



Disability-relevance of quality assurance systems in social services

Serbia

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Definition and framework of the quality of personal social services

The standards of social protection services include two groups of standards – structural and functional. Structural standards determine infrastructural, organisational and personnel conditions for providing services. These standards relate to venues, facilities, location, appropriate equipment, availability of other services, education of personnel and service organisation. Functional standards are related to the professional procedure for providing social protection services. These standards describe the way in which activities in the service are implemented, how the outcomes of service provision are evaluated and what the mandatory procedures are in the provision of social protection services (in particular the admission of users, assessment, planning, evaluation and re-examination of users). However, there is no legal definition of the quality of social services.

1.2 Evaluation of the quality of social services

The quality assurance processes that enable the functioning of the social protection system consist of a number of mechanisms: standards of social protection services; licensing of organisations that provide social protection services; licensing of professional workers who provide social services; and the accreditation of training programmes and programmes for the provision of social protection services. The Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services prescribes that, at least once a year, the service provider shall conduct an internal evaluation of the quality of the services provided, which includes a satisfaction survey among users or their representatives. This is the only provision that refers to the evaluation of social services.

1.3 Impact of quality assurance mechanisms

No publicly available data could be found on the impact of the quality assurance mechanisms.

1.4 Recommendations for the Republic of Serbia

Encourage development of quality assurance mechanisms, in line with human rights standards and based on the best international practices.

Encourage development of tools for the monitoring and evaluation of social protection services, incorporating the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities at all levels of the process (assessment, creation of tools, monitoring, evaluation).

Ensure mandatory external quality assurance mechanisms for each social protection service provided at national and local level, in line with the CRPD principles.

1.5 Recommendations for the European Commission

Prescribe conditions related to the development and/or establishment of quality assurance mechanisms for social services in the context of EU funding intended to support the development of the social protection system in the Republic of Serbia.

Ensure that best practices are shared among EU Member States and pre-accession states in relation to quality assurance mechanisms for social services, in line with the CRPD principles.

2 Conceptualising quality of essential services provided directly to the person: framework, definition, and research in the European States

2.1 Definitions and frameworks

The social protection system in Serbia is regulated by the Law on Social Protection.¹ This law defines the objectives of social protection, beneficiaries and specific social protection services, as well as their complementarity. The law also allows civil society organisations and other organisations that have been registered in accordance with the relevant regulations to act as social service providers.

Social protection services are, as defined by the Law, activities to provide support and assistance to individuals and families for the purpose of improving or preserving the quality of their life, eliminating or mitigating the risk of unfavourable life circumstances and creating opportunities to live independently in society.² According to the Law, users are divided according to their age: minors (children) and adults up to 26 years (young people) in situations when their health, safety and development are at risk due to family and other life circumstances – that is to say, if it is certain that, without the support of the social protection system, they cannot reach the optimal level of development. Beneficiaries of social protection are persons of legal age, 26 to 65 (adults), as well as adults over 65 years old (elderly), when their well-being, safety and a productive life in society are at risk due to old age, disability, illness and family and other life circumstances.³ From the above, it can be concluded that the law recognises disability as a personal (protected) characteristic that can make it difficult for a person to exercise the right to well-being, safety and a productive life in society.

The standards of social protection services, which should ensure the quality of those services, are prescribed by the Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services.⁴ These standards apply to all service providers in the Republic of Serbia. They are minimum standards, and service providers should not go below them in their service provision. The competent authorities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and local self-government units may prescribe higher standards or more favourable conditions for the implementation of certain social protection services. The prescribing of minimum standards is the exclusive responsibility of the Minister for social protection affairs, and they cannot be prescribed by other bodies.

The standards of social protection services include two groups of standards – structural and functional. Structural standards determine infrastructural, organisational and personnel conditions for providing services. These standards relate to venues, facilities, location, appropriate equipment, availability of other services, education of personnel and service organisation. Functional standards are related to the professional procedure for providing social protection services. These standards describe the way in which activities in the service are implemented, how the outcomes of service provision are evaluated and what the mandatory procedures are in the

¹ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 24/2011 and 117/2022 – decision of the Constitutional Court.

² Article 5(1) of the Law on Social Security.

