



The Social Services Network for Europe

Annual Review 2015



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The European Social Network (ESN) brings together people who plan, manage and deliver local public social services, together with those in regulatory and research organisations. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and experience.



Introduction

Looking Forward

Letter from the Chief Executive

Dear Colleagues,

2015 has been a year of tremendous engagement by members in a whole range of activities which have brought them together to share knowledge and inspire each other to improve the lives of their citizens and communities. Some might think that working at an international level is far removed from everyday realities but for those sharing their expertise with colleagues, there is nothing more relevant and thought provoking.

I saw this in the working groups on older people looking at community initiatives in Seville, on mainstream employment of disabled people in Vilnius as well as in the peer review on investing in children in Budapest.

The work on research and evidence with its emerging toolkit for public services and the review of national government plans within the EU Semester framework were milestones in new developments for the network as was the research commissioned by ESN to open the Manchester seminar on integrated services.

As governments are challenged by high youth unemployment and exclusion, ESN initiated the first of a series of workshops bringing together a wide range of experts to find local solutions with young people themselves. ESN's commitment to working with citizens was evident in the participation of service users at the Lisbon conference as part of a joint initiative with the European Commission.

Throughout the year we have invested in improving our communication with more videos, podcasts, brighter and more targeted newsletters and if you want to check out practices from across Europe, we now have a new library of analysed practices on our website!

Just to end with a very warm welcome to our 19 new members and a new country (the Ukraine). Thank you to all our members and staff who worked so hard in 2015.



John Halloran
ESN Chief Executive

Introduction

Looking Forward

Towards 2016

2016 promises to be an action-packed and eventful year for ESN. We have a number of projects planned, and we will work with our members to ensure knowledge transfer, sharing of good practices and strengthening innovation in the delivery of social services.



Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes

Our research project on children's services comes to an end with the publication of a report describing the situation in 14 European countries.



Youth services cooperation

The second workshop on young people's services will examine service cooperation to promote social inclusion for young offenders.



Quality services for older people

Our working group on ageing and care will hold a meeting on workforce development and their impact on older people's services.



Applied evidence in social services

We will publish and test in selected countries our toolkit for planning and evaluating social services, which is the result of the activities undertaken in this field in 2014 and 2015.



Independent living for people with disabilities

Our working group on disability services will assess how users participate in the design and implementation of their own services.



Working at EU level

Our Reference Group on the European Semester will evaluate the National Reform Programmes and Country-specific Recommendations for 2016.



EU mobility and social care workforce

Our annual seminar will take place in Bratislava during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union and will address the impact of social care workforce mobility across Europe.



The future is local

Our 24th European Social Services Conference will take place in The Hague on 20–22 June 2016 in cooperation with the Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

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Learn About Current Policy and Practice Trends



Nerero Zamaro
Regional Director
Lazio Region
Italy

“Being involved in the ESN’s project on children’s services allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the European Commission’s Recommendation ‘Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage.’ As part of the national delegation from Italy at the third peer review in Budapest, Hungary, I received an excellent introduction on how to best ensure quality in early childcare in my region.”



Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes

The third peer review of ESN's project 'Investing in children's services' was held in Budapest on 7–8 May, in cooperation with the Directorate General for Child Protection and Social Services in Hungary. The meeting examined the implementation of the European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

The meeting brought together representatives from national, regional and local children's services from Hungary, Romania, Portugal, Italy and Belgium. They presented national perspectives on quality children's services, identified gaps in national provision, and made proposals for policy and service development.

Opening the event, Mr. Károly Czigere, Minister of State for Social Affairs and Social Inclusion stressed the significance of bringing the event to Hungary and underlined the importance of investing in human capital, particularly children's services. He described this investment as a national issue for Hungary, and confirmed his intentions to increase children's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The first session invited representatives from the OECD, the European Commission (EC), the European Social Policy Network and ESN to discuss the evidence-base for investing in effective children's policies and services. Although the five countries have made progress in implementing the Recommendation, there are still improvements that can be made in light of the European Commission's 2015 Country Reports. Evidence suggests that improving access to childcare services should be a policy priority, as this can deliver better outcomes for children and their families.

