

Conference abstract

The Commission strategy for supporting the quality of social services of general interest across the European Union

Concetta Cultrera, Head of Sector, Unit “Social Protection, Social Services”, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission

Correspondence to: Concetta Cultrera, E-mail: Concetta.Cultrera@ec.europa.eu

Abstract

Introduction: The announcement of the Commission strategy for supporting the quality of social services of general interest (SSGI) across the European Union in the Communication on “services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment”.

The reasons for a quality framework: First, when dealing with a variety of providers, public authorities need to clearly define the services they are delegating and thus the quality they expect. Second, societal challenges and changing needs have a direct impact on the demand for SSGI, which has increased and has become more sophisticated. Enhancing SSGI quality and efficiency is essential in order to address this increasingly more sophisticated and evolving demand for SSGI and to foster the ability of users to make informed choices. Third, a consistent part of SSGI addresses the (multiple) needs of vulnerable users. A EU Quality framework will enhance their ability to make informed choices, thereby strengthening equitable access to SSGI. Fourth, the expanding and more complex demand for SSGI raises the need for sufficient and well-trained human resources. Finally, in the EU context, the debate on SSGI quality and efficiency acquires a special value also because of the cross-border dimension of SSGI provision.

The Commission strategy—three complementary actions: (1) Financing via the PROGRESS programme bottom-up initiatives aimed at developing mechanisms for the definition, measurement, assessment and improvement of SSGI quality. These initiatives, which have started at the end of 2008, cover a variety of SSGI, such as long-term care services to elderly people, services for the integration of migrants, services to people with disabilities, services to homeless people and childcare services. (2) Financing public authorities training programs, which will notably focus on how to guarantee the delivery of quality services when applying public procurement rules and state aid rules for the selection and the financing of SSGI providers. (3) Supporting the development, within the Social Protection Committee, of a voluntary quality framework for SSGI. This will provide a tool that public authorities and other relevant stakeholders can refer to in order to define, measure and assess SSGI quality and therefore to promote high-quality SSGI.

Keywords

Social Services of General Interest, European Commission, long-term care services, elderly, disabilities, quality

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