

European Social Services Awards

The European Social Services Awards (ESSA) recognise innovation and excellence in social services, shining a spotlight on successful new approaches and the extraordinary ongoing work done by public social services managers, funders, planners, providers, and deliverers of social services.

Its aims are:

- To identify and promote best practice in social services
- To recognise excellent work done in the field
- To encourage peers to work with and support each other in improving their practice
- To promote innovation in social services in Europe

The entries, submitted in the **five categories** below, are shortlisted by a panel of experts and then voted online. Final scores are based both on the judges and online votes. In line with ESN's ethos of promoting peer relationships and a social service community, the final decision on the headline award, the **ESN Excellence in Social Services Award**, is made by all those gathered at the annual awards ceremony from across the social service community, with live voting at the event.

1. 2021 Theme

Each year, the European Social Services Awards are held under social service practice theme. The European Social Services Awards in 2021 are held under the theme **Building Resilience in Social Services**.

During the pandemic, all populations have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but in particular children, vulnerable families like those where parents are in unstable or low paid jobs, the homeless, and older adults, especially those living in residential facilities, all of them populations with whom social services work.

Closure of schools meant that the most vulnerable could not access support services operating through schools such as free school meals leading to the increase in the numbers of children at risk of poverty. The sharp increase of unemployment led to a rise of families in need of income support. Domestic abuse, violence against women and children, homeless' struggle to find shelter, reduction of care for people with disabilities, the isolation of older people, in residential and home care, are only some of the major challenges social services have faced during the past months.

Social services jumped into action to improve service delivery to those in need. The pandemic brought to light the essential role social services play in improving people's lives as well as the urgent need to build more resilient services and communities.

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While some challenges emerged as a direct consequence of this crisis, others related to social needs that were not adequately met prior to the crisis worsened, such as the lack of adequate housing and quality long-term care. In many European countries, [years of under-investment](#) before the pandemic meant that the social services sector struggled to meet the growing demand for support while ensuring the quality, accessibility, and continuity of services.

In 2021, the European Social Services Awards will explore how social services have responded to the crisis to ensure the continuity and quality of care for vulnerable populations and those in need of support across Europe. The Awards will honour the effort of social services in developing practice and programmes responding to immediate needs but also looking ahead towards building resilient services and communities that are better prepared for future crises.

Therefore, the aim is twofold:

1. To recognise the central role of public social services in responding to the Covid emergency and in the recovery after Covid.
2. To highlight the need to strengthen public social services to improve their preparedness for future crises.

The 2021 Awards seek to honour efforts to develop innovative and resilient models of care and support for all population groups: children and youth, families, adults with complex needs, older people, informal and formal carers.

Submissions may relate, for instance, to:

- crisis-preparedness plans and emergency responses to support the most vulnerable populations in light of health and social emergencies;
- crisis-preparedness plans and emergency responses to support the workforce in light of health and social emergencies;
- the development of coordination plans between different levels of government, other agencies and third sector organisations to ensure continuity of care;
- the development or promotion of community/volunteering initiatives in support of public services;
- the development of innovative practice to guarantee the continuity of care;
- the development of digital tools to facilitate the provision of social services and guarantee the continuity of care for the populations covered by social care and social services;
- the development of digital tools to address isolation/loneliness isolation of vulnerable people in residential or home care;
- the investment in telecare to provide support for people to remain in their homes;
- the development of projects and protocols for joint working between different care services;
- the development of practice or projects to take into account the views and wishes of people using social services and their families in planning.

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2. Categories

The award categories highlight different aspects of social services work. Applicants can submit their proposals in any of the following five categories:

- Social Service Innovation
- Outstanding Team
- Collaborative Practice
- Technology Tool
- Research Project

The headline category, the ESN Excellence in Social Services Award, is voted live at the Awards Ceremony.