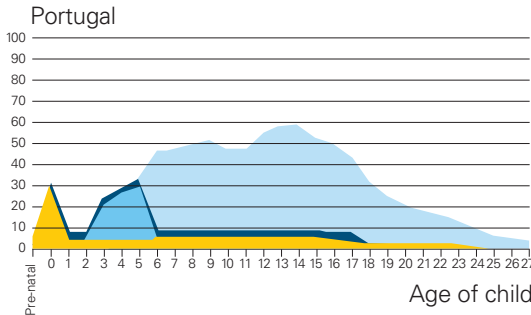
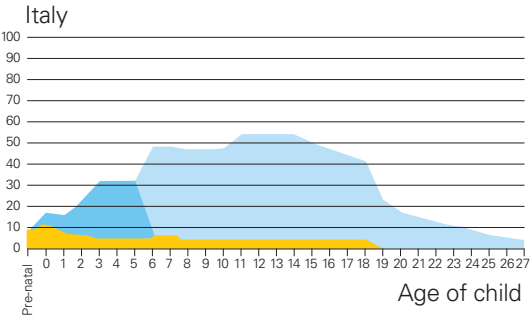
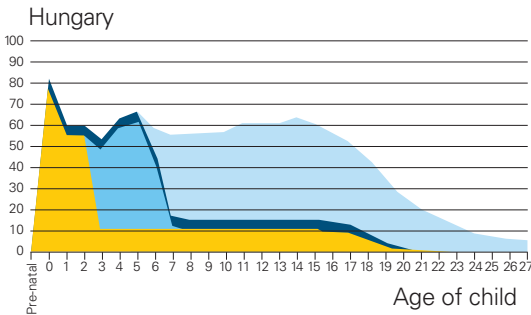
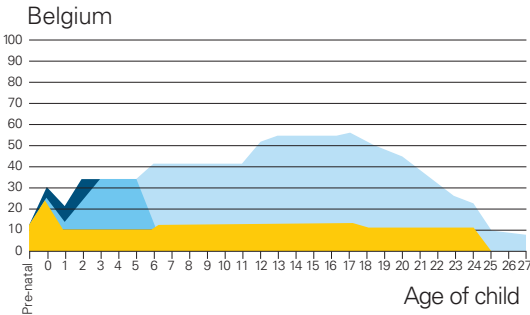
The peer review then looked at the organisation of children's services across the five countries reviewed. The five national delegations provided country specific data on the number of children in care, child social welfare and ECEC participation rates. An overarching conclusion across these presentations was the fact that in most countries there are simply too many children in residential care.

The meeting concluded with a roundtable on proposals for policy and services development. Government representatives from the five countries spoke of the need to address child poverty and wellbeing through an evidence-based policy framework, prioritising access and quality, social work training and the use of Structural Funds.

The third peer review was a great success as it provided national delegations a unique platform to share their progress and challenges in the local implementation of the Recommendation. To finalise the project, ESN plans to launch its report on 'Investing in children's services' at the European Parliament in April 2016.

Key findings from the ongoing research project can be found here esn-eu.org/investing-in-children-services-improving-outcomes

Cross-country comparison of children's services



Cash benefits and tax breaks Other benefits in kind
Childcare Education

Source: OECD (2014), OECD Family database, OECD, Paris.



Learn Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes

Interviewed during ESN's third peer review in Budapest, four participants explain how the European Recommendation 'Investing in Children, Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage' is being implemented in their countries and what knowledge they will take home from the peer review.



Julien Van Geertsom

President of PPS SI (the Belgian Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration)

Q In what ways has this EC Recommendation been impactful for your country?

A This recommendation is very important for Belgium because during our European Presidency (July – December 2010) we put the fight against child poverty on the European policy agenda. We succeeded together with other countries and networks, to put a focus on poverty in the Europe 2020 strategy, and in the European platform against poverty and social exclusion.

Q How will you apply the Recommendation in your country to develop quality children's services?

A I have learned that all the countries at the peer review have common problems. This is key as it means that common policies can be developed.



Antonietta Bellisari

Manager of the Office for Adoption and Foster Care for the Lazio Region, Italy

Q In what ways has this EC Recommendation been impactful for your country?

