

## General quality guidelines for Estonian social services<sup>1</sup>



As of 1 January 2018, pursuant to subsection 3 (2) of the Social Welfare Act, quality principles came into force in the provision of social services, which must be followed in the provision of services.

The social service provider must follow the generally accepted quality principles when providing social services: person-centeredness, the empowering nature of the service, results-oriented approach, needs-based approach, integrated approach, protection of individual rights, involvement, competence and ethics of an employee, and good organization and quality management of the organization.

The general quality guidelines for social services are based on the above-mentioned quality principles, the attached criteria reveal the content of the principle and the quality indicators allow to check the compliance of the service provision with the quality principles.

In addition, the Estonian National Social Insurance Board has prepared service-based quality guidelines for all social services in the Social Welfare Act, which serve as a technical aid and basis for developing common understandings in providing quality social services to service financiers, service organizers, service providers and people in service.

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\*The quality guidelines for social services have been prepared under the European Social Fund's conditions for support (ESF TAT) 'Welfare Services that Support the Participation in Job Market in 2014–2020' clause 2.3.3 'Improving the Quality of Estonian Welfare Services by Quality Themed Trainings, Consultations and Introduction and Implementation of Quality Management Systems'.

\*Terms that need to be explained in the text are listed at the end of the text.

## AVAILABILITY, AFFORDABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT OF SERVICE PROVISION

Services are available, affordable and accessible for people. Services are provided in a supportive environment.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Availability and affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The availability of up-to-date and comprehensible information to the target group of the service will be ensured.</li><li>• Information about possible services is provided in a comprehensible way.</li><li>• People are helped to find a suitable service and make choices.</li><li>• Information on a contribution of a person when paying for the service shall be disclosed in a clear and comprehensible manner.</li><li>• When charging for the service, the solvency of a person is taken into account, they are informed about the possibilities to receive support and/or assistance in paying for the service.</li></ul>
Environment of service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physical access to the service is guaranteed.</li><li>• The service is provided in a physical and social environment that supports the achievement of the goal.</li><li>• The place of residence of a person is taken into account when planning and providing the service.</li><li>• The service is provided in an environment that contributes to the fulfilment of the individual needs and goals of a person and to the empowerment of a person.</li></ul>

## PERSON-CENTREDNESS, NEEDS-BASED AND INTEGRATED APPROACH

Services meet the individual needs of a person, improve or maintain their quality of life. The services comprehensively cover human needs, are aimed at networking between services and service providers in different fields (e.g. education, work, health care, etc.). If necessary, the continuity of services and a smooth transition from one service to another is ensured. In order to better provide the service, cooperation is established with the person, other service providers as well as related stakeholders.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Person-centred, purposeful and needs-based services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person's individual goals, needs, strengths and opportunities are assessed and taken into account.</li> <li>• When planning the service, the goal of the service is formulated together with the person, when and how to reach the desired goal is agreed upon.</li> <li>• When planning the service, the actual and changing needs of the person are taken into account and followed.</li> <li>• The services provided in advance and in parallel and the impact of the services are taken into account when assessing the needs of and setting goals for a person.</li> <li>• The needs of a person are assessed regularly.</li> <li>• Time and appropriate methods based on the person's needs are selected for the provision of the service.</li> </ul>
Integrated approach, smooth service organization and networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provision of services is based on an integrated approach, ensuring a smooth organization of services that takes into account the needs, expectations and opportunities of a person as a whole.</li> <li>• The physical, intellectual and social needs of a person are taken into account when planning and providing the service.</li> <li>• The living environment of and people close to a person is taken into account when planning and providing the service.</li> <li>• The services provided in advance and in parallel and the impact of the services are taken into account when planning and providing the services.</li> <li>• The person is provided with the necessary services in cooperation with other service providers.</li> <li>• Duplication of services is avoided when providing services.</li> <li>• Community-baseness is taken into account, and community resources and opportunities are used when planning and providing the service.</li> <li>• The person and their relatives are informed about the most suitable service and service provider.</li> <li>• In cooperation with other service providers, the transition from one service to another or the exiting from the service is organized, if necessary.</li> <li>• Depending on the person's needs, cooperation is established with other service providers, network partners and people close to them.</li> </ul>