³ Article 31 of the Law on Social Security.

⁴ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019.

provision of social protection services (in particular the admission of users, assessment, planning, evaluation and re-examination of users).

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the Republic of Serbia there is no legal or professional definition of the quality of social services used by persons with disabilities (or any other persons).

As regards the above-mentioned standards, several facts can be observed. First, all joint minimum standards refer to all groups of users, without considering the specificity of their personal (protected) characteristics. At first glance, the focus of the standards is on the service providers. Furthermore, the active participation of the user in the provision of service(s) is not sufficiently considered. Thus, the Rulebook prescribes, within the framework of the joint minimum functional standards, that the acceptance assessment of the user shall be carried out before they can use the service. The assessment is based on a direct conversation with the user or their legal representative, persons important to the user and other sources. In practice, this means that a significant number of persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, who are deprived of legal capacity, will not decide on the selection and provision of service(s). Therefore, it can be concluded that these (minimum) standards are not in line with the principles based on respect for human rights, including the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially in maintaining maximum independence and self-determination. Finally, it is important to note that neither the Law on Social Protection nor the Rulebook mention the CRPD, nor other ratified international human rights treaties.

2.2 Research studies and national debates

In the Republic of Serbia, there is no comprehensive expert report, document or academic papers focused exclusively on the quality of social services and quality assurance. Only a small number of publications are available that map social protection services in Serbia or analyse their funding. However, these publications focus on other aspects of providing social services, while they deal with the quality of services on a smaller scale. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, a publication that maps social protection services in local self-government units (LSGUs) in the Republic of Serbia, while also addressing issues related to the quality of social services provided in these LSGUs, will shortly be presented.

The publication *Mapping of social protection services and material support under the jurisdiction of local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia*⁵ was produced with the aim of ensuring comparability of data and indicators on the distribution, availability, efficiency and quality of social protection services under the jurisdiction of LSGUs. The findings of this research show that social protection services under the mandate of local authorities in Serbia are not sufficiently developed, and their availability is uneven. The number of service users is low, and the funds allocated for these purposes are also limited, while certain services are characterised by instability and unsustainability. Approximately one fifth of LSGUs provide only one service, mostly home care for the elderly and adults (with or without disabilities). More diverse and

⁵ Matković, G., and Stranjaković, M. (2020), *Mapping of social protection services and material support under the jurisdiction of local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade, Team for social inclusion and poverty reduction of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

complex services, aimed at a larger number of user groups, are provided only in larger cities. Among the services, the most widely available are daily community services: home care for the elderly and adults, personal assistance for children (*lični pratilac deteta*) and day care for children with developmental disabilities and other forms of disabilities.

It is important to note that, in its main findings, this publication paid special attention to the issue of the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to independent living, which is in accordance with the CRPD principles. It was emphasised, in particular, that support services for independent living aimed at persons with disabilities are extremely underdeveloped. A personal assistance service was established in only 17 LSGUs for 223 users. Supported housing for people with disabilities, which, for less developed LSGUs, is fully financed from the national budget, is present in only six out of 145 municipalities, provided for only 107 users.⁶ On top of scarce availability and geographical distribution, the way services are designed appear as problematic, as service delivery is not based on individual needs assessment, feeding the expectation that a person with disability should adapt to the service rather than the other way round.

The assessment of the quality of social services was carried out based on selected indicators. The indicators for service quality that were used in this research are:

- the share of users who use a service from providers who are licensed for a period of six years out of the total number of users; and
- the share of users who participated in the user satisfaction survey within the service (conducted by service providers) out of the total number of users of that service.

According to the publication's authors, these two indicators represent one aspect of service quality evaluation and, while quality indicators should certainly be further developed, they should be considered along with efficiency indicators. As an example, based on the previously mentioned indicators, it was observed that the quality of home care services can be positively evaluated based on both defined indicators. Home care records the highest score, given that 90 % of users receive the service from providers who are licensed or in the process of being licensed and who conduct a user satisfaction survey. When it comes to personal assistance for children and day care services, based on previously defined indicators, the quality has not been confirmed.⁷

Finally, it is important to emphasise that this publication does not analyse the quality of all social services, but only those that are most widely available at the local level, including the services provided to persons with disabilities that have been mentioned.

