

Principles of Quality in Social Services



*Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and **care** of good **quality**.*

European Pillar of Social Rights Principle 11

*Everyone has the right to affordable **long-term care** services of **good quality**, in particular home-care and community-based services.*

European Pillar of Social Rights Principle 18

*Access to social housing or housing assistance of **good quality** shall be provided for those in need.*

European Pillar of Social Rights Principle 19

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About the European Social Network

The European Social Network (ESN) represents the voice of public social services as employers, managers, funders, planners, providers, and inspectors of social services in Europe. ESN inspires Social Services Leaders to Improve the Lives of People in the Community through the development and exchange of knowledge to improve policy and practice in public social services, including all support and community-based services fighting poverty, promoting social inclusion and autonomy, child protection, protection of people with disabilities, care and support for older people, homeless people, and people and families in disadvantaged socio-economic situations.

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About this Briefing

This briefing has been drafted in the context of the 2023 annual meeting of the **European Social Network's Working Group on 'Quality in Social Services'**.

The Group, which runs from 2022 to 2025, aims to make a **proposal for an updated European Social Services Quality Framework** that takes account of current social services trends and developments. This proposal is the result of a **co-creation approach** implemented by the ESN Secretariat with members of the European Social Network in the framework of our Working Group on Quality in Social Services. This co-creation approach includes a series of questionnaires, annual meetings and focus groups sessions with professionals from public authorities, inspection and regulatory bodies, applied research and providers, as well as feedback from people using social services.

- In 2022, the Group made an assessment of key trends in social services quality assurance and put forward its first ideas of key principles for quality in social services.
- In 2023, the Group members agreed the key principles of quality that are relevant for social services, which will underpin the Group's proposal for common European social services quality standards.
- In 2024 and 2025, the Group will define standards and indicators for compliance, in line with the agreed principles.

The 2023 Working Group meeting brought together social services directors, professionals, and researchers from 16 European countries, representing local, regional, and national public social services, quality inspection agencies, research organisations and professionals' associations.

This briefing presents the principles that should steer the Group's proposal for a common European framework for quality in social services. The briefing also points out how and why some principles differ from the [2010 EU Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services](#).

The content of this briefing is based on desk research, the presentations and discussions of the 2023 Working Group meeting and questionnaires completed by ESN members from 17 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom) in February-March 2023. The questionnaire collected feedback on quality principles discussed at the first meeting of the Working Group in 2022.

Executive Summary

This is the Executive Summary of the briefing 'Principles of Quality in Social Services', published as an output of the 2023 meeting of the European Social Network (ESN)'s Working Group on Quality in Social Services. This is the second of a series of four briefings that summarise the findings of the annual meetings of the working group between 2022-2025.

Read the full briefing for a more comprehensive review of principles underpinning national quality frameworks for social services in different European countries and the Working Group's proposal on the principles that should underpin ESN's vision for a future EU framework on quality in social services.

Why a revamp of the European Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services?

Thirteen years after its introduction, the impact of the 2010 EU Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services (VFQSS) has been limited. Only three countries (Bulgaria, Estonia and Romania) refer to the VFQSS in its legislation. Several EU Member States do not deem it relevant for their national quality policies. Regional and local agencies, which are usually the competent authority for social services quality assurance, are mostly not knowledgeable of the European Framework. Therefore, ESN would like to put forward a new proposal which it expects to be more likely to be picked up as it will be more relevant for social services, with a clearer scope of application.

The framework will be a key reference document for:

- public regulators and quality agencies, which develop new standards.
- those who review existing ones in countries, regions and municipalities across Europe.

This Social Services Quality Framework will be based on principles, define standards and include indicators to measure compliance with the standards. This proposal is aligned with the approach taken in the development of existing national social services quality frameworks in European countries such as in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom.

