

## Quality Study Annex 6 France case study

### At a glance:

- Different quality assurance modalities from authorization and external audits by governmental institutions to private certifications.
- Authorities recognize specific private certification systems (NF AFNOR, Qualicert, and Qualisap), which serve as substitutes for national audits.
- Interviewed providers are satisfied with the quality assurance system of social services.
- Two out of three interviewees did not know EQUASS certification; overall perception that there is no market for EQUASS in France.

### Quality trends

As observed by researchers Francesca Petrella and Nadine Richez-Battest, aging population, together with changes in family structures and increasing demands for flexibility on the labor market, force European (and French) governments to develop "quasi-market" structures for social services. In the case of France, this led to the opening of social service provision also to private commercial operators (Petrella and Richez-Battest, 2010, p.273). **The growing variety of providers and services requires new instruments to ensure the standards and quality applicable to the services provided.** The complexity of the French case lies in the decentralization of social policies. Centralized social policy limits social risks creating safety net through compulsory insurance, income redistribution, and regulation. Meanwhile actors at the municipal level adjust their tactics based on the shortcomings observed in central government action and provide aid or services that top up and are complementary to national assistance.<sup>i</sup> Moreover, **the proliferation of private certification systems for quality in personal services, alongside public regulation tools, also stands out as a French specificity<sup>ii</sup>.**

The state controls the quality of social service provision through authorization or mandatory approval of providers. After a certain period, each entity has to pass an external audit in order to renew its authorization. **Besides obligatory accreditation, public institutions recognize various private certifications.** Having them exempts organizations from otherwise mandatory external audits by the competent governmental agencies and/or guarantees an automatic renewal of their licenses. There are three recognized certificates, all of them popular among social sector organizations.

- The *NF Services – Home Care Services*<sup>1</sup> is a standard specific to home care services as the name suggests, issued by France's Standardization Agency<sup>2</sup> (AFNOR).
- The *Qualicert* standard is issued by SGS-International Certification Services<sup>3</sup> and does not directly address issues relevant for social services.

<sup>1</sup> NF Service - Services aux personnes à domicile, < <https://certification.afnor.org/services/nf-service-services-aux-personnes-a-domicile>

<sup>2</sup> Association Française de Normalisation, <https://www.afnor.org/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sgs.com/en/risk-management/quality-security-and-business-continuity/quality/qualicert-service-quality-certification>



- The *Qualisap*<sup>4</sup> standard issued by the certification agency “Bureau Veritas” was elaborated by them jointly with the National Agency for Personal Services<sup>5</sup>, Directorate General of Social Action<sup>6</sup> and General Directorate for Consumer Competition and Fraud Control<sup>7</sup> and reflects the necessities of social sector organizations.

Medical (or so-called medico-social services) do have compulsory quality assessments by the National Authority for Health<sup>8</sup>. Since 2021, there will also be a new quality standard for vocational training providers, *Qualiop*<sup>9</sup>, regulated by the Ministry of Labor.

All four interviewed providers claimed that **the regulation of social service quality in France is sufficient and supports the quality of services**. One of them claimed that the quality regulations are good, as they have been elaborated by sector-specific professionals, are specific and understandable. The interviewee predicted there will be push to put the service user at the center of the services and to focus on the added-value of the services provided.

**Two interviewees sustained that the system became overly focused on quality** (making it not a voluntary but regulatory issue) complicating the work of service providers. Their opinion is in contrast to the research of Petrella and Richez-Battest, who point to a relaxation in the quality requirements and, potentially, weakening of the quality assurance system since 2002<sup>iii</sup>.

### Place of EQUASS in the overall system

According to Petrella and Richez-Battest, **the most popular quality certification standards in France are the AFNOR and “Qualicert”**. While both are quite similar in their content, the AFNOR is more typical for the social economy sector, “Qualicert” is the primary choice for private

*The most important dimension is the quality of service provided for the people we accompany. In particular we measure the satisfaction rate at the entrance/beginning, during the individual support and at the end of the training. Our objective is to attend the rate of 90 % satisfaction.*

commercial organizations. The interviewed providers also mentioned being aware of the ISO and European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) certifications and their use in France.

Only one of four interviewed providers was aware of the EQUASS certification, even if the organizations had other optional certificates (mostly ISO and AFNOR). As observed by the interviewee aware of EQUASS, **French organizations give priority to French quality**

**obligations and certifications supported by the government**. While service providers tend to have optional certifications (as is true of two of three organizations interviewed for this brief), their

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bureauveritas.fr/besoin/certification-qualisap>

<sup>5</sup> Agence Nationale des Services à la Personne, ceased to exist in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Direction Générale de l'Action Sociale, <http://www.sante.gouv.sn/les-directions/la-direction-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9rale-de-l%E2%80%99action-sociale>

<sup>7</sup> Direction Générale de la Concurrence de la Consommation et de la Repression des Fraudes, <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/dgccrf>

<sup>8</sup> Haute Autorité de Santé, <https://www.has-sante.fr/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.certifopac.fr/espace-documentaire/>



cost and effort required makes organizations consider at length the added value of each certification. As essential elements for quality, the organizations mentioned the quality of services and procedures (quality management) and relations with the client (client support and their involvement in the program, and their satisfaction)

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<sup>i</sup> Archambault, E. 2007. "Social services in France: A Public/Private Partnership". *Changing Administration-Changing Society. Challenges for Current Social Policy*, Nova Science Publishers, pp.157-174.

<sup>ii</sup> Petrella F., Richez-Battesti, N. 2010. "Régulation de la qualité dans les services á la personne en France: l'économie sociale et solidaire entre innovation et isomorphisme?" *Management Prospective*, no. 5 n° 35, pp. 273 - 292

<sup>iii</sup> Peterlla and Richez-Battesti, p. 279.

