

# Driving up Quality in Social Services

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



*This document is the Executive Summary of the briefing 'Driving Up Quality in Social Services,' published as an output of the 2022 meeting of the European Social Network's Working Group on Quality of Social Services. Read the full briefing for a more comprehensive description of the definition of, and approaches to, quality in social services; a snapshot of current trends of social service quality assurance in European countries; and relevant EU policies, followed by an overview of potential quality principles and considerations for future work. This is the first of a series of four briefings that summarize the findings of the annual meetings of the 2022-2025 ESN Working Group on Quality of Social Services.*

### **What is quality of social services and how can it be measured?**

The right to access quality social services is notably enshrined in principles 11, 18 and 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. According to the International Organization for Standardization, 'Quality' can be defined as the "appropriate delivery of a mutually agreed service or product." In the context of social services, the appropriateness of a social service delivered is defined in a dialogue of three key stakeholders of social care and support: the beneficiaries, public authorities, and service providers. Together, they should agree on processes, standards, indicators, and outcomes that ensure the quality of services. Quality can also be measured in relation to the general performance of the care system in a municipality, region, or country. To unify the socio-economic differences between countries, regions and municipalities at the European Social Network (ESN) we have proposed a framework to measure the performance of social services systems; the REC Index, which includes three key components: social rights, economics and coverage.

### **Social Services Quality Assurance Trends**

In the framework of the 2022 ESN Working Group on quality in social services, the following trends impacting social services quality assurance have been identified so far:

1. A shift from input based to output based quality measurement
2. Care is centred on the person's (and carer's) needs
3. A shift from institutional to home, family and community-based services
4. The increasing role of quality standards and improvement agencies
5. A culture shift from quality monitoring to continuous improvement

6. Self-assessment as part of continuous improvement
7. External quality certification
8. Integration of health and social care
9. Procurement and quality in social services
10. Personal budgets

## **The Need to reform EU Guidance on Quality in Social Services**

The [voluntary quality framework for social services](#), which is the only overarching EU guidance on quality in social services dates to 2010 and is rather unknown, especially at local and regional level. ESN believes that to promote quality across social services, an up-to-date common cross-sectoral quality social services framework at European level is needed. In our briefing we have highlighted trends and some potential principles, which should be reflected in future EU guidance on quality in social services. More recent guidance has been developed for early childhood education (2019) and long-term care (2022), but these guidelines should not remain standalone documents, but be in full alignment with an updated cross-sectoral framework.

## **Common Principles of Quality**

Inspired by the quality principles mentioned in the existing European and national frameworks, ESN's working group discussed principles which should form the basis of a new European cross sectoral quality assurance framework. These encompass principles such as human-rights-based, safe, outcomes-oriented, person-centred, respect, partnership and trust, choice, empowering, easy to access, community-based, transparent, integrated and comprehensive, accountability, well-resourced/well-funded, workforce support. These principles need to be translated into objectives, standards, and measurable indicators.

## **Future Reflections**

The EU has a role in supporting the development of EU-wide principles and standards that can be shared, help support ongoing improvement and ensure consistency.

ESN can support the EU in establishing a common language for standards i.e., define what can be commonly understood under terms such as home care, community care, independent living, residential care, care home, professional and informal carers, family carers.

The working group will continue to identify and assess national and local quality frameworks to support the process of overhauling the current EU quality framework and make proposals to ensure individual frameworks are integrated within this process.



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