The Working Group's Proposal for Principles of Quality in Social Services

After initial discussions on 15 principles of quality in 2022, in 2023, the Working Group members put forward a final number of **six principles of quality in social services**, building a basis for an actionable and effective quality framework:

1. Human Rights-based

2. Person-centred
3. Outcomes-oriented
4. Safe
5. Community-based
6. Well-managed.

A more extensive description of each of the principles and what it entails can be found below:

1. Human rights-based

Social services provision is based on the respect of people's human rights in line with international and national human rights legislation. A human rights-based approach to quality in social care and support seeks to ensure that the human rights of people using social services are protected, promoted and supported by staff and services. It places an emphasis on protecting and promoting people's rights and respecting their autonomy, privacy, dignity, values, preferences and diversity.

In social care and social services, this means people's right to:

- participate in their care and support
- fairness in terms of access and delivery of care and support
- being treated with dignity and respect and not discriminated against for any reason such as age, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or disability
- having the freedom to choose and give consent where this is possible
- being safe from harm and violence
- and being empowered to have control over one's life, self-manage and be independent.

2. Person-centred

The person is always at the centre of how the service is planned and delivered. The needs of the person are understood by the service provider, and the person is actively involved in planning, delivering and evaluating the care service in a co-production approach. The provider enables the person to define their personal needs and goals and enables them to take decisions and maintain as much control as possible over their lives.

The person has the freedom to choose the services which best respond to their needs. Services cooperate and work in an integrated manner, ensuring continuous, integrated and comprehensive support for the person across different care settings, services and sectors, including health, education, employment, and social cohesion. The service is accessible, meaning that people can access care in ways that meet their personal circumstances, including physical and digital

access. The service is available in a timely way, this means everyone can access the care, support and treatment they need when they need it.

3. Outcomes-oriented

Care and support should be oriented towards measurable outcomes. Services are planned and provided for people to have the best possible outcomes based on their needs and ensuring they have a good quality of life.

Attaining a good quality of life for the person in care or support according to objective and subjective indicators should be a key marker of quality in social services provision. The intended outcomes of social services are defined and measured jointly with the person.

4. Safe

Service users are safeguarded from the risk of harm, neglect or abuse. Safety is a priority for everyone and leaders embed a culture of openness and collaboration. People are always safe and protected from bullying, harassment, avoidable harm, neglect, abuse and discrimination. Their liberty is protected where this is in their best interests and in line with legislation.

Services recognise that people can be particularly at risk of not having their needs met when they are being discharged from one service to another, for example from an acute setting back to the community, or in the case of a child, transitioning between services or families. People also have the right to make choices that may be considered risky or unwise, as long as there is a sensible balance between their individual needs and preferences and their own, and others safety.

5. Community-based

A person receiving care and support services, is enabled to be part of and is included in the community. This means services are designed to ensure a person can live in their home or a home-like environment and maintains meaningful relations with their family, friends and wider community, wherever they live.

Social services should support people to be independent for longer, in their own homes and localities and staff advise people and where appropriate, family members or carers, of the supports that are available to them within and outside the service to meet their needs and to support their individual wellbeing.

Where appropriate the service involves people close to the person and supports them in their potential role of informal carers. Services are provided in the local community enabling people to overcome or manage any condition, disability, or life difficulties they may face within their communities. People are not segregated; they are seen as co-producers of their care and they are not treated in blocs.

6. Well-managed

There is an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement, shared by all managers and staff. Managers proactively support staff and collaborate with partners to deliver care and support. There are effective governance and management systems in place. Information about risks, performance and outcomes is used effectively to improve care. Information on care quality inspections results and advice for improvement are publicly available and presented in a transparent and accessible way. Accountability for quality of the service is clearly defined, and people are informed on how they can provide feedback on the quality of their care.

Well-managed services organise and manage their workforce to ensure they have the right staff with the required skills, flexibility, and experience to respond effectively to the needs of people for whom they provide care and support. Qualified and healthy workforce whose well-being and safety is taken into account, are supported through a positive culture of supervision and encouraged to develop new skills through training. Providers of services can work in a relationship of trust with inspection agencies and public authorities.