- Excellence in Social Services Award

The headline award, the annual excellence award, recognises a stand-out project or team working in the 2021 theme of social services' resilience. Applications from any field of care or sector are eligible so long as they fulfil the criteria.

In addition to meeting the general criteria, applicants must demonstrate:

- An outstanding contribution to or an achievement in social service practice, either through an individual project or a continuing discernible practice
- An achievement specifically related to social services' resilience, crisis preparedness or continuity of care, including but not limited to the examples mentioned above.

- Social Service Innovation

Awards for social service innovation are open to applications demonstrating practices that show initiative in creating, implementing or promoting a new approach building resilience of social services. Practices may promote a new approach to the delivery of social services, particularly innovative practices developed during the crisis associated with the pandemic to guarantee continuity of care or social plans to make social services stronger.

In addition to the general criteria, entries should demonstrate:

- The innovative nature of the project or practice at hand - what is new about the project, how it is now (or expected to be);
- Evidence supporting the success and benefit of the new approach for people using the service and how the innovative approach made or could make the service more agile in its development and delivery;
- Potential lessons for other social services to build more resilient services.

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- Specific examples may include, for instance:
 - a newly established service/programme for emerging need(s),
 - innovative service/programme to respond to the crisis,
 - new projects or plans set up to improve their preparedness for future crises,
 - innovative outreaching practices,
 - a new case management approach,
 - or newly set up agency.

- **Outstanding Team**

Social care and social services professionals have been at the forefront of the Covid-19 pandemic and the social emergency that emerged. To recognise the crucial role of professionals in ensuring the continuity of social care and social services, the support and protection of vulnerable populations and those in need, the Outstanding Team Award will honour outstanding contributions to care and social support provision during the pandemic and its aftermath. In particular, the ways in which social carers and social workers have been creative in finding solutions and different ways of approaching their ordinary work during the pandemic.

Nominations for the Outstanding Team Award may be made for a contribution to an individual project or for a broader professional achievement over time.

Nominees may be from any organisation which provides social services, and nominations must show:

- An outstanding contribution of a team to guarantee the continuity, quality and coverage of social care and social services support or to build more resilient services;
- Creative solutions to provide services during the crisis associated with the pandemic or to have better prepared services in the future;
- Specific examples may include tangible achievements in
 - the improvement of social services and care during the Covid-19 emergency and after,
 - receiving repeated internal or external recognition for extraordinary service,
 - demonstrating how the team benefited the organisation or the service beneficiaries by reaching out or providing support to a wider group,
 - or specific accomplishments that improved internal processes.

- **Collaborative Practice**

Coordination between different levels of government, public agencies, services and third sector organisations has been key in ensuring continuity of public care and support during the

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pandemic. Cooperation has proved to be crucial in the planning, financing, and delivery of care and support, and there have been negative impacts where there was a lack of cooperation in areas like health and social care for adults with complex needs or between social and housing services to support the homeless and emergency situations. Collaborations with the third sector, volunteer groups or private companies may have been pursued to address the multiple challenges brought about by the crisis.

As a social services network, ESN believes strongly in the importance and value of collaboration between organisations and sectors. This Award recognises such collaborations and is jointly awarded to organisations or teams who have collaborated across agencies and sectors to jointly plan, finance, or deliver services during the pandemic. The Award will honour new joint programmes or plans through the collaboration of different organisations or sectors that have benefitted the communities, making them more resilient to cope with the challenges brought about by the pandemic crisis.

In addition to the general criteria, entries should:

- Include partners from different sectors (private, public, non-profit) and services that have collaborated, either in an interim programme or plan or through a more long-term collaborative arrangement.
- Have worked together on establishing, managing, funding or delivering social services to face the Covid-19 crisis challenges or be better prepared for future crises.
- Specific examples may include:
 - a jointly set up service,
 - an agency pooling services or professionals from across agencies, sectors or budgets,
 - or an integrated case management approach.

