

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of the briefing '[Towards a European Framework for Quality in Social Services](#)', published as an output of the 2024 meeting of the **European Social Network (ESN)**'s Working Group on Quality in Social Services. The Group's aim is to strengthen social services' quality assurance capacities, and for this purpose, it will propose an updated **European Framework for Quality in Social Services** as its final output.

This executive summary presents the main findings of the Group's **2024** work.

Read the [full briefing](#) for a more comprehensive review of ESN's vision for a future **European Social Services Quality Framework**.

What does the briefing propose and why?

The current **European Voluntary Framework for Quality in Social Services** is outdated. Therefore, ESN will propose a revamped framework that takes account of new trends and organisational developments within the social services sector to ensure relevance. It will propose more concrete standards that go beyond the broad quality principles defined in the current European Framework.

The proposed new standards will be overarching and applicable to different types of social services.

Who will be able to use the framework?

The framework will be a key reference document for:

- Public regulators** and **quality agencies** which develop new social services quality standards
- Those who review existing standards** in countries, regions, and municipalities across Europe
- Providers** who set up their own quality frameworks

What will the framework look like?

The proposed new standards will be overarching and applicable to different types of social services. Based on the assessment of the different national frameworks presented and discussed in the Group over the years of **2022** and **2023**, the Group agreed the following structure:

Key principles and themes
Standards formulated as 'I-' and 'We-' Statements
A list of Arrangements that providers can put in place
to meet the standards

To illustrate how this will look, we have designed the following structural outline:

Table 1: Outline of Framework Proposal

PRINCIPLE A			
THEME 1	QUALITY STANDARD		ARRANGEMENTS
	I-STATEMENT	WE-STATEMENT	
THEME 2	QUALITY STANDARD		
	I-STATEMENT	WE-STATEMENT	
PRINCIPLE B			
THEME 1	QUALITY STANDARD		ARRANGEMENTS
	I-STATEMENT	WE-STATEMENT	
THEME 2	QUALITY STANDARD		
	I-STATEMENT	WE-STATEMENT	

What are its key principles?

The Group identified six principles as most relevant:

Human Rights-based; Person-centred; Outcomes-oriented;
Safe; Community-based; Well-managed

Each principle is subdivided into themes. For example, the principle 'person-centred' has the following themes:

- a) People's involvement, b) Enabling choice, c) Responsive to needs, d) Recognising aspirations, and e) Accessibility

In total, there are **25 themes**. The principles and their themes are described in more detail in the full briefing.

All principles are translated into a specific set of standards, except for the principle 'outcomes-oriented'. This principle is mainstreamed across all standards, and they are all formulated as **outcomes**.

What are its standards?

In **2024**, the group defined quality standards for each key principle, with at least one standard per theme of a principle.

Those draft standards were formulated as 'I-' and 'We-' **Statements**, and their content was based on existing standards and practices in the participants' home countries.

The Group decided to formulate standards as 'I-' and 'We-' **Statements** because such statements reflect the views of the person using the service and the organisation providing the service. 'I-' and 'We-' **Statements** are formulated as pairs.

Together they form a **quality standard**. For each quality standard, there are several example **arrangements** that providers can put in place to meet these standards.

'I-Statements'

The **I-Statement** is the outcome a person should expect, formulated in a person-centred and outcome-based manner.

The use of **I-Statements** in quality frameworks for social services is a relatively new trend that occurred in **Ireland**, **Scotland**, and **England** over the past 10 years.

They have been introduced to make quality standards more person-centred, as they are formulated from the perspective of the person using social services in an inclusive co-produced process.

I-Statements were, for the first time, used in the [Scottish Standards for Quality in Health and Social Care](#) in **2017**.

In **2021**, **HIQA**, the **Irish Quality Agency**, announced it was using **I-Statements** for the development of future quality frameworks, such as the [Overarching National Standards for the Care and Support of Children using Health and Social Care Services](#).

In **2022**, **CQC**, the **English Quality Inspection Agency**, announced its new [Single Assessment Framework](#) will be composed of quality statements formulated as **I-Statements**.

'We-Statements'

The '**We-Statement**' formulates the outcome a service provider should aspire to, formulated in an outcomes-based manner.

'**We-Statements**' represent the provider's perspective and describe the aspirations providers adhere to, to provide quality social services. They were first used by **CQC** in **England** with the introduction of the new [Single Assessment Framework](#) in **2022**.

Arrangements - How providers can ensure they meet the standards

In addition to standards, the framework proposed by the Group will include descriptions of '**arrangements**' that illustrate which processes providers can implement to meet the standards.

These example '**arrangements**' are suggestions, and providers can use other processes if they also achieve this goal.

An **arrangement** that can ensure meeting the **I-Statement** "*I am involved in all care and support decisions affecting my life*", is, for example: "*We have processes in place to engage people in decision-making about their care.*"

Arrangements, for example, are used in the **Irish Quality Frameworks** for social services as a complement to **I-Statements**, which help providers demonstrate they have processes in place to meet their clients' expectations.

Finalising the Proposal

The final framework will be published in **2025**.