A Thanks to this peer review, we were made aware of the Recommendation, and we shared views and ideas to devise convergent policies for children at both national and local level. In this sense, this peer review has been particularly useful because it has produced profiles on the situation in each country.

Q How will you apply the Recommendation in your country to develop quality children's services?

A In Lazio, we are working on the development of a common quality framework for children's services, beginning with nurseries (3 months to 3 years). We will therefore take into account the comments made by Norá Milotay (European Commission) during the peer review on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

“CPAS Liège (Belgium) participated at the ESN peer review on 7 and 8 May in Budapest with the aim to showcase their project ‘How best to address child poverty in Liège’. We found the exchanges at this ESN meeting very useful. It has allowed us to discuss new ways of working as outlined by other countries’ experiences.”

Jean-Marc Jalhay
Public Social
Welfare Centre
Liège, Belgium



Marta Korintus

Senior Advisor and Childcare Expert to the General Directorate of Social Services and Child Protection, Hungary

Q In what ways has this EC Recommendation been impactful for your country?

A We have been involved with this Recommendation since it was in draft form due to the Hungarian presidency of the European Union in 2010. This recommendation is important for Hungary because it serves as a motivation and a driver for change.

Q How will you apply the Recommendation in your country to develop quality children’s services?

A There have been participants at this ESN peer review from all levels of childcare provision in Hungary and they will also be able to take home learning and guidance.



Alina Mrejeru

Head of Department for projects, strategies and logistics at the Municipality of Arad, Romania

Q In what ways has this EC Recommendation been impactful for your country?

A This Recommendation is very important for Romania, because all the countries involved in the peer review need some form of levelling system. I want to congratulate ESN for this initiative. As a member of ESN for a long time, we really appreciate these initiatives as through them we come across new ideas from different countries, which we can compare and adapt at home.

Q How will you apply the Recommendation in your country to develop quality children’s services?

A In Romania we are very concerned about the quality of children’s services, given the backdrop of child poverty and problems with our children’s services due to the economic crisis. Nowadays we have to try to do our best to develop qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

Learn Integrated Services Working Together to Improve Lives

The annual ESN seminar was organised in Manchester on 4-6 November in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in England (ADASS). This year over 100 participants from 25 European countries came together to share knowledge and expertise.

The discussions linked research and current literature with policy and practice examples which demonstrated the extent of service integration in a number of Member States. Service integration is a complex theme, as it means different things to different people. Some believe it to mean structural reorganisation and improved governance, whilst others think it defines improved cooperation between professionals across sectors. Many feel that it is more to do with pooling budgets or setting up integrated funds. *At ESN, we believe it is the range of activities implemented to achieve more efficient coordination between services and improved outcomes for service users.*

The first session looked at the European context of service integration and featured Bob Butcher from the Department of Health (UK), Ray James (President of ADASS) and Loukianos Gatzoulis (DG Health and Food Safety, European Commission).

The first day provided practical examples of integrated services. In the city of Manchester, public service reform revolves around integrated and coordinated support packages which use evidence to change problematic behaviour, of which the Troubled Families programme is a good example. After six months of key worker intervention the project successfully reduced the number of children in need by 17%.

In 2015, ESN's cross-cutting theme was integrated services. Besides our annual seminar, we organised two working group meetings that looked at integrated support for people with disabilities and older people.



“[The different sessions of the seminar were] a great opportunity to learn about different approaches on service integration.”

Luc Claessens
Municipality of Antwerp
Belgium





“It is very interesting to hear from other countries and to share experiences at an ESN event, and I find this helps me with my own work at local level.”

