

Quality Study Annex 4 Slovenia case study

At a glance:

- One and only one-size-fits-all certification for social services issued by the Social Chamber of Slovenia.
- Public tenders issued by different ministries specify the quality requirements for social services, no homogenous system in place to ensure their fulfillment.
- Support for EQUASS from providers and regulators.
- Quality increasingly important both for providers and regulators.

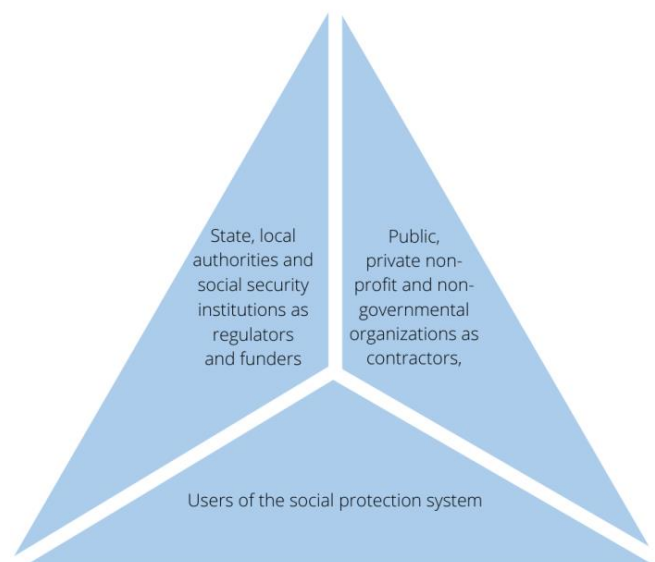
Regulation of social services

The Social Security Act¹, adopted in 1992, defines the goal of social assistance services elimination of social hardship and problems, and they include:

1. **Emergency assistance:** assistance in identifying and determining social hardship and problems, assessment of potential solutions, and provision of information to beneficiaries on all possible services and benefits they are entitled to.
2. **Personal assistance:** counseling, personal organization, and guidance aimed at enabling individuals to develop, supplement, maintain, and improve their social capacities.
3. **Family support** composed of:
 - a. *Family counseling:* professional counseling and support for re-establishing family relationships and caring for children, and enabling the family to perform its role in daily life.
 - b. *Family help at home:* social care provided to beneficiaries in the case of disability or old age and in other instances where social care at home can replace institutional care.
 - c. *Domestic services:* help with household and other chores in case of childbirth, illness, disability, old age, accident, other.

Figure 1 – System of Social Services in Slovenia

4. **Institutional care:** assistance provided in an institution, in another family or any other organized form to substitute or supplement the functions of a beneficiary's own home and family.
5. **Guidance, care:** organized, comprehensive care for adults with physical and mental impairments, personal development and their harmonious inclusion in the community.
6. **Employment under special conditions** encompasses forms of work that enable persons with impairments to maintain their acquired knowledge and skills and to develop new ones.



¹ Zakon o socialnem varstvu



7. **Assistance to workers employed in companies, institutions, and with other employers.** This includes advice and help in solving the problems faced by workers in their working environment and upon the termination of their employment contract, assistance in exercising their rights in the areas of health, pension, and disability insurance, and the rights arising from child and family protection.

Article 45 of the same act **foresees the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities** (further: Ministry of Labor) **and municipal councils as the key institutions responsible for social assistance (the) and defining the scope and type of social services in corresponding geographic areas and sectors.** As observed by our interviewees, both the Ministry of Labor and the Municipalities are essentially funders of social care programs, whereby they buy services from different providers. While they both finance similar programs and issue tenders based on the National Social Security Program 2013-2020, municipalities can also fund experimental and supplemental programs. One provider interviewed said working with both the Ministry of Labor and municipalities means a dual application process, twice the number of tenders to respond to, twice the number of reports; they suggested the work of municipalities in this respect was superfluous and all could be done centrally by the government.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport (MESS) regulates Vocational Education and Training (VET). The Center of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, a public institution funded by the MESS, the Ministry of Labor and a few business organizations, prepares formal VET programs, subject to approval by the Minister of Education on the recommendation of the Council of Experts at the MESS. According to the **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act**² the Ministry competent for disability protection (currently the Ministry of Labor) is responsible for overseeing the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. In its public tenders, it also details quality requirements for vocational rehabilitation services that it buys – personnel, organizational, technical, and other conditions.ⁱ