⁶ Matković and Stranjaković (2020).

⁷ Matković and Stranjaković (2020).

3 Evaluation / assessment of quality assurance for social services

The mechanisms for quality assurance processes that enable the functioning of social protection system are:

- standards of social protection services, prescribed by the Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services;
- licensing of organisations that provide social protection services, prescribed by the Rulebook on the licensing of social protection organisations;⁸
- licensing of professional workers who provide social services, prescribed by the Rulebook on the licensing of professional workers in social protection;⁹ and
- accreditation of training programmes and programmes for the provision of social protection services, prescribed by the Rulebook on the standards and accreditation procedure of training programmes for professional workers and professional associates in social protection.¹⁰

As mentioned before, the standards of social protection services include two groups of standards: structural and functional standards. Structural standards determine infrastructural, organisational and personnel conditions for providing the service. These standards relate to venues, facilities, location, appropriate equipment, availability of other services, education of personnel and service organisation. Functional standards are related to the professional procedure for providing social protection services. These standards describe the way in which activities in the service are implemented, how the outcomes of service provision are evaluated and what the mandatory procedures are in the provision of social protection services (in particular the admission of users, assessment, planning, evaluation and re-examination of users).

Licensing is a procedure in which it is examined whether a social protection institution – i.e. the service provider, as well as professional workers – meets the criteria and standards for providing services in the field of social protection.¹¹

Accreditation of the training programme ensures a minimum quality of staff training in social protection, which enables the development of competencies. The accreditation of training programmes should ensure their diversity, accessibility, comparability and competitiveness, it should enable monitoring and evaluation of the training programme's implementation, and it should encourage continuous improvement of the quality of the training programme.¹²

⁸ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 42/2013.

⁹ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 14/2013 and 53/2013-correction.

¹⁰ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 31/2014.

¹¹ Jovanovic, V., and Stevkovski, D. (2014), *Handbook for CSOs as providers of social services*, Belgrade, Gradjanske inicijative.

¹² Article 2 of the Rulebook on the standards and accreditation procedure of training programmes for professional workers and professional associates in social protection.

The bodies responsible for the implementation and supervision of the implementation of standards, the licensing of service providers, the licensing of professional workers and programme accreditation are the Ministry for Social Affairs, the Social Protection Inspectorate, the Republic Institute for Social Protection, the Programme Accreditation Committee, the Chamber of Social Protection¹³ and the Social Protection Ethics Board.

It is important to note that the disability perspective is not considered in the Rulebooks.

3.1 Types of quality assurance

1. Evaluation of the quality of social services

The Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services prescribes that, at least once a year, the service provider shall conduct an internal evaluation of the quality of the services provided, which includes a satisfaction survey among users or their representatives. This is the only provision of the Rulebook that refers to the evaluation of the social services provided. The first concern is the vagueness of this provision. It is unclear how (with which methods, methodology, tools, etc.) organisations should conduct internal evaluation. Furthermore, it is worrisome that only internal evaluation is prescribed, bearing in mind that external evaluation would ensure the independence of this procedure. Finally, from the disability perspective, it is of particular concern that internal evaluation can be conducted by examining the satisfaction of service user representatives. It may therefore be the case that, due to deprivation of legal capacity, persons with disabilities, especially those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, do not get the opportunity to express their opinion about the service provided. In other words, someone else must do it for them.

2. Licensing of social protection organisations

Based on the Rulebook on the licensing of social protection organisations, organisations should be licensed to provide a specific social service(s) to obtain the status of an authorised service provider. Having a licence is a formal requirement for the provision of social services. The licence is issued to the social protection organisation for a period of six years, which is the full duration. In some cases, the licence can be issued for a shorter period. It is a limited licence. The legislator had in mind situations in which a certain local community needs to provide specific social protection service(s) but there is no available organisation that could meet the criteria for issuing a six-year licence. The right to a six-year licence for the provision of social services is granted to an organisation which is registered in accordance with the law, which meets the standards for the provision of the service for which the licence is sought (location, space, equipment, number and expertise of staff, assessment, planning and activities for the provision of a specific social service) and which has been providing social services for at least two years. An organisation that does not meet all these requirements may be granted a limited licence, which limits the duration of the service, the number of users and the type of service provided. A limited licence is valid for up to five years and can be issued only once.