Future Steps

These principles will guide the future formulation of the framework standards, which will be co-created with our members throughout the year 2024. Finally, ESN will work with members to come up with indicators that will help practitioners measure compliance with the standards. For both, standards and indicators will also seek the views of persons using social services, so we can come up in 2025 with a framework consisting of principles, standards and indicators that becomes a reference for quality social services in Europe.

1. Revamping the European Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services

The core of European Union policies promoting quality in social services is the [2010 EU Voluntary Framework on Quality in Social Services \(VFQSS\)](#). Compiled in 2009 by the Social Protection Committee – an advisory policy committee to the Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council of the European Union, its purpose, at the time, was to help public authorities to enhance their capacity to organise and provide high quality social services.

In the context of public spending cuts following the 2008 financial crisis, it aimed to help policy makers to prioritise continuous development of both quality and cost-effectiveness of social services. Taking into account the differences in social services across European countries, the framework was designed as a voluntary reference point for national and sub-national quality regulators, proposing 14 quality principles. These include seven general principles which social services should fulfil to address the needs of the persons; two principles related to the providers-users relationship; two related to the public authority-service providers relationship; and three specifically related to human and physical capital.

Thirteen years after the VFQSS was introduced, its impact has been limited. A study conducted for the European Commission in 2022 found the VFQSS had a very limited direct take up in EU Member States. Only three countries (Bulgaria, Estonia and Romania), where regulations on the quality of social services had been developed or amended after 2011, referred to the VFQSS itself or its principles in their legislation. In some countries, there is no reference to the framework in the legislation ([European Commission, 2022](#)). Other texts, such as for example, Spain's Reference Catalogue of Social Services, lays out the basic typology and principles of social services and serves as a benchmark for coordination between different regions, which are responsible for the delivery and oversight of social services ([Ministry Of Health, Social Services And Equality, 2013](#)).

According to the Commission's study, many EU Member States do not consider the VFQSS relevant to their national quality regulations. Some EU Member States, such as Hungary and Poland, do not consider the VFQSS as having the potential to significantly contribute to an increase in the quality of social services at national level. The study acknowledges that the European framework is mostly unknown at local and regional levels, which limits its impact, as the competence for quality assurance in social services is situated in several EU countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Germany or Spain, at regional level ([European Commission, 2022](#)).

2. The purpose of a revamped European framework on social services quality

The main purpose of a revamped European Social Services Quality Framework is to propose a set of common principles, standards and indicators in social services quality assurance, so that people using social services can enjoy a similar level of quality in their services regardless of where they live.

The framework will be a key reference document for:

- public regulators and quality agencies, which develop new standards.
- those who review existing standards in countries, regions and municipalities across Europe.

With this clear scope of application, we expect it to be more relevant for the authorities responsible for regulating and inspecting social services.

A Point of Reference for Quality Assurance Across all Social Services


The Framework should concern services provided by public authorities, third sector and private providers and should apply to a wide range of social services. This is in line with national developments where there is a move towards having high-level overarching national standards underpinned by common principles across all social services, particularly social care (and in some cases health and social care combined) rather than having multiple standards for services for specific populations.

For example, HIQA, the Irish Care Inspector and Regulator, has developed a Standards Development Framework, which identifies principles of quality that are to be used consistently across all national standards to be overseen by HIQA, irrespective of the setting or service type per population ([HIQA, 2021](#)).

Health and Social Care Standards in Scotland apply to a diverse range of services from child-minding and daycare for children in their early years, housing support and care at home for adults, to care homes ([Scottish Care Inspectorate, 2017](#)).

France has a framework that applies to all social services and which offers “a single, standardised national framework common to over 40,000 establishments and services across the country” ([HAS, 2022a](#)).

