



Leading
Social Services

ANNUAL REVIEW **2025**

The Social Services
Network for Europe



Co-funded by
the European Union



About the European Social Network (ESN)

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 support and community-based social services fighting poverty, promoting social inclusion and autonomy, child protection, protection of people with disabilities, care and support for older people, homeless people, as well as people and families in disadvantaged socio-economic situations.

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Colleagues and Members,

As we celebrate 25 years of the European Social Network, I feel proud and deeply grateful. This milestone is more than a number - it reflects the dedication, creativity, and collaboration of so many people who believe in stronger social services for all.

Over the years, ESN has grown into a vibrant community where ideas become action and partnerships create real impact. None of this would have been possible without the commitment of our members, partners, and the ESN team. Thank you for your hard work and for making ESN what it is today.

Looking ahead, our mission remains clear: to strengthen social services, embrace innovation, and ensure inclusion and resilience guide our work. The challenges are significant, but together we have the experience and determination to shape a better future.

Here's to the next chapter: building on 25 years of progress and continuing this journey with optimism and purpose.

Christian Fillet
Chair, European Social Network

Letter from the CEO

Dear Members and Partners,

2025 was a remarkable year of collaboration and transformation. In Aarhus, Denmark, the 33rd European Social Services Conference brought together almost 700 delegates from 38 countries for our second-largest event ever. United under the theme 'Where Care Meets Tech', they proved that technology and human connection must advance side by side.

We proudly celebrated 25 years of ESN, a milestone that reflects our enduring commitment to shaping better social services across Europe. Our anniversary Members' Forum in Warsaw charted an ambitious path for 2026-2030, making the modernisation of social services central to our future strategy.

More than 300 delegates from 25 countries gathered for the biggest European Social Services Awards yet, applauding innovative programmes that make a real and long-lasting difference.

Through key publications and shared learning on social services policy and coverage, quality, and crisis management, we've built momentum for a Europe where no one is left behind.

Let's carry this spirit into 2026, inspiring social service leaders to improve the lives of people in the community.

Together, let's continue to shape the future of social services in Europe.

Alfonso Lara-Montero
Chief Executive Officer
European Social Network

2025 in Numbers

186 Members in **32** Countries

ESN organised **13** Events

ESN spoke at **56** Events

66,500 Website Users

496 Participants at EC Co-Funded Work Programme Events

1,897 Publication Downloads

24,000 News Subscribers

European Social Services Awards

27,000 Votes Cast

135 Applications from **28** Countries

72 Shortlisted Projects

302 Delegates from **25** Countries at the Awards Ceremony

European Social Services Conference

24 Speakers

113 Presenters

45 Sessions

670 Delegates from **38** Countries

2025 Activities Highlights

April 7-8
Warsaw, Poland

ESN Members Forum



September 10-11
Tallinn, Estonia

Working Group on Social Services Transformation and Resilience



October 15
Brussels, Belgium

European Parliament Roundtable



November 18-19
Brussels, Belgium

Working Group on Quality in Social Services



June 22-25
Aarhus, Denmark

European Social Services Conference 2025



October 14-15
Brussels, Belgium

European Social Services Index 2025



November 13-14
Madrid, Spain

European Social Services Awards 2025



November 19
Brussels, Belgium

European Parliament Roundtable



SHARE

Current Policy
and Practice

Our Members

ESN brings together **186** organisations from **32 countries**, representing **millions of senior social services professionals** across Europe and beyond.

Our membership includes national associations of directors of social services; national, regional, and local departments of social services in ministries, regions, counties, cities and municipalities; universities, applied research institutes working on social services improvement; social services providers; and regulators and inspection agencies.



ESN 2025 MEMBERS FORUM

Sharing Achievements, Shaping Future Social Services

7-8 April, Warsaw, Poland

Every four years, the ESN Members Forum brings together ESN members and EU decision-makers to discuss the future of social services in Europe and prepare our strategy for the years ahead. This edition, which took place in Warsaw, Poland, in cooperation with Poland's EU Presidency, hosted expert-led policy discussions, interactive sessions, and collaborative workshops aimed at tackling the most pressing challenges in social services, including workforce shortages, sustainable funding models, and the transformation of care, with a particular focus on innovation and person-centred approaches.

The first day also brought together colleagues for a workshop on long-term care (LTC), where the development of innovative solutions to address the needs of Europe's ageing population was the main topic of discussion.



