

A Care Guarantee for All

**Response to the European
Commission call for evidence
for the European Care Strategy**



About the European Social Network (ESN)

The European Social Network (ESN) is the independent network for local public social services in Europe. It brings together the organisations that plan, deliver, finance, manage, research, and regulate local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing. We ensure the visibility of the perspective of public social services at the European level, while supporting the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

For further information about ESN, visit www.esn-eu.org.

About this briefing

ESN represents the perspective of its member organisations, public social services, in EU initiatives. With this briefing, ESN submits its response to the call for evidence launched by the European Commission on European Care Strategy, representing the view of ESN members. This response is the result of many initiatives undertaken by ESN over the past 30 years in areas of social inclusion ranging from children's services to support for adults with disability and older people.

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Published: March 2022

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European Funding

This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation 'EaSI' (2022-2025). For further information, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

Introduction

Our work on care

Members of the European Social Network (ESN) cover all aspects of managing care, including financing, planning, delivery, monitoring and inspection of all types of services and home care for people with care needs, including the provision of remote and advanced telecare and support for informal carers, whether respite care or allowances for family foster care or adult guardianship.

ESN has undertaken a significant amount of work over the years in relation to social, child and long-term care funding, planning and quality, providing opportunities for its members to share and acquire knowledge and to feed into European policy developments. In 2007, ESN organised its first working group on ageing and care, which discussed choice of care for older people and the changing relationships between public authorities and care providers. In 2010, ESN launched a study that analysed in detail the relationships between public authorities, providers and representatives of people using long-term care with a focus on quality of care planning, regulation, case management and provision. Between 2013 and 2015, ESN led the project '[Investing in Children's Services](#),' with the participation of child welfare agencies across 14 European countries. The study assessed how key principles of the European Commission's Recommendation '[Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage](#)' were being implemented in practice. Outcomes of this project were published in a report in 2017.

In 2012, the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations, ESN organised a seminar centred on how to design social and health services to assist older people in retaining and regaining independence and inclusion in later life. A series of practice-based examples were identified and gathered in a paper published in 2013 covering early prevention, integrated services, ICT, involving older people in care design and delivery.

As a follow-up to this seminar, ESN members, directors and senior professionals in long-term care, came together at a workshop with representatives from health agencies to address in more detail the issue of choice of care for older adults. Specifically, participants discussed the challenges and opportunities to support active and healthy ageing as well as social inclusion through social and health care, especially at home. This workshop led to the establishment of a working group that assessed five key themes between 2014 and 2017 including integrated care, active and healthy ageing, participation, technology in long-term care and growing older with a disability.

This working group culminated in the production of the toolkit '[Investing in later life](#),' with guidance for social services directors and practitioners on the development of care programmes for older people. In 2020 ESN organised a seminar on quality in long-term care which led to the publication '[Putting Quality First – Contracting for Long-Term Care](#),' analysing the role of public procurement, contracting and commissioning in ensuring quality of long-term care services.

Between 2018 – 2021, ESN organised a working group on integrated care and support addressing the design of integrated services throughout the life cycle. The working group's findings were gathered in the report '[Integrated Care and Support - Promoting Partnerships across Services, Improving Lives](#),' which provides an overview of relevant principles, initiatives, and practices across different European countries on cooperation between social services and education, health, and employment to support children and adults' social inclusion.

ESN led a working group on the development of community care between 2008 and 2010, which led to the publication in 2011 of '[Developing Community Care](#),' which for the first time at European level spoke of addressing 'institutional culture' going beyond the size of institutional facilities. As a follow up, ESN led a training programme in cooperation with the University of Kent for professionals working in care in public and non-public sectors in the four Visegrad countries between 2011 and 2013.

Between 2014 and 2017 ESN led a working group on disability which addressed key themes of integrated services, active inclusion, choice and control, co-production, and growing older with a disability. This working group led to the publication of the publication 'Towards more independent lives for people with disabilities' in 2018.

European Commission Call for Evidence on European Care Strategy

In September 2021, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced in her State of the Union address plans for a European Care Strategy, which will be launched by the autumn of 2022. This initiative will take the form of a Commission Communication and be accompanied by proposals for Council Recommendations on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care (ECEC), and long-term care (LTC). In preparation to this, the Commission launched a consultation to provide evidence, to which the European Social Network replied with this document.

The ESN Response

ESN welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop a European Care Strategy. Ensuring people's access to quality affordable care at all life stages should be the aim of the strategy, whose implementation will require a coordinated joint effort by public authorities at all levels in cooperation with non-public providers in all European countries.

Public authorities with statutory responsibilities for social services will be key partners in the implementation of this strategy. Based on ESN's 30 years' experience in promoting people's access to quality social care we suggest a number of key elements to be considered for a comprehensive European Care Strategy.

With populations ageing and an increasing variety of family models, the use of formal long-term care for adults with long-term needs for care and support is growing in all European countries. Public authorities in Europe, in particular local and regional authorities, have engaged in developing long-term care (LTC) services over the past few decades. The ever-growing need for long-term care has led and will continue to lead to higher public expenditure and will require investments in developing sustainable responses (ESN 2021a). To promote better reconciliation of affordable and financially sustainable long-term care, the EU should promote promising practices such as:

- Strategic Outcome-based Commissioning
- Socially Responsible Public Procurement
- Development of Personal Care Budget Models
- Integration of Care
- Deinstitutionalisation and Community Care

1. A strategy based on key principles

A European Care Strategy should be based on key principles of community, home and family-based care throughout the life cycle, person-centred and rights-based, promoting quality of life of the person in need, which supported in an integrated manner and involved in every stage of their care.

