

## What Social Workers Need to Provide Quality Services

A Contribution to the ESN European Parliament Round Table “Promoting Quality Social Care in Europe” on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

As a foreword, I would like to point out that Social Work as a profession, does not only have the mission to support the individual, but also to promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people<sup>1</sup>. In other words the profession of Social Work enhances wellbeing and improves the societal conditions for all people. Social Work contributes to a Social Europe in many different and often unrecognized ways.

Therefore, I am very happy to be here today, and that for having noticed in the preparation that we as social workers are recognized as “a primary tool and resource to ensure quality of social services”<sup>2</sup> by ESN.

Ensuring quality in social services, does not come by itself. It requires skills, qualifications, and an enabling working environment.<sup>3</sup> So let me now focus on what social workers need to provide quality services.

First, we as social workers do need **Common Qualification Standards** that enable us to provide quality services. Social Work is not recognized as a profession in all member states. Not in all member states there are mandatory registrations or nationwide professional accreditations in force. Social Work is not widely recognized as an academic discipline in all member states, academic research as well as profound education of students is often limited due to funding. There is no mutual recognition of the different forms of educations, limiting the possibilities for social workers to work in other member states. A Directive<sup>4</sup>, as already established for professions like nurses, doctors as well as pharmacists and midwives would make it easier for social workers to prove their qualifications<sup>5</sup>. **We as social workers are in**

---

<sup>1</sup> IFSW (2014): [Global Definition of Social Work](#)

<sup>2</sup> ESN (2020): [Striving for Quality in Social Services and Social Care](#)

<sup>3</sup> Social Plattform (2021): [Quality Social Services for All](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005](#)

<sup>5</sup> As already proposed by ESN (2020): [Striving for Quality in Social Services and Social Care](#)

**favor of common qualification standards on European level, ensuring that our skills are recognized and accepted as being vital for the quality of social services.**

Now from qualification to quality: As you know, the field of social services is diverse, there are huge differences in funding. This has given way to a patchwork of quality standards. There are great disparities, not only between member states but also in between districts and cities. We, as social workers do need **Common Quality Standards** to provide quality services. Such standards have already been set by the Social Protection Committee.<sup>6</sup> But they are not widely recognized or even known especially on local levels, which is a shame. Such common quality guidance can ensure that service users in all member states have access to social services of good quality. **We as social workers are in favor of a framework of common quality standards that are in line with the Code of Ethics for Social Work<sup>7</sup>, Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.**

We as social workers need **public procurement that prefers the best bid regarding service quality** to provide quality services. Long term funding and investing in specialized services grant efficient and effective support for service users. Reliable relationships between service users and social workers are the foundation for change and development and are therefore avoiding a prolonged need for support through social services. Changing tender conditions or short funding periods obstruct sustainable and enduring outcomes and even lead to disruption of services. They also prevent skilled and educated persons from working in the field due to insecure job-perspectives. **We as social workers do need quality procurement for being able to deliver the best possible support for service users.**

In our working environment, we as social workers do need **good working conditions** to provide quality services. And those working conditions are not only created by the organization itself. They are an outcome of funding terms and procurement. We as social workers need adequate funding<sup>8</sup> and enough staff members in the services we are working in, to provide quality services. Inadequate staff-to-user ratios and high workloads restrict the quality of services and limit efforts. Providing good working conditions include also adequate payment and reliable working times. Contracts for social workers must include the right to attend supervision meetings and trainings as part of working routines and to ensure quality. By enabling good working conditions for social workers, high turn over rates can be prevented, and they contribute to resilience of social workers, enabling them to give service

---

<sup>6</sup> Social Protection Committee (2010): [A Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services](#)

<sup>7</sup> IFSW (2018): [Global Social Work Statement of Ethic Principles](#)

<sup>8</sup> ESN (2021): [Putting Quality First – Contracting for Long-Term Care](#)

users the best possible support in crisis. **We as social workers need good working conditions for providing quality services for service users.**

And last but not least, we have to **prepare for the future**. As in the personal care sector, also in the field of Social Work skilled professionals are badly needed. It is quite paradox, that even though studying Social Work is quite attractive, many colleagues new to the job quit within the first years of practice. It seems like the challenging working conditions, high workloads, temporary or part time contracts and a lack of guidance are reasons for high turnover rates of young professionals. It is necessary to create standards and working conditions that make it attractive to stay in the job. **We as social workers need new colleagues who are well trained and get guidance during their first years of practice.**

The foundation for effective and efficient social services is the workforce. Establishing quality and qualification standards and creating decent working environments is therefore crucial for contributing to a Social Europe. Therefore, investing in us, in social workers and all other professionals working in the field of social services is key.

Additional Documents:

IFSW (2016): [The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems: The Universal Right to Social Protection](#)

Social Platform (2020): [Socializing the European Semester](#)

Zitierhinweise / Suggested Citation:

obds (Hrsg.): Position Paper on the Topic „What Social Workers Need to Provide Quality Services“. A Contribution to the ESN European Parliament Round Table “Promoting Quality Social Care in Europe” on November 16th. 2021. Onlineveröffentlichung.