The ESN Members Forum was a key milestone in shaping the ESN 2026-2030 Strategy, with collaborative discussions and reflections with our members across the two days to help set priorities for the years to come.

Co-hosted with:



Under the framework of:



Become a Member

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.

Organisations that wish to join us as a member can gain access to specific benefits depending on their membership, such as:

- Discounted participation fees at our flagship events: the European Social Services Awards (ESSA) and European Social Services Conference (ESSC)
- Access to the Member's Area, where ESN and members can collaborate, share knowledge and best practices
- Be featured on our Online Library and website
- Regular updates on members' activities and EU policy monitoring
- Funded participation at selected activities under programmes co-funded by the European Commission
- Participation in our Peer Learning Visits programme
- Receive tailored support in building links with specific members

Our current membership types include:

Core Members: Public Authorities; Associations of Social Service Directors

Associate Members: Professional Associations; Inspection & Development Bodies; Service Providers; Applied Research Organisations

Council Membership

All ESN members may request to be part of the Council, which advises on ESN's strategic direction. The ESN Council is made up of 20 to 25 organisations and meets twice per year.

For more information on how to join ESN, please fill in the contact form at the link below or contact our Membership Team at membership@esn-eu.org



Peer Learning Visits

Since 2014, ESN's Peer Learning Visits Programme has enabled members to learn from each other's practice, strengthen peer exchange and support, and adapt good practice to their own contexts.

In 2025, ESN facilitated two Peer Learning Visits focused on quality improvement and improvement programmes for children in child protection. The Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS), France, visited the Care Inspectorate in Scotland to support their ongoing work on updating national evaluation frameworks, strengthening user participation, and improving data systems.

A second visit brought Riga's City Council Welfare Department to Yvelines County Council in France to inform discussions on service redesign, professional support for foster families, and improved responses for older adolescents and migrant children.



“*A great opportunity to learn from peers, exchange practices, and collectively strengthen social care across Europe.*”

Cécile Lagarde, Programme Manager,
National Authority for Care Quality, France



“*Participation in the the peer learning visit programme not only brings fresh ideas and perspectives but also reaffirms that we are on the right path with our own plans. It gives us the opportunity to compare existing practices and, importantly, to reflect and evaluate our own work.*”

Martins Moors - Head of the Social Administration Division and Deputy Director of City Council Welfare Department, Latvia

Contributing to EU Policy

The European Social Network has actively shaped key EU policy debates through its response to the European Commission's public consultations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) New Action Plan, and the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The **next MFF** should prioritise funding for community-based social services, promote partnerships with regional and local public authorities, and ensure that EU funds support social inclusion, workforce development and a care guarantee for all.

For **the EPSR New Action Plan**, ESN's policy recommendations call for linking EU funding to the implementation of the Pillar, strengthening access, coverage and quality of public social services, and investing in integrated services, long-term care and social inclusion programmes.

In our input on **the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, ESN advocates for a multidimensional approach to poverty, a quality framework for social services, a social services workforce strategy, and person-centred support and targeted measures for populations in vulnerable situations.

Read Our Publications



ESN Response to the European Commission's - **Public Consultation on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**



ESN's Response to the European Commission's Public Consultation on: **'EU's Next Budget (MFF) - implementing EU funding with Member States and regions'**



2025 - **European Social Services Awards**



ESSC 2025 - **Transforming Social Services - Where Care Meets Tech**



European Social Services Index 2025 - **Cross-Country Analysis**



European Social Network **European Framework for Quality in Social Services**



European Social Network **Crisis Management Framework for Social Services**



BUILD

**Knowledge to Develop
Quality Services**



Working Group on Social Services Transformation and Resilience

Tallinn, Estonia
10-11 September 2025

Recent years have brought multiple crises - pandemics, geopolitical instability, natural disasters, and cyberattacks - challenging social services across Europe. In response, the fourth and last meeting of ESN's Working Group on Social Services Transformation and Resilience met in Tallinn, Estonia to develop the first crisis management framework for social services.

Participants reviewed case studies that highlighted the importance of rapid action, interagency cooperation, and clear communication with service users to address crises effectively. Building on these insights, participants proposed a crisis management framework centred on organisational agility, systematic risk assessment, well-trained staff, clear leadership roles, improved communication between services and users, and the use of technology to predict and respond to crises.

The outputs of the meeting have led to the development of the very **first Crisis Management Framework for Social Services in Europe**, aimed at improving social services' resilience and preparedness for future crises.

The full framework can be viewed via the **Learn More about ESN** section found at the end of this publication.