¹³ Jovanovic and Stevkovski (2014).

After the organisation submits a licence application, the competent authority begins the procedure. It is an administrative procedure, regulated by law, whose rules are applied by the ministry in charge of social protection affairs as the authority responsible for licensing organisations. Upon receipt of the request, social protection inspectors inspect and consider the documentation that has been provided to determine whether the requirements have been met. Mere consideration of the documentation provided is not sufficient for issuing a licence to an organisation. Therefore, social protection inspectors conduct a field visit to determine on the spot whether the requirement for issuing a licence has been fulfilled. After the factual situation has been fully determined, the minister responsible for social protection makes a decision on issuing a licence. The quality of work of organisations providing social protection services is maintained in accordance with the rules on licence renewal, suspension and revocation. Service providers are required to constantly maintain the quality of service provision, and if they do not do so, they face a number of sanctions: their licence will not be renewed after the expiry of the term for which it was issued; it will be suspended or it will be revoked. In this regard, the organisation to which the licence was issued is obliged to submit to a regular periodic review of conditions for further work. If, during the review procedure, the Social Protection Inspectorate finds that the organisation does not provide the services for which it received the licence in accordance with the established standards and conditions, the inspector notes this in the record. On the basis of that record, the ministry responsible for social protection can initiate the procedure for licence suspension. The organisation will be given some time to eliminate deficiencies that have been identified in the provision of the service. If the organisation does not eliminate the deficiencies within the period stipulated by the licence suspension decision, the authority responsible for issuing the licence makes a decision to revoke it.¹⁴

3. Licensing of professional workers who provide social services

A licence is a necessary condition for performing the basic professional tasks of social protection, in particular to work as a case manager, an educator, a professional worker for adults and the elderly in residential homes, a professional worker in a shelter, in foster care, as an independence counsellor, as a professional worker who provides services in the community (day care, home care, personal assistance, personal attendant, respite care), as a professional worker who performs advisory work and socio-educational activities or as someone providing other services that support life in a natural environment. The conditions for issuing a licence to perform these tasks in social protection, as established by the Law on Social Protection, are that the candidate has the educational qualifications that have been requested, that they have successfully completed an appropriate accredited training programme and that they have appropriate work experience, i.e. they have passed the licence exam. Appropriate work experience is defined as one year of experience, except for supervisory jobs, for which five years of experience is required.

The licence for performing social protection activities is issued by the Chamber of Social Protection. The licence is renewed at the request of the professional worker after the period for which it was issued has passed. To satisfy the conditions for renewing the licence, a professional worker is obliged to improve his/her skills,

¹⁴ Jovanovic and Stevkovski (2014).

continuously follow the development of social work theory and practice and acquire knowledge and skills that improve the protection and support of users. The process of licence suspension and revocation is conducted by the Chamber of Social Protection. A proposal for the suspension and revocation of a professional worker's licence can be submitted to the Chamber by the minister responsible for social protection, the social protection inspector, the professional worker's employer, a professional association, a user or the user's legal representative.¹⁵ This means that a person with a disability, as a user of social protection service(s), can submit a proposal for the suspension and revocation of a professional worker's licence, either on their own or through their legal representative. The suspension of the licence will be carried out if the social protection inspector temporarily prohibits the professional worker from independent work, if the competent authority of the Chamber imposes a temporary ban on independent work, if the body responsible for supervising professional work determines that the professional worker is not performing the work in accordance with regulations and standards, or if the Social Protection Ethics Board finds a violation of professional ethics. The revocation of a professional worker's licence is prescribed by the Law on Social Protection if the professional worker does not perform their work in accordance with regulations and standards, if their employment contract is terminated due to a violation of work obligations or work discipline, or if the worker grossly violates the code of ethics.¹⁶

After a description of the three quality assessment systems in detail, it can be concluded that disability is not directly addressed in the quality assurance system.