## THE EMPOWERING NATURE OF THE SERVICE, INVOLVEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In providing the service, the independence of a person in organizing their life is increased or maintained by involving and supporting the person in defining their personal goals and needs. The person, their relatives and other stakeholders are involved in the planning, development and performance evaluation of the service as active participants. Organizations providing social services base their work on international human rights law. The rights of a person under the law are guaranteed.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Empowering of a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person is informed and is aware of their rights, opportunities, obligations and responsibilities in achieving the goals of using the service.</li> <li>• The development of the person's independence is supported.</li> <li>• The person is encouraged to identify and formulate their real needs and is supported in implementing them.</li> <li>• The person is given motivating feedback on their developments.</li> </ul>
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person or their guardian participates in defining their personal goals and needs.</li> <li>• The person or their guardian participates in the planning, development and evaluation of the effectiveness of the service.</li> <li>• The representation of service recipients participates in the development of the service and performance evaluation.</li> <li>• Relatives of the person and other related stakeholders, including independent organizations, are involved in service planning, development and service performance evaluation.</li> </ul>
Human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service is provided in a way that ensures respect for and compliance with human rights.</li> <li>• The service is provided in a way that ensures the privacy and security of the person.</li> <li>• The service is provided in a way that ensures the protection of personal data related to the provision of the service (private and special types of personal data).</li> <li>• The person is treated as an equal partner.</li> <li>• The person is guaranteed access to information about them related to the provision of the service.</li> <li>• The service provider has created an opportunity for the person to submit complaints in accordance with their abilities.</li> <li>• The complaints procedure is clear and simple and ensures that complaints are registered and resolved objectively.</li> </ul>

## RESULTS-ORIENTED APPROACH

The services are evaluable, effective and aimed at improving/maintaining the person's quality of life.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Evaluation of results and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the set goals, the direct results and impact of the service provision are regularly evaluated.</li> <li>• The person and their relatives give the service feedback and have the opportunity to make suggestions for improving the service.</li> <li>• The evaluation results are analysed together with the person and changes and improvements are introduced in the service's activities and the provision of service, if necessary.</li> </ul>

## COMPETENCE AND ETHICS OF EMPLOYEES

The services are provided by qualified employees, whose professional development the service provider constantly contributes to. The service provider describes the ethical standards that employees follow when providing the service.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Competence of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are informed and adhere to the core values of the organization.</li> <li>• Employees are informed and know their own roles, tasks and responsibilities and of other employees, and employees know during which issues to turn whom to.</li> <li>• Conditions will be created for the development of employees' competencies.</li> <li>• The development and training needs of employees are regularly assessed.</li> <li>• The service is provided in accordance with the principles of teamwork.</li> <li>• Employees are made aware of the requirements of the law and their responsibilities.</li> </ul>
Ethics of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The daily work of employees is regulated by a set of principles and values, which is guided by the Code of Ethics for Social Work Professionals.</li> </ul>

## GOOD WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION

The organization plans its activities, evaluates and analyses the results of the activities and improves its activities. The responsibilities, obligations and roles of the employees have been agreed upon. The service provider ensures a suitable working environment and conditions for its employees.

Criterion	Content of the criterion
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organization has a clear mission, vision and values that are the basis for providing the service and setting goals.</li> <li>• The organization has a clear strategy/development plan/plan, which formulates the goals of the organization.</li> <li>• The activities of the organization are based on the set goals and legal requirements.</li> <li>• Performance indicators will be identified to help assess the achievement of the set goals.</li> <li>• The results of the organization's activities are regularly evaluated and analysed (internal evaluation) and improvements are made accordingly.</li> <li>• The summaries of the feedback and the results of the satisfaction surveys are made available to the person, their relatives and other related stakeholders.</li> <li>• The organization systematically promotes quality and raises quality awareness.</li> <li>• Timely and relevant practices are applied and future needs are taken into account when designing services.</li> <li>• Information about the operation of the organization is distributed to employees in a way that is understandable.</li> </ul>
Working conditions and the organisation's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The compliance of the environment with working environment requirements and the goal of the service is ensured.</li> <li>• The physical and mental safety of employees shall be ensured in accordance with the specifics governing the provision of services.</li> <li>• Employees are provided with the necessary tools and premises to perform their duties.</li> <li>• Risks related to the work environment are assessed regularly.</li> </ul>