Hosted by: Tallinn



Working Group on Quality in Social Services

Brussels, Belgium
18-19 November 2025

Across Europe, many social service regulators, public authorities, and providers are currently updating or redesigning their quality standards. Yet the existing European Voluntary Framework for Quality in Social Services, created in 2010, has become outdated. Recognising the need for a modern approach that reflects today's understanding of quality, the Working Group on Quality in Social Services has developed an updated **European Social Services Quality Framework**, presented this year in a Roundtable at the European Parliament.

Developed over four years by the Working Group, the proposal sets out 23 overarching standards based on a review of emerging trends and key quality principles. The standards are expressed through person-centred 'I-Statements' and provider-focused 'We-Statements', supported by practical 'Arrangements' to help implement them in practice. Initial reactions from regulators, providers, and EU officials have been highly positive, noting its clarity and relevance for national reforms.

ESN now encourages the European Commission and Member States to use the proposed framework to refresh the EU's Voluntary Framework, as we plan local piloting to support implementation across Europe.

The full framework can be viewed via the **Learn More about ESN** section found at the end of this publication.



European Projects

ESN is currently partnered on the following projects:

ACE to transform home care for older people by accelerating the use of technological innovations.

Eldicare 2.0 to support the upskilling and reskilling of the long-term care workforce to better fulfil the care needs of older people.

LAUREL to develop an integrated long-term care model that truly includes a health and social perspective.

NEAR to reinforce effective guardianship for unaccompanied children.

INSPIRE to support with evidence the development of a framework for social services in rural areas.

COMHOM focused on leveraging data-driven solutions, digital tools, and innovative practices to combat homelessness.

ESN is leading on the following projects:

ECSILI to transfer a social inclusion model from the Spanish region of Andalucia to support the social inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in the cities of Warsaw and Arad.

The following projects concluded in 2025:

LINK to create a model that guides those working in health and social care to find innovative solutions to complex and evolving societal challenges.

SISWEC to support the improvement of social workers' skills in response to major crises in Europe.

ESN Technical Assistance

The European Social Network (ESN) provides tailored technical assistance to help public social services modernise delivery and strengthen quality. In 2025, ESN concluded an RRF-funded programme supporting the design of a new model of care in residential settings, including a cost-benefit analysis to guide sustainable investment.

We also carried out a review of alternative care services in Malta, examining links with child protection and pathways to family- and community-based support.

In parallel, ESN supported the transfer of our proposal for a European Social Services Quality Framework to local practice with Gipuzkoa County Council in the Basque Country.



Find out more about ESN's European Projects on our website:

<https://www.esn-eu.org/european-projects>



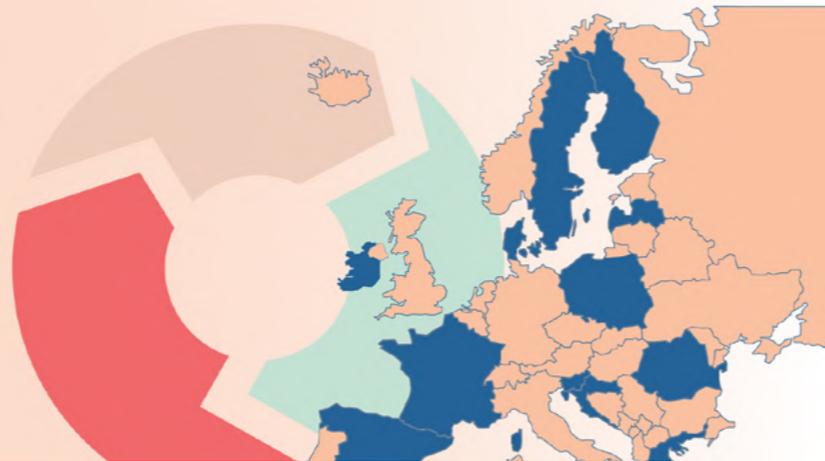
INFORM

International and
National Policymaking



European Social Services Index

Brussels, Belgium
14 - 15 October 2025



The **European Social Services Index (ESSI)**, which was endorsed by the European Parliament in 2024, is an initiative launched by ESN in 2023 to better understand and compare the situation of social services in different European countries.

Each year, with the support of a dedicated Working Group, ESN gathers and compares social services national data on **legislation, expenditure, and coverage**. In 2025, the ESSI featured 16 countries.

The data collected is intended to support the European Commission in formulating recommendations to national governments within the European Semester.