In general, the service providers report to whoever is funding a particular social care program (the government, municipality, or the Foundation for financing disabled person organizations). As observed by interviewed providers, the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia performs a so-called evaluation. However, "in reality, this is merely monitoring the administrative part of programs," as there is the assumption that whoever is funding a particular program will make sure that the processes are right, and service providers have complied with quality criteria.

Quality trends

Article 41.d of the Social Security Act states that **entities or individuals wishing to deliver social services have to meet certain conditions and regulations.** Public services are provided via the public network, however legal or individual entities can participate in public

² Zakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov (ZZRZI)



tenders. Social protection service providers that are outside the system of public services can get permission to provide services by the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. Article 65 of the Social Security Act establishes the following criteria for social service providers:

- to have an appropriate professional education;
- to have passed the professional examination and obtained the opinion of the Social Chamber;
- to have at least three years of work experience in the field;
- not to be employed;
- not to be barred from pursuing the profession by a final decision of the court;
- to have sufficient facilities, equipment and staff.

The **verification by the Social Chamber of Slovenia is the only quality certification that is required by the government, and it targets just those services that are considered "social."** Vocational rehabilitation programs do not go through the Social Chamber but through public tenders, where each bid specifies demands. The interviewed providers observed that the verification process is a one-size-fits-all process that does not take into consideration peculiarities of different social services.

VET/ Vocational Rehabilitation

Regional units of the Public Employment Services offer **vocational rehabilitation services**, delivered by teams of professionals that include a medical doctor among others. Vocational rehabilitation is carried out as a public service within the network of public and private providersⁱⁱ. The University Rehabilitation Institute sets standards for vocational rehabilitation services, prepares and facilitates training and knowledge standards for professionals and practitioners of vocational rehabilitation.ⁱⁱⁱ Public tender documents for each service set their quality requirements.

Responsibility for **VET** at the national level lies with the MESS, which certifies potential VET providers. The Inspectorate for Education is an affiliated body of the Ministry, which oversees the implementation of legislation in pre-university institutions. Similarly, the monitoring process that addresses different aspects of teaching and learning is carried out by the National Institute for VET.

The Law on Vocational Education³ foresees that: "The school ensures the quality of educational work according to the principles of a comprehensive quality management system, which also respects the common European framework for quality assurance in vocational and technical education" (ZPSI, art. 15). Each school is supposed to have a Quality Committee responsible for overseeing the quality of its offer. However, as evidenced by various evaluations, many Slovenian organizations offering VET often do not have a stable internal quality system in place, and their quality management processes could be further improved.^{iv} (EQUAVET, 2018)

There is no national quality assurance framework for VET – this is

³ Zakon o poklicnem in strokovnem izobraževanju (ZPSI)



currently in development as part of a broader national framework, which will cover the whole education system⁴. The first part of the national framework for supporting schools in the self-evaluation process is prepared, but not yet confirmed by the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport. The second part that is addressing a system level will be prepared during the period 2020-2022.

The interviewed organizations observed both negative and positive trends taking place in the last few years in relation to the quality of social services in different sectors. On the one hand, there is a growing administrative burden and overregulation. On the other, there is a slow transformation under way of a soviet-style social system towards de-institutionalization and the human rights-based approach. The interviewees also pointed out that **clients of services are becoming increasingly active advocates for change**, demanding more and more varied social services for themselves. The official stance towards these requests is seen by interviewed providers as positive, though reactive rather than proactive as the government does not initiate but is rather pushed for change. Nonetheless, the pressures from society are unlikely to cease, and there might be more positive changes in the social system as a result.