3.2 Types of services

All social services used by persons with disabilities are required to carry out the process of internal evaluation, based on provision of the Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services. Those services are prescribed by the Law on Social Protection and are grouped into five categories: assessment and planning services, day services in the community, independent living support services (including supported living, personal assistance, training for independent living and other types of support necessary for active participation in society), counselling and socio-educational services, and accommodation services including placement into residential institutions.

As mentioned above, the internal evaluation includes an assessment of user satisfaction. The Rulebook allows a user's representative to participate in the research. Bearing in mind that many people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities in Serbia are deprived of legal capacity, it can be inferred that these persons will not participate in the survey. Therefore, if the user's representative participates in the survey instead of the user, the evaluation of certain social services for persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities will not be conducted properly and in accordance with the principles of the UN CRPD.

¹⁵ Vlaović Vasiljević, D. (2013), *Community social protection service standards and licensing procedures*, Belgrade.

¹⁶ Vlaović Vasiljević (2013).

3.3 The formal bodies

According to the Rulebook on the licensing of social protection organisations, social protection inspectors are officially responsible for implementing the quality assessment of social services. Specifically, inspectors can state in their records that the social protection organisation does not provide services for which it has a licence, in accordance with the law and/or the prescribed standards and conditions. However, the Rulebook does not answer the question of who initiates the inspection procedure or how often inspections are carried out (and whether it can be carried out ex officio). The answer to this question is not given by the Law on Social Protection either. The Law on Inspection Supervision¹⁷ stipulates that the inspection supervision procedure is initiated and conducted ex officio or at the request of the supervised entity as well as at the request of another person who is recognised as a party to the procedure. Inspection supervision, depending on the type, can be regular, extraordinary, mixed, control or supplementary. Regular inspection supervision is carried out according to the inspection supervision plan. Extraordinary inspection supervision is carried out when it is necessary to take urgent measures due to incidents or upon learning about the existence of an illegal service provider. During 2018, a total of 230 inspections were conducted. Of that number, there were 7 regular and 76 extraordinary inspections. Other inspection procedures were related to licence requests and advisory official visits to organisations.¹⁸ Regarding social protection inspections, the last available information on the Ministry for Social Affairs official website is from 2019, regarding the plan for 2020. It should also be noted that there are only 15 social protection inspectors in the whole country.¹⁹

3.4 Stakeholders, experts by experience and organisations of persons with disabilities

The social service evaluation process is carried out by the licensed organisation that provides the service that is the subject of evaluation, whether it is a public or private entity, a civil society organisation or an organisation for persons with disabilities. Given that the provision related to the internal evaluation of social services is unclear, there is no prohibition for the organisation to hire an expert or a civil society organisation to help it in the planning and implementation of the evaluation. Thus, experts and civil society organisations can, for example, help with the selection of evaluation methods, data collection, analysis of collected data and conclusions about the success of the work. All the above applies to organisations of persons with disabilities and disability experts.

3.5 Methods and methodologies

When it comes to the evaluation of social services, the Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services prescribes only the following: 'At least once a year, the service provider shall conduct an internal evaluation of the quality of the services provided, which includes a satisfaction survey

¹⁷ *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 36/2015, 44/2018 – other law and 95/2018.

¹⁸ Information available at the Ministry for Social Affairs website at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/node/181192>.

¹⁹ Ministry for Social Affairs, Department of Social Protection Inspection, Workplan for 2020, available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/node/181192>.

among users or their representatives'. Therefore, all social protection institutions that have received a licence for their work are faced with the challenge of how to conduct an internal evaluation, that is, how to provide relevant data on the quality of the service(s) and recommendations for their improvement.²⁰ In other words, there is no legal framework that provides guidance on methods and methodologies for conducting an internal evaluation.

The Provincial Institute for Social Protection developed Guidelines for the implementation of internal monitoring and evaluation of social protection services²¹ with the aim of encouraging service providers to carry out the obligation of internal evaluation as prescribed by the Rulebook, and to highlight the essential importance of this process in the context of improving the quality of services for users. The document contains recommendations for implementation of the internal evaluation, as well as clarifying what can be the subject of evaluation and how the process can be carried out. Regarding methods, the Guidelines propose documentations, observation, questionnaires, interviews including group interviews, focus groups, photographs, SWOT analysis, etc. Given that there is no framework for specific evaluation of social services for persons with disabilities in Serbia, these Guidelines do not mention evaluation from the disability perspective.

