

EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the Executive Summary of the briefing ‘[European Framework for Quality in Social Services](#)’, published as an output of the [European Social Network \(ESN\)](#)’s 2022-2025 Working Group on Quality in Social Services. The Group’s aim is to strengthen social services’ quality assurance capacities, and for this purpose, it developed an updated European Framework for Quality in Social Services. This executive summary presents the framework, its purpose and development process.

Read the [full briefing](#) for a more comprehensive review of ESN’s proposal for a 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The current [European Voluntary Framework for Quality in Social Services](#) is outdated.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 has developed a new framework that takes account of recent trends and organisational developments within the social services sector to ensure relevance and better take-up. The proposal includes concrete standards that go beyond the broad quality principles defined in the current European Framework. They have been developed in collaboration with experts and professionals from the social sector to ensure they are actionable and close to practice.

What is the scope?

The framework is overarching and applicable to different types of social services. For clarity on scope, the briefing provides definitions of quality and social services applicable to the framework.

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 ones in countries, regions and municipalities across Europe;
- providers who set up their own quality frameworks.

How was it developed?

The framework is based on evidence gathered from 24 European countries. The evidence was collected through questionnaires, presentations, group discussions and desk research. The group reviewed the evidence and identified the most relevant and up-to-date frameworks to serve as the basis for developing the proposal.

How does the framework look?

The framework provides an overarching set of standards for social services. It has the following structure:

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

To illustrate how looks, we have designed a schema:

Table 1: Outline of Framework Proposal

PRINCIPLE A			ARRANGEMENTS	
THEME 1	QUALITY STANDARD			
	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 **23 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?

Each standard is presented as '**I-Statements**' and '**We-Statements**', along with the **arrangements** that must be in place to ensure these standards are met. By formulating the standards in such a way, these are presented in a person-centred and outcome-oriented manner.

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 use 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.

Next steps

The purpose of the framework at different levels can be:

At European level, to...

- Revamp the current EU framework
- Make the Social Services Quality Framework a flagship initiative of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Launch a social innovation call to test quality frameworks locally

At national & sub-national level, to...

- Support public authorities with social services responsibilities to develop their own frameworks taking this framework as the basis for conversations with practitioners in the administration, professionals in public and third sector service providers and representatives of people using services.
- Support public authorities to review their current frameworks to be up to date with current trends.
- Provide a benchmark for self-assessment to providers and persons contracting their own services.

Organisations interested in using the framework can contact policy@esn-eu.org to organise a review of their current quality assurance tools or to request support for developing new quality standards.



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