Finally, the Framework must also serve as a reference point for social services providers’ own assessment as well as persons who buy their own care through personal budgets.



“The Standards are for everyone. Irrespective of age or ability, everyone is entitled to the same high-quality care and support.”
([Scottish Care Inspectorate, 2017](#)).

3. How should a future Social Services Quality Framework look?

A Social Services Quality Framework should be based on **principles**, define **standards** and include **indicators** to measure compliance with the standards.

This proposal is aligned with the approach taken in the development of existing national social services quality frameworks. A comparative review of quality frameworks in five English speaking countries conducted by Israel’s Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, found that:

“Quality standards usually include three levels of detail: Fundamental values (Principles); Standards; Characteristics/features/criteria.”

Similarly, HIQA in Ireland concluded in an international review of quality assurance frameworks that there is a move towards high-level overarching national standards underpinned by principles. This led to the decision to develop a set of principles to underpin all national standards for health and social care services in Ireland ([HIQA, 2021](#)).

Principles Underpinning National Standards for Health and Social Care Services in Ireland

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), Ireland issued a **Standards Development Framework**, which is a reference point for the development of all social services quality standards.



Image 1: Quality Assurance Principles in Ireland. Source: HIQA, 2021

The framework identifies four principles that should underpin all future national quality standards for health and social care services:

1. **A human rights-based approach:** The principle of a human rights-based approach (HRBA) means that health and social care services respect, protect and promote the human rights of the person receiving care and support at all times.
2. **Safety and wellbeing:** The principle of safety and wellbeing is about how health and social care services work to protect and enhance the safety and wellbeing of people who use their services.
3. **Responsiveness:** The principle of responsiveness includes both how health and social care services are organised to deliver coordinated care and support that meets the needs of people using their service, and how people working in these services identify, assess and respond to a person's needs in day-to-day practice, to ensure they receive the right care and support at the right time and in the right place.
4. **Accountability:** The principle of accountability is the foundation for how health and social care services ensure that people receive high-quality safe care and support that is consistent, coordinated and focused on achieving good outcomes for them. Accountable services have a clear vision for their work, support their staff to deliver on this vision, work well with other relevant services, and regularly assess the impact of their work on those who they support and care for.

These principles have been developed to be used consistently across all national standards developed by HIQA, irrespective of the setting or service type. The four principles are underpinned by the core concept of person-centred care and support. Person-centred care and support is the ultimate aim of everything health and social care services do. Person-centred care and support is not viewed as a principle in itself, rather it is an approach to care, with the four principles working together to achieve person-centred care and support ([Ibid.](#)).

3.1. Analysis of common principles in national quality frameworks and legislation

ESN has implemented a co-creation approach with its members for the formulation of the principles that will underpin our proposal for a future European Social Services Quality Framework. Members of the Quality Working Group have been key in helping us to come up with an overarching cross-European proposal for social services quality principles that will underpin a future proposal for social services quality standards. In this section, we describe the foundation principles of social services quality frameworks from several countries that were presented at the 2023 Working Group meeting.

Common Fundamental Quality Principles in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute in Israel conducted a comparison of social care standards in the following countries:

- England, Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- Scotland Care Inspectorate Scotland (CIS).
- Northern Ireland Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RIQA).
- Ireland Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).
- Australia Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC).

JDC concluded that the following five principles were the most common across the three countries social services quality frameworks:

- service user rights.
- management and leadership.
- effective care.
- safety and responsiveness.
- flexibility to service users.

	Service user rights (respect, involvement, dignity)	Management and leadership	Effective care	Safety	Responsiveness and flexibility to service users needs
England CQC	+	+	+	+	+
Ireland HIQA	+	+	+	+	+
North Ireland RQIA	+	+	+	+	–
Australia ACQSC	+	+	+	+	+
Scotland CIS	+	–	–	–	+

Image 2: Most Common Fundamental Principles of Quality from selected Inspection Agencies. Source: Presentation ‘Quality Standards in Social Care - An International Review’, Lior Beserman Navon, Researcher at JDC Myer Brookdale Institute, Israel, at the 2023 Meeting of ESN Working Group on Quality in Social Services.