3.6 The indicators and the principles

One of the joint minimum functional standards prescribed by the Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services is that 'The assessment of the user begins immediately after admission and ends within ten days'. The suggested indicators that are proposed in the Guidelines for evaluating the fulfilment of this standard are: (1) the assessment of the user starts immediately after admission, and (2) the duration of the assessment is no longer than ten days after admission. It should be kept in mind that, within the framework of this standard, it is also prescribed that, during the assessment of users, their priority needs should be considered, as well as their cultural and personal characteristics, such as geographical and national origin, mother tongue, religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

As already stated, there is no joint minimum standard applied exclusively to persons with disabilities. However, as this standard requires the service provider to consider, during the assessment, the user's personal characteristics (which may include disability), we can also observe the standard from the aspect of disability. Given that this standard can apply to any social service provided to persons with disabilities, it can be concluded that it does not reflect the CRPD principles to a great extent, except that it is certainly important for users with disabilities that the assessment begins and ends as soon as possible because of their benefit and inclusion in the community through specific social services. Accommodation in residential institutions is definitely

²⁰ Amity, 'How to conduct an internal evaluation of the quality of services provided', Belgrade, 18 January 2017, <http://www.amity-yu.org/2017/01/18/kako-sprovesti-internu-evaluaciju-kvaliteta-pruzenih-usluga/>.

²¹ Provincial Institute for Social Protection (2020), *Guidelines for the implementation of internal monitoring and evaluation of social protection services*, <https://www.pzs.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SMERNICE-ZA-INTERNI-MONITORING-I-EVALUACIJU.pdf>.

an exception, however, bearing in mind that this social service, which still exists in Serbia, is in contradiction with all CRPD principles.

Furthermore, the Guidelines propose another indicator to evaluate the quality of the social services provided. The Rulebook on detailed conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services stipulates that the implementation of internal evaluation is one of the joint minimum functional standards. As already explained, the internal evaluation, according to the provisions of the Rulebook, should also include an examination of the satisfaction of users or their representatives. In accordance with that, and to examine user satisfaction with the attitude of employees towards them, the Guidelines recommend the following indicators: (1) number of users included in the satisfaction assessment; (2) the average rating of satisfaction with employee attitudes is at least 4; and (3) the number of complaints.

The proposal of these indicators can be extremely important for persons with disabilities. First, the indicators refer exclusively to the assessment of user satisfaction, excluding the possibility of users' representatives participating in the survey instead of them. This setting is in accordance with the CRPD principle related to maintaining the highest level of independence as well as participation in all aspects of life. The indicator related to the number of complaints filed against employees in organisations is also very important for persons with disabilities as users of social services. In this way, this indicator enables and encourages the expression of disagreement with certain actions of employees, demanding respect for the dignity of the person and personal autonomy, as well as preventing any form of humiliation and abuse of service users. If the proposal for the adoption of this indicator was adopted, it would be in accordance with the CRPD principles related to physical, mental, social and vocational ability. Unfortunately, practice shows that users, especially when it comes to persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, are not aware of the possibility of filing complaints, and even when they are, they often do not dare to initiate this procedure out of fear of consequences. This is particularly common in the provision of social services, where the quality of life of the user with disability depends entirely on the employee (of the service provider).

4 The impact of quality assurance mechanisms and systems and promising practices: strengths and weaknesses

4.1 The impact of quality assurance mechanisms

Unfortunately, there is no publicly available data on the impact of the quality assurance mechanisms.

The only available information refers to the number of revoked licences for professional workers. From 2015 until the end of 2019, four licences were revoked.²²

It should be noted that inspections in the social protection system are carried out mainly as extraordinary inspections, usually due to incidents or after learning about the existence of an illegal service provider (unregistered entities without a licence) and upon a request to determine the fulfilment of the conditions for obtaining a licence for provision of social protection services.²³ The reason for this is primarily the insufficient number of social protection inspectors, which makes it impossible to ensure a greater number of regular inspections and continuity of control over social welfare service providers and other institutions – the supervised entities in this area. In the 15 years of the Ministry's Social Protection Inspectorate, a total of 138 work bans were issued to illegal service providers (unregistered entities) – in 2019, five work bans were issued.