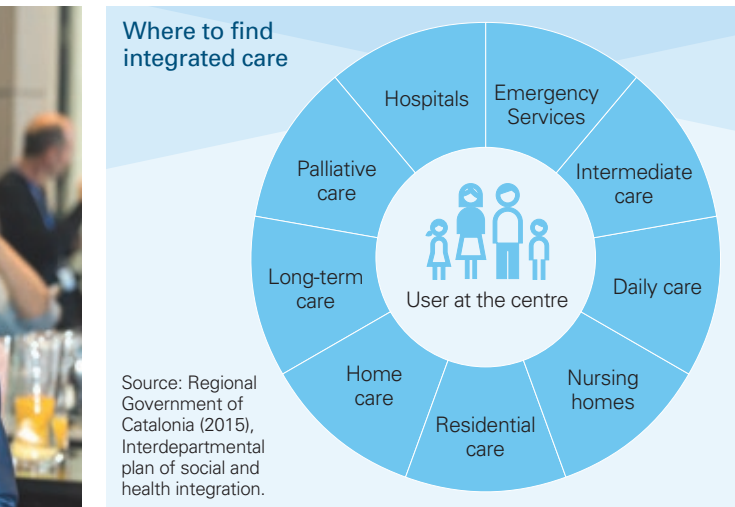
Jolanda Verbiesen
Municipality of Heusden,
the Netherlands

An example of ICT-enabled integrated services came from Andalucia, Spain. In this case the network for early intervention for young children with developmental problems has produced software that allows data-sharing among social services professionals working in the region. This ICT-tool allows for a plurality of access to the unique records of each child and prevents the need for individuals to repeat information each time they access a new service.


The City of Tampere presented the Finnish service integrator, Kotitori, which lists all older people's services. This is a public-private partnership where the local authority provides guidance for service users so that they can choose the most suitable one. According to self-reported evaluations, service users are highly satisfied as the integrator helps them access all necessary services through a single access point.

ESN and the Dutch Centre of Expertise for Long-term Care (Vilans) have been examining research into integrated services and preparing a report on the topic. A highlight of the second day was the presentation of the executive summary of this report, which allowed members to give their feedback and suggest policy and practice recommendations. This member input was particularly useful ahead of the launch of the report in early 2016.

This seminar was the first of its kind to allow both ESN members and non-ESN members to participate on the first day of the event. For those unable to travel to the event, we also provided live web streaming.



 View the videos per session here: esn-eu.org/videos

 Audio (split per session) is available in the ESN podcast library esn-eu.org/audio/

Learn Research and Evidence Evidence-based Practice for Public Social Services

“The unique strengths of this knowledge exchange were, bringing together practitioners and researchers from different countries with different cultures.”

Graham Owen
Association of Swedish
Directors of Social
Services

ESN organised its forum on evidence-based practice for public social services at Nesta (England's innovation agency) in London on 9 October. This is a continuation of ESN's work on evidence-based policy and practice which began in 2014, when we brought together several applied researchers to discuss the evidence-based policy and practice phenomenon in social services in selected European countries.

The concept of evidence-based practice has become popular in social services management with an increased focus on cost-efficiency. Given difficult economic circumstances and an ageing population, this requires that key metrics and performance indicators are taken into account.

Throughout 2015, ESN worked with Ann Buchanan, a researcher from the University of Oxford, to conduct a detailed review of international databases in the social work field, to determine their value to social services practitioners when developing services. This, in turn, has helped us to develop a toolkit for planning and evaluating public social services, a draft of which was presented at the ESN forum.

The discussion at the meeting indicated that significant issues emerged around defining quality and effectiveness in public social services. The range of evidence needed to develop evidence-based social services was examined with certain types of knowledge flagged as especially relevant e.g. identifying risk and protective factors, understanding the problem and the importance of evaluation. One area of concern was workforce training and development, with an aim to be more focused on data analysis and evaluation in social work.

ESN's recently published report 'Evidence-based social services: toolkit for planning and evaluating social services' is available in the ESN publications library esn-eu.org/publications

This event was live streamed for our members at home.



View the videos per session here: esn-eu.org/videos



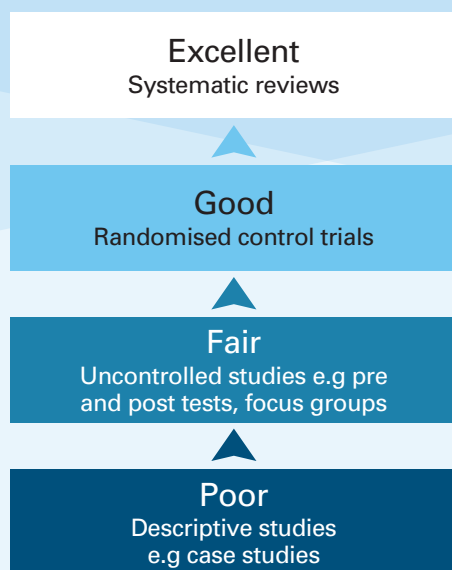
Audio (split per session) is available in the ESN podcast library esn-eu.org/audio/

“It was important to understand the value of evidence-based working in groups. I believe this makes it more likely that participants will use the toolkit and ideas behind them in practice.”