Fundamental Principles of the National Quality Framework for Social Services in France

Angélique Khaled, Director of Social and Medico-social Care Quality, presented at the 2023 Working Group meeting, the National Quality Framework for Social Services in France, which is based on four key principles:

1. **Self-determination.**
2. Respect of **fundamental rights.**
3. **Inclusive** approach to support.
4. Ethical knowledge of **professionals** ([HAS, 2022b](#)).

Fundamental Principles of Quality Assurance in Romania

Adela Setet, Manager, Centre for Training and Assessment in Social Work (CFCECAS) in Romania explained that social services quality principles were included in national legislation on quality assurance in social services. In 2012, this legislation mentions the following principles:

1. **Effective, accessible, comprehensive, sustainable** social services, **centred on the individual** needs of the beneficiary.
2. Relationship between suppliers and their beneficiaries: use of **correct, transparent** and **accessible** means of **information** and communication.
3. Participation of beneficiaries: active **involvement of beneficiaries** and **their families** in the planning, granting and evaluation of social services.
4. Relationship between suppliers and-public authorities: effective **coordination** between **public and private sectors**, encouraging **partnerships** for the sustainability and **continuity** of social services.

5. Development of **Human Resources** (Law No. 197 1 November 2012 On Quality Assurance In Social Services, translation provided by [Global Regulation, 2016](#)).

Fundamental Principles of Quality Assurance in Bulgaria

As part of its EU Recovery and Resilience Plan, Bulgaria passed legislation on social services quality, which entered in force in July 2022, defining the minimum quality standards that guide the provision of social services. Article 18 outlines the following **specific principles**:

1. Systematic internal **control** and **monitoring** for better **efficiency** and **effectiveness**.
2. Orientation of measures to increase the quality of services towards achieving specific **results for users**.
3. **Active involvement** of persons using social services in the **processes of control** and **monitoring**.
4. **Fact-based approach to decision-making** to improve the quality of social services.
5. **Adequacy** and **timeliness** of measures to increase quality and professional support.
6. **Continuous improvement** of the quality of provided social services, based on analysis and facts. (Own translation of Article 18. - [Ordinance on the Quality of Social Services No. 135 of 22.06.2022](#)).

Fundamental Principles of Quality Assurance in Croatia

Seventeen Quality Standards for Social Services were set up with the adoption of specific legislation in Croatia in 2014. The standards have been formulated along **six** basic principles:

1. **Holistic/comprehensive** with an **emphasis on users**.
2. **Easy to understand** for users and families and available in local communities where users live.
3. **Promoted through partnerships** between users and service providers and other stakeholders (ministries, local and regional (regional) self-government units, schools, kindergartens, health centres, etc.).
4. **Suitable for users**, designed to **empower** service users and **respect** their rights, freedom of choice and self-determination.
5. **Efficient**, i.e. best possible ratio in meeting the need and the quality of the services in relation to the amount of human and material resources.
6. **Well-managed** and **results-oriented**, planned and evaluated in accordance with the planned results. (Own translation from [Ministry of Social Policy and Youth \(2014\) Rules on Quality Standards of Social Services, Official Gazette, No. 143/14](#)).

Fundamental Principles of Quality Assurance in Sweden

In Sweden, quality standards for social services and their indicators are not defined by law but developed and monitored by the National Board of Health and Welfare. Quality standards in social services were defined by the National Board of Health and Welfare in 2008 for the first time, in their publication ‘Good Quality in Social Services’ ([National Board of Health and Welfare, 2008](#)). Based on this document, the Board developed the concept of good care and support built around six key principles (or dimensions).