Key needs identified by this year's Cross-Country Analysis included:

- The launch of a European social services workforce strategy.
- The prioritisation of the development of community-based social services, including through EU funds.
- The establishment of common data indicators for national collection and reporting by EU countries on social services expenditure and coverage.

This year's ESSI Cross-Country Analysis can be viewed via the **Learn More about ESN** section found at the end of this publication.



The ESSI is not just a technical instrument – it is a foundation for responsiveness in social policy, ensuring that even with fewer resources, decisions remain fair, strategic, and centred on people's real needs.

Ana Radulescu, Centre for Training and Assessment in Social Work, Romania

Towards the First-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

Roundtable - European Parliament

Brussels, Belgium
15 October 2025



Following the announcement of the EU's first Anti-Poverty Strategy, ESN organised a roundtable at the European Parliament to reflect on the multidimensional nature of poverty and the importance of ensuring public social services feed into the design of this strategy and are given the resources to ensure its successful implementation.

Hosted by MEP Idoia Mendia and MEP Michał Szczerba, this event brought together EU, national governments, and social services representatives from across Europe and was enriched by relevant key findings from ESN's European Social Services Index.

ESN members from France, the Netherlands, Malta, and Croatia provided concrete examples of how their national governments are supporting people with low income, incentivising active inclusion, and preventing homelessness.

Hosted by:



“Implementing services at the ground level is where the real fight is and where we can make sure that the eradication of poverty happens.”

Katarina Ivanković Knežević,
Directorate-General for Employment,
Social Affairs and Inclusion,
European Commission



NETWORK

with Key Decision-Makers
and Peers across Europe



2025
European
Services A

25 Years
of ESN

European Social Services Conference 2025

Transforming Social Services

Where Care Meets Tech

22-25 June 2025, Aarhus, Denmark

Hosted by:



Supported by:



Under the framework of:



In partnership with:



At the 33rd edition of the European Social Services Conference, hosted under Denmark's EU Presidency, we discussed how **relational welfare** approaches, on the one hand, and **welfare technology**, on the other, are major drivers of social services transformation.

The Conference, hosted by Aarhus City Council, in cooperation with Denmark Central Region, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, and the Ministry of Senior Citizens, provided a unique platform to to address how the combination of relational approaches and technology in social services creates a powerful synergy that enhances efficiency, accessibility, personalisation, trust, and empathy.



“

Sharing experiences from national, regional and local politics makes a real difference.”

Sophie Hæstorp Andersen,
Minister for Social Affairs and Housing,
Denmark



“

We need to explore new paths to ensure our welfare systems are fit for the future.”

Christian Budde,
Department of Health and Care,
Aarhus City Council, Denmark



“

Long-term care should meet the needs of every person, and be tailored to individual needs.”

Mette Kierkgard,
Minister for Senior Citizens,
Denmark



“

Digital technologies can enable people with existing or emerging disabilities to participate in working life in a self-determined manner and advance inclusion.”

Verena Staats, Director,
German Association of Public and Private Welfare, Germany

2025 European Social Services Awards

13-14 November 2025
Madrid, Spain



Hosted by:



In partnership with:



The 7th edition of the European Social Services Awards (ESSA), hosted by Madrid City Council, brought together more than 300 participants from 28 countries, and honoured projects from Europe and beyond across 10 newly launched categories. The theme of the 2025 edition, **“Social Services: Creating Lasting Change”**, highlighted organisations and individuals who are rethinking how services are designed and delivered, with a focus on providing impactful, long-term solutions for the people and communities they support.



Entering the ESN Awards is an opportunity to really reflect on the hard work that our social care practitioners perform every day.”

Declan McAllister, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, United Kingdom



Much of the work in social services goes unseen — carried out by everyday heroes who work tirelessly day after day, year after year. It is vital that we pause to celebrate this extraordinary work, which makes a real and life-changing difference to millions of people.”

Alex Stephany, Magic Notes (Beam), United Kingdom



The priority of social services must be social intervention; but this social intervention must have a purpose, which is to help people return to autonomous living.”

José Fernández Sánchez, Councillor, City of Madrid, Spain

2026 European Social Services Awards



November 2026
Rome, Italy

Hosted by:



REGIONE LAZIO

Submissions for the 2026 European Social Services Awards in Rome, Italy, will open in Spring 2026.

- Showcase the amazing work of your social services teams
- Highlight your team’s innovative projects
- Learn from and share your experiences with other social services professionals across Europe

Please visit the ESSA website to find out how you can get involved.