Kristen Thorsteinsdóttir
Municipalities
of Sandgerði
Garður and Vogar
Iceland



A visualisation of the Social Work Policy
Institute's Hierarchy of Evidence



Source: ESN (2015).

The Future is Local!

World Forum

The Hague

20–22 June 2016

Join over 400 senior professionals from across Europe to connect with the latest trends and challenges in social affairs.

Learn from high-profile speakers about latest international social policy & practice

Share knowledge and experience in interactive practice workshops

Network with senior professionals who plan, finance, research, manage, regulate and deliver local public services

Be Inspired by new knowledge, different perspectives and innovative ideas



Empowering communities
Combating poverty
Improving services



To register, visit our brand
new website essc-eu.org

Share Effective Practice to Promote Quality Services



Kristien Soenen
Bruges Public
Centre for Social
Welfare
Belgium

“Through attending the third disability working group meeting I gained much relevant knowledge on the role of public social services in supporting the employment of people with disabilities. I found the demand-driven approach showcased by Gloucestershire to be particularly inspiring.”



Share

ESN Working Groups

Ageing and Care, Disability

Two working groups ran in parallel in 2015: one, on ageing and care and the other, on disability services. Each working group met twice. The first meeting of both working groups addressed integrated services corresponding to the theme of the annual seminar (see pages 13–14). The second meeting of the ageing and care working group looked at active ageing, while the second meeting of the disability working group examined active inclusion.

Ahead of the meetings, ESN members submitted practices, which were analysed by Jenny Billings (University of Kent) for the ageing and care working group, and Sarah Carr (researcher with several British Universities) for the disability working group. More than 60 practice examples were collected and uploaded into our new practice library.

Active ageing

Members of the ageing and care working group discussed active ageing on 7–8 September in Seville (Spain). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), active ageing can help people realise their full potential by improving their physical, social and mental wellbeing. By implementing measures to support older people to live as happy and healthy lives for as long as possible in their own communities, public social services can help delay or even avoid the need for long-term support in residential care.

The meeting was hosted by our member, the regional government for health and social policies in Andalusia, where day care centres for older people were transformed into ‘active participation centres’. These centres organise their activities around three pillars: supporting healthy living, security and active participation for more than 600,000 older people in the region.

Participants had the opportunity to visit one of these centres and learnt about their social, cultural, recreational and sport activities, as well as their health promotion programmes, self help activities, advice and advocacy services.

A concluding message resulting from the meeting is that there is a lot of potential which could be untapped by involving older people in activities to make their daily lives more active and meaningful.



View the video from the Seville meeting here
esn-eu.org/videos/43



Find more information on the ESN project here
esn-eu.org/ageing-and-care

“I am delighted to have participated in this working group. This meeting has provided extensive knowledge on social policy and practices related to active ageing at the local level.”

Pilar Martínez Sánchez
Employment and Social Welfare Department
Galicia, Spain

Active inclusion

ESN disability working group held a meeting on the active inclusion of people with disabilities in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 19 November.

According to the European Commission, active inclusion is based on adequate income support, inclusive labour markets, and access to quality services. Policies and practices in the participating countries combined a great variety of approaches to focus on people's abilities and their integration into the open labour market.


Divosa (the Dutch national association of municipal managers in the field of social affairs) built national and local partnerships based on employers' needs thus implementing a successful demand-driven approach. In Vienna, the 'Jobwärts' programme addresses the transition from sheltered to open labour market placement and in Gloucestershire, England, the co-production of employment strategies has contributed to raising employment rates for persons with learning disabilities to above the national average.