Dimensions of Good Care and Support					
Knowledge-based	Safe	Customised to the Individual	Effective	Equal	Available
Care and support based on the best available knowledge and proven experience.	Risk prevention shall prevent damage. Services must follow legal regulations.	Care and support must be given with respect for the individual's specific needs, expectations, integrity, and their involvement.	Care and support must make the best use of available resources to achieve set goals.	Care and support must be provided and distributed on equal terms for all.	Care and support must be available and given in a reasonable time.

Table 1: Fundamental principles of good care and support in Sweden. Own translation from [National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013](#).

Based on those principles, more specific standards and indicators have been developed for specialised social services such as care for older people and child care. In 2023, the National Board of Health and Welfare made a comparative study on how these principles have been translated into quality standards and indicators for different types of social services. Every 2 years, social services must transmit evidence to the National Board of Health and Welfare on how they meet the standards in three of six quality dimensions. In 2023, they reported on the quality principles **Safe**, **Effective** and **Available**. In 2024 services will report on **Knowledge-based**, **Customised to the Individual** and **Equal**. This model gives municipalities more time to work with quality development between the measurements, which are expected to promote quality development ([National Board of Health and Welfare, 2023](#)).

3.2. The Working Group’s Proposal for Principles of Quality in Social Services

In the first meeting of the Working Group, participants identified an initial list of 15 principles ([ESN, 2022](#)), based on international, European, national and local examples of quality frameworks presented in focus groups during the meeting. In 2023, the Working Group members reflected further on those initial principles through a feedback questionnaire prior to the meeting and in five focus groups during the meeting.

Based on the feedback from the questionnaire and focus groups discussions, the Working Group concluded that it was necessary to reduce the number of principles, to avoid overlap and develop an actionable and effective quality framework. Some of the initially proposed principles such as ‘well-funded’ turned out to be more of a means for standards implementation than a quality principle as such. In other cases, Group Members suggested integrating principles into more overarching ones, for example ‘promoting choice’ under ‘person-centredness’ or ‘workforce support’ under ‘well-managed’. Finally, members suggested the inclusion of additional principles not initially foreseen, such as responsiveness.

Initially Proposed Principles	Proposed Principles
Respectful	Human Rights-based
Empowering, Accessible, Responsive, Integrated, Comprehensive, Choice	Person-centred
	Safe
	Community-based
	Outcomes-oriented
Trust, Workforce Support, Partnership Accountable, Transparent	Well-managed

Table 2: Proposed Quality Social Services Principles. Source: Own creation.

Asked to provide feedback on the final principles, one of the Group Members said: “While it is important to agree on principles’ names it is even more important to define what they mean.” This is realised in the section below.

3.3. Defining Social Services Quality Principles



Image 3: Proposed Quality Social Services Principles. Source: Own creation.

1. Human rights-based

Social services provision is based on the respect of people's human rights in line with international and national human rights legislation. A human rights-based approach to quality in social care and support seeks to ensure that the human rights of people using social services are protected, promoted and supported by staff and services. It places an emphasis on protecting and promoting people's rights and respecting their autonomy, privacy, dignity, values, preferences and diversity.

In social care and social services, this means people's right to:

- participate in their care and support.
- fairness in terms of access and delivery of care and support.
- being treated with dignity and respect and not discriminated against for any reason such as age, gender, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or disability.
- having the freedom to choose and give consent where this is possible.
- being safe from harm and violence.
- being empowered to have control over one's life, and have autonomy and independence.

2. Person-centred

The person is always at the centre of how the service is planned and delivered. The needs of the person are understood by the service provider, and the person is actively involved in planning, delivering and evaluating the care service in a co-production approach. The provider enables the person to define their personal needs and goals and enables them to take decisions and maintain as much control as possible over their lives.

The person has the freedom to choose the services which best respond to their needs. Services cooperate and work in an integrated manner, ensuring continuous, integrated and comprehensive support for the person across different care settings, services and sectors, including health, education, employment, and social cohesion. The service is accessible, meaning that people can access care in ways that meet their personal circumstances, including physical and digital access. The service is timely, which means that everyone can access the care, support and treatment they need whenever they need it.