4.2 The role of human rights NGOs, Ombudsman, and other related offices

Independent human rights mechanisms exist in Serbia, but they are not officially involved in the quality assessment of social protection services. However, an unsatisfied user of a social protection service can file a complaint. In 2021, the new Law on the Protector of Citizens was adopted, and the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) is mandated as an independent monitoring mechanism for the CRPD in the Republic of Serbia.²⁴ In addition, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination established an independent body – the Commissioner for Protection of Equality – and provides the mechanism for filing a complaint based on discrimination on the grounds of disability. The Law on the Ombudsman makes it possible to file a complaint to the Ombudsman in cases of violations of rights by governmental institutions, bodies and public companies. There is a deputy Ombudsman for persons with disabilities and the elderly, and the Ombudsman's Council for persons with disabilities and the elderly consists of various experts and activists from the disability movement. In addition, both independent institutions, the Ombudsman²⁵ and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality,²⁶ issue opinions and recommendations on current legislation and bills. Until now, neither of the independent institutions published a report on the quality of social services, nor was such information included in their regular annual reports.

²² Chamber of Social Protection, list of revoked licences, available at: <https://www.komorasz.rs/spisak-oduzetih-licenci/>.

²³ Ministry for Social Affairs, Department of Social Protection Inspection, Workplan for 2020.

²⁴ Article 2(2) of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, *Official Gazette*, No. 105/2021.

²⁵ Ombudsman, persons with disabilities and elderly persons page (in Serbian), <https://www.osobesainvaliditetom.rs/>.

²⁶ Commissioner for Protection of Equality, opinions and recommendations in complaint proceedings based on disability (in Serbian), available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/misljenja-i-preporuke/misljenja-i-preporuke-u-postupku-po-prituzbama/invaliditet/>.

4.3 Promising practice

No promising practices could be identified in the Republic of Serbia related to services used by persons with disabilities. Furthermore, there is no publicly available information on any progress in terms of development of a quality assurance system in social protection services.

Three case studies	Public service	Private	NGO
Describe the type, scope and aim of the service used by persons with disabilities.			
What quality assurance system exist? Is there a timeframe? What is the relevant authority? (questions under Section 3.1, 3.2, 3.3) Does the quality assurance system explicitly address disability issues?			
Which methods and methodologies were used in the quality assurance system? (questions Section 3.4)			
How are people with disabilities / disability organisations involved in the assessment process? Are they consulted? (questions under Section 3.5)			
What indicators are used in this particular quality assurance system?			
Which CRPD principles are included in the quality assurance framework?			
What evidence is there that the relevant quality assurance system has an impact on the quality of the social service delivered to persons with disabilities, on the attractiveness of the sector and on the skills of the workforce?			

4.4 Analytic reflection

This analysis has shown that there are no proper quality assurance mechanisms in place in relation to any social protection service. The other existing challenge is that social protection services are mostly provided at the local level, and thus are not evenly distributed. Many persons with disabilities cannot use any of the services, since social protection services are rarely designed for them. In addition, there is a rulebook setting standards for the quality of services, however no mandatory checks of the quality of services are carried out. Thus, it can be concluded that existing services in Serbia are not aligned with the principles of the UN CRPD.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for the Republic of Serbia

Encourage the development of quality assurance mechanisms, in line with human rights standards, and based on the best international practices.

Encourage the development of tools for the monitoring and evaluation of social protection services, incorporating the CRPD principles and ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities at all levels of the process (assessment, creation of tools, monitoring, evaluation).

Ensure mandatory external quality assurance mechanisms for each social protection service provided at national and local level, in line with the CRPD principles.

5.2 Recommendations for the European Commission

Prescribe conditions related to the development and/or establishment of quality assurance mechanisms for social services in the context of EU funding intended to support the development of the social protection system in the Republic of Serbia.

Ensure that best practices are shared among EU Member States and pre-accession states in relation to quality assurance mechanisms for social services, in line with the CRPD principles.

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