2017) "Quality Management and Excellence in the third sector: examining European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) in non-profit social services", Total Quality Management and Business Excellence, Volume 28, 2017 - Issue 7-8.

<sup>ix</sup> Melão, N., Amorim, M., Marimon, F. and Alegre, I. (2018), "Quality management systems in European social service organizations: A survey of EQUASS Assurance pioneer adopters", International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 354-372.



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