European Social Services Conference 2026
BRIDGING BOUNDARIES
 International Insights into Social Services

Valletta, Malta
 17-20 May 2026



Hosted by:



Join us in Valletta, Malta, between 17-20 May 2026, where we will explore how social services can cross borders and bridge boundaries to respond to shared challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

In partnership with:



Entitled 'Bridging Boundaries - International Insights into Social Services,' the 2026 European Social Services Conference (ESSC) seeks to examine and compare how key social services, such as child protection and family support, long-term care for people with disabilities and older adults, and social inclusion programmes, are designed, financed, and delivered across Europe.

Private partners confirmed so far:



Please visit the ESSC website to find out how you can get involved.

Register now to join the conversation and help shape the social services of the future!



Become a Partner

As the leading network of social services leaders in Europe, partnering with ESN enables organisations to connect with a broad audience of national, regional, and local authorities that manage and oversee Europe's social services – the core members of ESN.

Through our Awards, Conference and other annual events, ESN has developed mutually, beneficial long-term cooperation with partners to pursue excellence and innovation in social services to:

LEARN about the latest social policy and practice trends

MEET with social services leaders to develop future cooperation

SHOWCASE products and solutions and gather immediate feedback

Get in touch with ESN Development Coordinator, Francesco Capuani, at francesco.capuani@esn-eu.org to set up a meeting.



“

As longstanding ESN partners, one of our main takeaways from the ESSC is the importance of ongoing collaboration and the sharing of best practices between countries. It has also reinforced the value of building relationships with key stakeholders and exploring new opportunities for cross-border cooperation.”

Carole Winberg,
 Manager, Tietoevry



Governance

The Board of Trustees

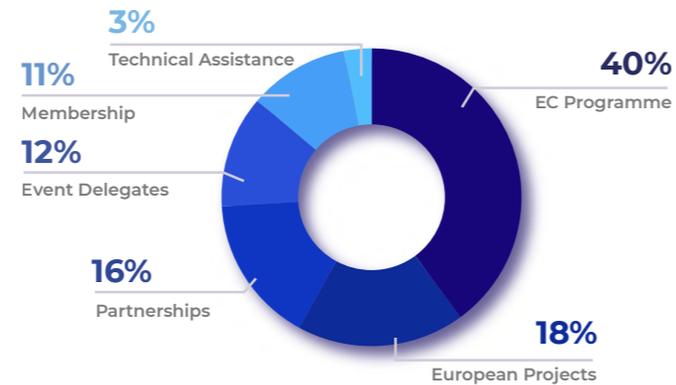
The Board of Trustees are legally responsible for overseeing the management, financing, and work of the Network and its members' interests. The Trustees meet regularly throughout the year, and do not receive payment for their work on behalf of ESN.

The Council

The Council consists of 24 national and regional authorities and organisations of social services directors. They are voting members who, among other responsibilities, elect the Board of Trustees. They are responsible for the overall Network's direction.

Finance

ESN's financing comes from a variety of sources, including a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission (EC Programme), European projects, the self-funded European Social Services Conference and European Social Services Awards, institutional and private partnerships, membership, and technical assistance.



Current ESN Trustees

Meet our Board of Trustees on the ESN Website:

<https://www.esn-eu.org/about/board>



Secretariat

Meet the Secretariat

The Secretariat, led by ESN's Chief Executive Officer, provides strategic, policy, communications, financial, and administrative support to the network.

It also manages the network's relationships with partners, which include the European Commission, national governments, and private partners.

Meet our Secretariat:

<https://www.esn-eu.org/about/secretariat>





The European Social Network (ESN), founded in 2000 from very humble beginnings, has grown into the leading international network for public social services in Europe. Over the past 25 years, ESN has brought together local public social services authorities, directors, researchers and policymakers to share knowledge, best practice and innovation for stronger, more inclusive social services across the continent.

As the independent network for local public social services, ESN now unites close to 200 member organisations in 33 countries, encompassing those who plan, finance, manage, research and deliver social services. Through flagship events such as the European Social Services Conference and the European Social Services Awards, ESN fosters learning, collaboration and recognition of transformative practice that improves lives in communities across Europe.

Our anniversary year highlights the network's enduring commitment to solidarity, quality and innovation in public social services. As we look to the future, we invite public authorities, professionals and partners to help us shape the next chapter of high-quality, inclusive social services in Europe.

Best wishes,

Alfonso Lara-Montero
Chief Executive Officer
European Social Network



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