The resulting key message was that employment is crucial to promoting independent living, dignity and choice for people with disabilities. Employment offers protection against poverty, and promotes community inclusion. Thus public social services are key intermediaries between employers and employees.

The labour market participation ladder for people with disabilities in Belgium



Join the Conversation



Join us as we live-tweet
from our events

Get the inside track on EU policy

Discuss the issues affecting you
with like-minded professionals

See key updates from the
ESN Secretariat in Brighton

Follow us on

 @ESNsSocial

 Social Services in Europe

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European Social Network

Share

Youth Workshop on Education Employment and Social Services

The ESN workshop on education, employment and social services for vulnerable young adults brought together 30 participants from 15 countries. The meeting took place in The Hague (the Netherlands) on 4–5 June.

This workshop focused on vulnerable youth aged 18-25 (i.e. young people with mental health issues, young adults leaving care and young adults with a third country background). The workshop examined education, training and employment across EU Member States.

The workshop began with an examination of European policies relevant to young people and speakers highlighted local partnerships for youth with regards to school graduation, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications. Pedro Cunha from the Portuguese Ministry of Education spoke about how best to ensure that education could deliver better outcomes for vulnerable young people.

Transition periods, particularly school-to-work transitions, were noted as particularly critical for young people. Ulrike Storost from the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, presented a successful entrepreneurship pilot taking place in Galicia. Another example was provided by Martin Lebégue from Pas-de-Calais (France) who presented the local implementation of the 'Youth Guarantee' and stressed the importance of supporting young people leaving care in terms of housing and financial autonomy.

Throughout the discussions, the importance of an integrated approach between education, employment and social services was emphasised.

"It was probably the best ESN workshop I have ever attended. It gave me some practical ideas to take back to youth services in Bihor on how to improve our 'Youth Guarantee' offer."

Adina Patroc
County Agency
for Payments and
Social Inspection
Bihor, Romania





Influence European and National Policy-Making



Marianne Thyssen
European
Commissioner
for Employment
and Social Affairs

“Social services are a vital investment in Europe’s people and its growth, and integrated social services delivery is key to efficiently support those most in need.”

Address to the 13rd European
Social Services Conference
Lisbon





European Initiatives on Active and Healthy Ageing

In 2015 ESN was involved in several European projects on ageing and care, representing the role of local public social services in the development of services that help older people remain active and healthy. ESN is a member of the AFE-INNOVNET thematic network on innovation for age-friendly environments across the EU. We are also a member of the Action Group on Integrated Care within the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing.

European Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing

As a partner of the European Joint Action (JA) on Mental Health and Wellbeing, ESN has been involved in three work packages: mental health of children and adolescents, community mental health care, and mental health in all policies. ESN worked with members from Spain (Andalucía, Castilla La Mancha, Galicia), Estonia, Germany, Italy, Ireland and Sweden to contribute with data, feedback on policy recommendations and reviews of local practices to the JA meetings. Alfonso Lara Montero, ESN's Policy Director, spoke at the Stakeholders meeting in February, and on the development of community-based mental health services in Hungary in September.

European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (EEG)

Following the end of the ESN-led EU Joint Action in 2014, the European Expert Group (EEG) resumed its activities promoting the development of community-based services. Two sessions were organised to train EU officials on monitoring the use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to develop community care. In June, ESN Chief Executive John Halloran spoke on how to promote strategies for inclusive local communities at a conference on de-institutionalisation organised by the Latvian presidency of the Council of the European Union.



“A key strength of my participation at the European Semester Group was the diversity of country perspectives and suggestions for debate on social policy issues in the current EU agenda”

Fernanda Rodrigues
President
Association of Social
Services Professionals,
Portugal

For Quality! Project

Since 2014, ESN has been working on the two year project ‘For Quality! – on quality of jobs and services in personal care and household services’. The project has aimed to assess the current state of play in personal and household services (PHS) in 11 European countries and to analyse the implications of the European Commission’s ‘Employment Package’. ESN’s role has been to represent public social services and to ensure that the project focused on service users’ needs. ESN organised the second of three regional seminars and produced a follow-up report. In early 2016, 11 country profile reports and the final report, including recommendations for social services providers in the PHS sector in Europe will be published.