Community, home and family- based care

The new Care Strategy should promote investment, especially with regards to fostering, community- and home-based care across the life cycle. For children who cannot remain with their families, alternative childcare should prioritise family-based models. The upcoming Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care should not only address access to quality childcare in schools or kindergartens, but also access to quality alternative care in foster families and community-based placements, putting the best interest of the child in the centre, according to the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Person-centred care

People supported by care services and their families should be truly involved in decision-making about their own care. Involving people in care and their families means including them in co-design, co-delivery, co-production and co-evaluation of services to ensure that 'experts by experience' have a say in how services are set up, delivered and assessed. Harnessing their experience, skills and expertise at all stages helps to ensure that services respond effectively to people's needs. Care services should put in place participatory approaches in planning, commissioning, design, implementation and evaluation of services. This should apply to everyone, including children (ESN 2017c), people with disabilities (ESN 2017d) or older people (ESN 2021a).

Integrated care and support

Integrated care and support is essential to ensure quality and effective person-centred care at all life stages. To ensure quality and effective person-centred care, the Care Strategy should promote integrated service delivery, through improvement in communication between services, interprofessional collaboration and cross-service coordination overcoming fragmentation and increasing joint funding, planning, commissioning and delivery of services (ESN 2016a). ESN reports have identified that integrated services improve early risk identification and management, information sharing, and shared decision-making for instance in child protection (ESN 2021c). ESN stresses the importance that ECEC services coordinate with social and other public services including health and child protection as they identify early signs of neglect or abuse.

Ensuring quality of life

Being confronted with limited budgets, public authorities are balancing the goals of making care accessible, while promoting quality and managing rising costs. There is the question of measuring quality, since guaranteeing quality care is crucial to ensure that investments in care are being made in the right direction. The question of quality of care is directly linked to quality of life and linked in turn to effectiveness and performance of public services. Across Europe, Member States are developing, commissioning, and procuring care services in different ways. To ensure that EU guidance is up to date, the EU should recast the 2010 Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services, based on the principles of ensuring quality of care and outcomes for people using services. Care Standard Authorities (CSA) and similar agencies have become an important element of quality assurance in social care across Europe. The Care Strategy should encourage the development of CSA that promote continuous improvement of care services in partnership with public authorities and providers (ESN 2021a).

2. Applying the principles - bringing it all together

For the implementation of those principles several actions should be promoted by the European Care Strategy. Improving care services' coverage and availability

According to latest ESN reports, the availability of long-term care services is perceived as insufficient to cope with increasing demand and changing demographics. This situation results in long waiting lists and tightened eligibility criteria. (ESN 2020b). The Care Strategy should promote mechanisms to monitor coverage and availability of care services across the EU. The 'Rights-Economic Investment-Coverage (REC) Index', developed by the Spanish social services directors association and adapted at EU level by ESN, could be promoted by the European Commission as an instrument to assess the quality of social services systems as a whole.

Mobilising investment in social services

Funding of care services is a key concern across public social services in Europe. According to the latest ESN EU semester survey, an increasing demand for services coupled with stagnating or decreasing financial resources have had a significant impact on coverage and quality of care services in recent years (ESN 2020b). Investment in social care should be supported by EU funding instruments such as the European Social Fund + and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The European Commission should encourage national governments to mobilise investment in social services through European and own funds coupled with the development of specific social services strategies.

Supporting the social services workforce

Staff in health and social care play a vital role in supporting those in need as we have seen during the current pandemic. Still there is insufficient availability of qualified workforce across all European countries. The Care Strategy should be backed up by further actions reinforcing training, recruitment, retention and development of a well skilled care workforce. If such activities are aimed at those living in rural and disadvantaged areas as well as younger people, it could also support social inclusion and investment in local communities promoting the development of the care economy (ESN 2021a).

Recognising the importance of informal carers

Providing support for informal carers should be an integral part of the Care Strategy. National authorities should be encouraged to support them through the provision of respite services and safeguards against experiencing poverty; for example, by the provision of financial support and their inclusion in national pension schemes (ESN 2021a). The Commission could also promote the use of EU funds for innovative programmes supporting informal carers. Putting in place measurable indicators.

The upcoming Care Strategy should require the development of national care plans, including targets, measurable indicators and monitoring mechanisms. The Council Recommendation on long-term care should, as the ECEC recommendation, include specific targets such as the proportion of residential vs home care, and the affordability of long-term care (e.g. out of pocket payments) across countries. Progress on targets could be assessed through the European Semester process.

Implementation in partnership at all levels

Local and regional public social services are key partners in the implementation of the Care Strategy, as planning, management, funding, delivery, and monitoring of many long-term care services, particularly home care, is part of their statutory duties. Their key role should be recognised in the Care Strategy. Implementation should be pursued in close partnership between national governments, regional and local social services as well as providers, people using services and families.

Reinforcement of innovation and resilience

During the Covid-19 crisis, care services across the board adapted their way of working in order to continue to deliver vital care for those in need. The Care Strategy should ensure sustenance of those new approaches, fostering digital, agile, and remote ways of working to create more resilient and future proof care services (ESN 2020a).

A Care Guarantee for All

Different groups in need should have a similar right to access quality care and support. A common thread across all social protection principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights is the need of support for different populations. The Care Strategy should therefore propose the right to quality care for all those who may need care and support at a certain time in their lives. A care guarantee for all would complement European initiatives on children, youth, disability and long-term care.

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