3. Outcomes-oriented

Care and support should be oriented towards measurable outcomes. Services are planned and provided for people to have the best possible outcomes based on their needs and ensuring they have a good quality of life.

Attaining a good quality of life for the person in care or support, according to objective and subjective indicators, should be a key marker of quality in social services provision. The intended outcomes of social services are defined and measured jointly with the person.

4. Safe

Service users are safeguarded from the risk of harm, neglect or abuse. Safety is a priority for everyone and leaders embed a culture of openness and collaboration. People are always safe and protected from bullying, harassment, avoidable harm, neglect, abuse and discrimination. Their liberty is protected where this is in their best interests and in line with legislation.

Services recognise that people can be particularly at risk of not having their needs met when they are being discharged from one service to another, for example from an acute setting back to the community, or in the case of a child, transitioning between services or families. People also have the right to make choices that may be considered risky or unwise, if there is a sensible balance between their individual needs and preferences and their own, and others, safety.

5. Community-based

A person receiving care and support services is enabled to be part of and is included in the community. This means services are designed to ensure a person can live in their home or a home-like environment and maintain meaningful relations with their family, friends and wider community, wherever they live.

Social services should support people to be independent for longer, in their own homes and localities and staff advise people and where appropriate, family members or carers, of the supports that are available to them, within and outside the service, to meet their needs and to support their individual wellbeing.

Where appropriate, the service involves people close to the person and supports them in their potential role of informal carers. Services are provided in the local community enabling people to overcome or manage any condition, disability, or life difficulties they may face within their communities. People are not segregated; they are seen as co-producers of their care, and they are not treated in blocs.

6. Well-managed

There is an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement, shared by all managers and staff. Managers proactively support staff and collaborate with partners to deliver care and support. There are effective governance and management systems in place. Information about risks, performance and outcomes is used effectively to improve care.

Information on care quality inspections results and advice for improvement are publicly available and presented in a transparent and accessible way. Accountability for quality of the service is clearly defined, and people are informed on how they can provide feedback on the quality of their care.

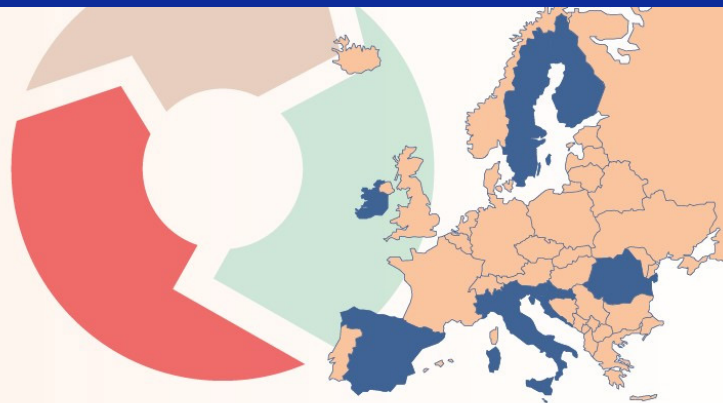
Well-managed services organise and manage their workforce to ensure they have the right staff with the required skills, flexibility, and experience to respond effectively to the needs of people for whom they provide care and support.

A qualified and healthy workforce whose well-being and safety is taken into account, is supported through a positive culture of supervision and encouraged to develop new skills through training. Providers of services can work in a relationship of trust with inspection agencies and public authorities.

3.4. Comparing the proposed key principles with the 2010 EU VQFSS principles

The 2010 EVQFSS put forward 14 quality principles for social services: seven as **general principles** for social **service provision**, two related to relationships between **providers and persons** using care, two on the relationship between service **providers and public authorities**, and three on **human and physical capital**.