EU-China Social Protection Reform Package

On the invitation of the European Commission, ESN CEO John Halloran addressed the High Level Forum on Social Assistance in Beijing, China. The event in September launched the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project. The aim of this project is to improve China’s Social Protection system and accordingly to promote social equity and economic inclusiveness.

ESN launched the Reference Group to make social issues and the challenges faced by local public social services visible in the European Semester, the annual economic policy coordination process between Member States and the European Commission. In 2015, the Reference Group brought together directors and senior professionals working in public social services from 23 ESN member organisations in 22 EU countries.

Looking ahead: Can the European Semester deliver for local public social services?

In November, we published the report *Looking ahead – Local public social services priorities for the European Semester 2016*, which presents the views of local public social services on the European Semester 2015 and identifies public social policy priorities for the 2016 cycle.

The report is based on a review of the *National Reform Programmes (NRPs)* and the *European Commission's Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs)* for 2015 conducted by the members of ESN's Reference Group on the European Semester.

The report is the result of the answers to a questionnaire and discussions in the annual Group meeting in September, with participation from the European Commission and colleagues from the European Social Observatory, with whom ESN worked to gather ESN members' views and draft the final report.

ESN requested the Group members to identify a recommendation they believed the European Commission should issue to their national government in the context of the European Semester 2016. The report includes a cross-country analysis and 22 country profiles with the recommendations for the year 2016 listed at the top of each profile.

Key issues for local public social services

Key issues addressed were: fiscal consolidation and the impact on social services; financing and implementation; social policy coordination at national, regional and local levels; comprehensive and integrated social inclusion strategies; and current challenges around housing exclusion, childcare, long-term care and the development of community-based services.

A wider approach to social inclusion

The report raises key questions around how the European Semester addresses the main socio-economic challenges of the countries featured in the report. Overall, the priority in the 2015 CSRs is labour market considerations, but ESN members felt that there is a need to develop broader social inclusion strategies along the lines of the concept of social sustainability. This means that public social services should be supported to find people jobs but also in their efforts to enhance people's overall quality of life – be it to help people with disabilities to live

independently, making sure older people receive adequate care or supporting the better provision of childcare services.

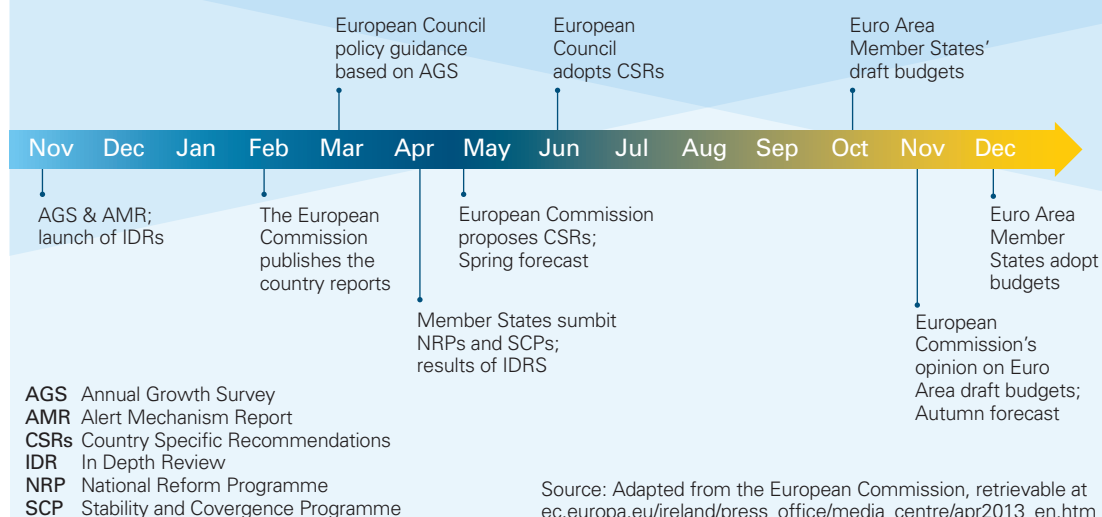
Looking ahead

The publication of the report coincided with the *2016 European Commission's Annual Growth Survey (AGS)*, which describes the priorities to be addressed in next year's European Semester process. Not surprisingly, the 2016 AGS sees the social dimension mostly in relation to employment, but it also re-iterates the notion of social investment with a focus on economic and social performance of social welfare systems. These issues will be addressed by the members of the Group next year.