## Definitions

**Goal** – the future state to be achieved. A good goal is formulated in a positive way and the result is motivating enough for the person to want to work towards achieving it. When formulating a measurable goal, SMART goal rules are of help:

**Specific** – the goal is clearly stated

**Measurable** – the achievement of the goal is described by a specific indicator

**Achievable** – the goal is attainable given the situation

**Relevant** – the goal is directly related to the situation to be changed and focused on the result

**Timely** – a specific deadline has been set for achieving this goal

**Quality of life** – people think of well-being as the situation in social, economic, psychological, mental, health and societal terms<sup>2</sup>. The 1993 World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>3</sup> definition of quality of life is an individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The WHO model of quality of life consists of indicators that focus on areas such as health, financial status, education, family, participation in society, living conditions, environment, security and reassurance, leisure, etc. In Estonia, the following aspects are also considered generalized when defining a person's quality of life:

- physical and mental well-being (health, independence);
- self-awareness/self-determination and rights;
- social involvement;
- emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships;
- individual development;
- material well-being.

Based on their purpose and content, all social services offered in Estonia are always aimed at raising/maintaining a person's quality of life in some of these areas.

**Stakeholders** – the circle of people/organizations on whom the achievement of the goals of the organization or person depends. Internal stakeholders are, e.g. staff and people using the service. External stakeholders are various parties that are involved or important in the provision of the service (incl. relatives, partners, financiers, suppliers, etc.). It is important that the service provider has defined the stakeholders necessary for them.

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<sup>2</sup>OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization (WHO)

**Involvement of the stakeholders** – involvement in the work process means informing, consulting, listening to opinions, giving feedback, etc. Involvement in decision-making creates the opportunity to get better results and avoid mistakes. Better can mean different things: a more informed decision with improved predicted effects, the most responsive to the circumstances, a more effective, more understood and supported decision that is implemented more quickly<sup>4</sup>.

**Person** – the service user who uses the provided service directly.

**Involvement** – making decisions together with those who are affected and taking them into account.

**Community-baseness** – based on the actions of people with the same geographical location, similar mind-set or similar interests.

**Cost effectiveness** – cost management in a way that minimizes costs.

**Participation** – participation is an important condition and component of involvement. Nelissen's participation scale (Van der Kley, 1988) distinguishes between four types of participation: compassion, co-thinking, involvement and co-determination. Each level means increasing participation. Herz (1985) identified four principles of participation: the right to speak, co-decision, shared responsibility and autonomy.

**Service organizer** – the service provider can be the state or local government, which is responsible for the availability, organization and quality of social services in a certain area.

**Service provider** – a legal or natural person who provides services directly to a person.

**Service financier** – a legal person that finances the activities of a service provider or reimburses a person for the cost of a service. In the case of state social services, this may be the Estonian National Social Insurance Board; in the case of local government services, it may be a local government unit. The service can also be financed by, for example, insurance companies, employers, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, etc.

**Performance of services** – the immediate results of the provision of the service and the impact in terms of changes in the quality of life of a person. At the individual level, the immediate result is the fulfilment of indicators related to the goals of a person. Collective results are aggregate statistical indicators of the results obtained by different service users and the impact on the quality of life.

**Activities** – interventions to achieve the goals (e.g. art therapy, needs assessment, CV drafting, etc.).

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<sup>4</sup> Kaasamise käsiraamat ametnikele ja vabaühendustele, Eesti Mittetulundusühenduste ja Sihtasutuste Liit 2009. [www.osale.ee](http://www.osale.ee)



**Performance indicators** – indicators used to understand the results or the impact of the service on the quality of life – specific, observable, measurable characteristics, activities or conditions that indicate whether the expected change has taken place.

**Empowerment** – deliberate encouragement of people’s capacity to act, including will, sense of responsibility, legal awareness, competence and skills, so that they have more opportunities to participate more actively and meaningfully in development, planning, organization and management. When a person is empowered, their ability to represent themselves in different situations increases (self-definition, expression of their opinion, awareness of rights, etc.). The person’s independence from services and assistance will increase.

**Networking** – involvement of important stakeholders to solve different situations. Mobilizing, enriching and strengthening contacts with the existing network.