Assessing Quality of Social Services Systems: The Social Services Index



The European Social Network has proposed a framework to measure the performance of social services systems. [The Social Services Index \(SSI\)](#) identifies **three key components** in each country's social services system: **social rights and policy**, **economic investment** in social services, and **social services coverage**. With the help of the data collected across these three components, ESN aims to help the European Commission to assess the performance of national social services systems and to formulate recommendations for national governments on how to improve their social inclusion policies within the framework of the European Semester.

The principles proposed by the ESN Working Group on Quality in Social Services are designed to assess the quality of a social service, not the quality of the system as a whole. This is one of the reasons why not all principles of the 2010 framework are included in ESN’s proposal.

Principles that can only be addressed at system level such as **affordability** or **availability**, mentioned in the 2010 EU Framework of Quality in Social Services, have not been put forward by ESN in this proposal. This is because a social services quality framework is concerned with assessing the quality of a service or programme.

Type of Principles	
General Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability • Accessibility • Affordability • Person-centred • Comprehensiveness • Continuity • Orientation towards outcomes
Relationship provider/user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for users’ rights • Participation and Empowerment
Relationship service providers/public authorities /other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership • Good governance
Human and physical capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good working conditions and working environment • Investment in human capital, • Adequate physical infrastructure

Table 3: Principles in the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services. Source: ([European Union, 2010](#))

Principles such as **Person-centred approach**, **Respect for user’s rights**, **Orientation towards outcomes** are part of the new proposal.

Other principles have been merged under overarching principles and will be reflected in the standards that will be elaborated for each principle.

- » **‘Accessibility’** will be a feature of the principle **‘Person-centred.’**
- » **‘Comprehensiveness’** & **‘Continuity’** will be features of **‘Person-centred.’**
- » **‘Good Governance’** defined in the 2010 EVQFSS as “Social services should operate on the basis of openness and **transparency**, respect for the European, national, regional and local legislation, efficiency, effectiveness, and **accountability** in relation to organisational, social and financial performance

of service delivery” will be reflected in standards to be developed under the principle **‘Well-managed.’**

- » **‘Good working conditions and working environment’** will be reflected in the standards to be developed under the principle **‘Well-managed.’**
- » **‘Investment in Human capital’** will be reflected in standards related to the principle **‘Well-managed.’**
- » **‘Adequate physical infrastructure’** will be reflected in standards related to the principle **‘Safe.’**

4. Future Steps

This proposal for the principles that will enshrine our future Social Services Quality Framework has been the outcome of a co-creation approach implemented with ESN members. Next steps include a consultation with all ESN members to confirm they agree with the proposed principles as well as with representatives of people using social services to confirm the principles are aligned with their views of how quality social services should be ensured.

These principles will guide the future formulation of the framework standards, which will be co-created with our members during 2024. Finally, ESN will work with members to identify indicators that will help practitioners measure compliance with the standards. For both, standards and indicators will also seek the views of persons using social services, so we can develop a framework consisting of principles, standards and indicators in 2025 that becomes a reference for quality social services in Europe.

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Organisations involved in the development of the principles in 2023

- Consortium of Retirement Homes - Vienna (Austria)
- National Association of Social Workers (Austria)
- Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW) Bruges (Belgium)
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Czechia)
- French National Authority for Health (HAS) (France)
- Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Equality Saxony-Anhalt (Germany)
- Municipality of Fyli (Greece)
- University of West Attica (Greece)
- Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) (Ireland)
- Health Service Executive (HSE) (Ireland)
- The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Organization (Israel)
- Welfare Department, Riga City Council (Latvia)
- Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) (Malta)
- Institute for Social Security (Portugal)
- Centre for Training and Assessment in Social Work (CFCECAS) (Romania)
- Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)
- Research and Documentation Centre (SIIS) (Spain)
- Municipality of Härryda (Sweden)
- National board of Health and Welfare (Sweden)
- Swiss Cities' and Towns' Social Policy Group (Switzerland)
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