Place of EQUASS in the overall system

Existing regulations and financial limitations are not conducive to voluntary certification processes on top of the obligatory verification. Providers, however, agree with the decision of not keeping the bar for registration too high: external certifications are expensive and making them prerequisite for service provision would deter local or small organizations. On the question of the utility of EQUASS, some interviewees wondered whether it would be possible to receive some EU funding during the new Multiannual Financial Framework to ensure the quality of social services.

EQUASS certificate demands more contents than some other certifications, not only the process and the management but also what is essential for people who receive services and impact of rehabilitation on their lives.

At the time of developing this study at the end of 2019, **the government seems to support the EQUASS certification**. The providers from the sector of vocational rehabilitation claimed that during the previous years the Ministry of Labor was supportive for their work and the sector in general, creating opportunities for all vocational rehabilitation providers could acquire EQUASS Assurance in Slovenia.

Our interviewees **felt EQUASS offers advantages compared to other available certifications**. They observe that **the national verification of the Social Chamber** is a one-size-fits-all and cookie-cutter, not tailored to specific sectors. Moreover, the conditions to obtain the verification as laid out in the Article 7 of “Rules on the procedure for the professional verification of social welfare programs implemented in the field of social protection,⁴” seem to be rather technical and focused on forma criteria of quality, such as staffing, infrastructure, supervision by certified professionals. As for **ISO**, which they see as too focused on

⁴ Pravilnik o postopku strokovne verifikacije socialnovarstvenih programov, ki se izvajajo na področju socialnega varstva



management and procedures. According to one study, the benefits of EQUASS for Slovenian organizations were related not only to improved organizational processes but also to better communication and partnership with different stakeholders, more organizational development and innovation^{vi}. Providers for voluntary certifications, despite the added cost, in order to increase their reputation, the quality of life for their clients, and to better meet their needs. As such, tailor-made certifications serve as a good benchmark.

Providers in Slovenia believe that there is a market for EQUASS certifications there, especially in disability or sheltered economy organizations. However, they observe that EQUASS should address the pitfalls of certifications. Among them, the interviewees mentioned the increase of bureaucracy and workload, problems of setting measurable goals, the resistance of staff, only one auditor being registered in Slovenia, and the costs related to obtaining or maintaining certified status.

Sometimes the language of EQUASS is not understandable and clear.

ⁱZakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov (ZZRZI),

<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3841#>

ⁱⁱ Report on the Comparison of the Available Strategies for Professional Integration and Reintegration of Persons with Chronic Diseases and mental Health issues Based on Five Categories of Social Welfare Models in Europe

https://www.path-ways.eu/wp-content/uploads/country_report_si.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Zakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov (ZZRZI),

<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3841#>

^{iv} EQAVET. 2018. Poročilo o kakovosti srednjega poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja 2017 za šolsko leto 2015/16 in koledarsko leto 2016, [https://www.eqavet-nrp-slo.si/wp-](https://www.eqavet-nrp-slo.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/PoK_zvezek1_interaktivno.pdf)

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^v <https://www.eqavet.eu/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/slovenia>

^{vi} Breclj, V., Ponikvar J., Pečar Morec P., 2017. Študija vpliva uvedbe sistema kakovosti Equass na področju zaposlitvene rehabilitacije, [http://www.rczr.ursoca.si/f/docs/2016_2/08. Uvajanje sistema kakovosti EQUASS na podrocju zaposlitvene rehabilitacije v le.p](http://www.rczr.ursoca.si/f/docs/2016_2/08_Uvajanje_sistema_kakovosti_EQUASS_na_podrocju_zaposlitvene_rehabilitacije_v_le.pdf)

[df](http://www.rczr.ursoca.si/f/docs/2016_2/08_Uvajanje_sistema_kakovosti_EQUASS_na_podrocju_zaposlitvene_rehabilitacije_v_le.pdf)