- **Technology Tool**

The pandemic has accelerated digitalisation of public social services. Public social services faced several challenges in adapting to new ways of working using technology and digital means at the start of the pandemic. However, public social services have also invested in the use of data, service innovation and improvement, as well as digital tools such as those allowing remote working, future demand forecasting and risk profiling. IT has been used in planning social services and several social work interventions were performed using IT.

This award recognises the key role that technology tools have been playing in the success of the care and support provided by social services. It rewards the technological and digital improvements supporting social services to ensure their accessibility and availability for those in need. Furthermore, it awards new practices that aim at improving the digital skills of the workforce and people using services.

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In addition to fulfilling the general criteria, entries should show:

- The contribution made by the tool to specifically delivering care and support during the pandemic or to improve services afterwards;
- The contribution of the tool in helping decision-makers and professionals take decisions about the services they provide in and after the Covid crisis;
- How technology and digital tools helped deliver specific policies and services;
- Social workforce and users' digital skills improvement;
- Specific examples may include:
 - new technology to help professionals in their decision-making process or their day-to-day work,
 - digital support for people using social services,
 - IT case management to better manage the specific situation of people using services,
 - assisted living technologies for people to remain in their home,
 - tools to help social services provide support during the pandemic and after,
 - new tools to improve remote communication with people using services.

- **Research Project**

The Research Project Award recognises the contribution of a research team/project that created knowledge on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in social care and social services, and the role of social services in managing the crisis.

In addition to fulfilling the general criteria, entries should show:

- How their research product can support professionals and organisations managing, providing and evaluating social services during times of crisis;
- How their research findings may impact the resilience of care services or the people they support;
- Specific examples may include:
 - a study or guidance on the impact of Covid-19 on social services, the role of social services during the pandemic or the immediate and longer effects on social services,
 - evaluations of the impact on social services (e.g. on care facilities) and the improvements made (organisational or in service provision),
 - Guidelines or improvement proposals for residential/home care, emergency services, or child protection, among others.

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3. General criteria

All entries must fulfil the following general criteria:

- Each organisation may submit up to 3 projects (use one form for each project);
- You should submit your project for your preferred category;
- Entrants may self-nominate;
- Entries must fulfil the criteria for each relevant category as described under each category;
- Entrants agree that their photographs, video-images, and details of their project may be used by ESN for promotional purposes.

4. Selection process

Award-winners are selected in a two-step process, combining an expert selection with a community vote.

Entries are submitted electronically based on a template that applicants must complete and could also include:

- 2-3 photographs showing evidence of the practice
- supporting material (in line with the criteria for the category; for example, data, press clippings, endorsements from other actors, or materials produced in the project)

Entries are first checked by the ESN Secretariat to confirm that they are complete and fulfil the criteria for the category.

The applications are then passed on to the expert selection panel who, after first analysing the entries individually, select a shortlist for each category based on the criteria for each category. In the evaluation process, an application may be assigned to a different category and applicants will be informed accordingly.

The winners in each category (except the Excellence in Social Services Award which is voted at the ceremony) are selected from a combination of the judges score for shortlisting and the public online vote.

The shortlisted entries are all invited to book a place for the **Awards Ceremony**, organised by ESN **on 3 December**, at which entries are presented. Attendees at the ceremony vote for the winning entry in the headline Excellence award amongst the shortlisted. The winner of the headline award will receive two free places to attend and present **at the European Social Services Conference on 8-10 June 2022**.

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Indicative deadlines:**Deadline for submissions:** 30 July 2021**Shortlisted nominees announced:** 11 October 2021**Online voting system open for five categories:** 18 October 2021**Ceremony:** 3 December 2021**5. Ceremony**

The ceremony will take place at the beginning of December in Brussels (proposed date of 3 December). A minimum of two representatives per organisation must register to attend the ceremony.

Participation fees, including the delegate fee, a three course-lunch and coffee-break, are as follows:

€135 for ESN members

€178 for non-members

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