“The EU Semester group meeting was both useful and informative. It was interesting to see that generally, across countries, there seems to be a disconnect between the European Commission's Country Specific Recommendations and the reality as experienced by the group's participants.”

Terry Madden
Independent Social
Work Consultant, Ireland

The European Semester Process





Network with Other Key Decision-Makers from Across Europe



Ella Kardemark
Chair of the social
board of the
municipality
of Halmstad
Sweden

“The City of Halmstad regards the European Social Services Conference as an important source of inspiration for our daily work, a meeting place to exchange and gain knowledge in the social service area. As a politician I support our involvement and appreciate the value the Conference brings to the City’s work of analysing the external world and its impacts on us.”



Network

A Growing and More Diverse Network





New Members in 2015

01	Kent County Council
02	City of Lisbon
03	City of Hannover
04	University of York
05	City of Bruges
06	City of Gent
07	PUFF (Practice, Development, Research, Future)
08	City of Vilnius
09	HomeNet
10	Bureau of Social and Political Development
11	KORA (the Danish Institute for Local and Regional Government Research)
12	Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University
13	Avedis Donabedian Research Institute – Autonomous University of Barcelona
14	City of Athens
15	Department of Family Policies, Secretariat of Prime Minister
16	City of Brighton & Hove
17	Gironde County Council
18	Public Social Services, Baia Mare
19	Lombardy Region

 This symbol indicates existing members

Network Working with Members

2015 saw 19 new members joining us from all over Europe, including the Ukraine. ESN works with 123 member organisations in 35 countries from a number of different government levels including: national associations of directors of social services; national, regional and local departments of social services, research organisations and regulatory agencies.

This year ESN has been supporting its members in their work at national level, in sharing knowledge and expertise through a peer learning programme, and through participation at conferences and membership visits.

ESN Member Participation at our 2015 activities

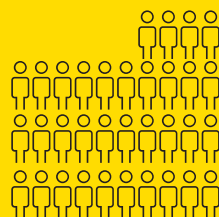
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Youth workshop



34

European semester reference group



Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

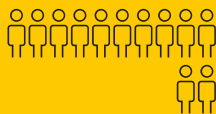
Jul

Aug

Sep

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Second ageing and care working group



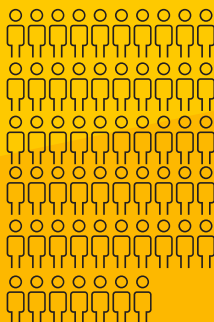
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Second disability working group



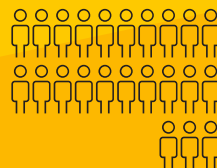
57

Third Investing in children's services peer review



23

Third ageing and care working group



93

Seminar on
integrated services

34

Research and
evidence forum

22

Third disability
working group

ESN organises a peer learning programme for its members

This is a programme where members can visit other peers to find out about a service they would like to implement in their own context or country. Four visits took place this year:

- 1 The first visit saw the *German Association of Local Employment Policy* travelling to Helsinki to learn about the implementation of the European Commission's Youth Guarantee and how this is affecting young adults in Finland. The aim was to understand how to adapt the Finnish approach for Germany.
- 2 The second visit was hosted by Barcelona County Council. This was on the topic of ICT-based assistive technology and showcased tele-care services to the City of Västerås (Sweden) who wish to implement a similar service.
- 3 The third visit took place in Barcelona: Bruges' Public Welfare Centre visited Barcelona County Council to discuss mortgage arrears and exchange knowledge on intermediation services.
- 4 The final visit featured Barcelona County Council travelling to Ghent to discuss fuel poverty. The result of these two visits will be a comprehensive guide for local authorities with practices to fight urban poverty from other European cities.

ESN visits ANDASS (Association of French directors of social services)

On 24-25 September, ESN attended the annual meeting of ANDASS in Bordeaux. 200 participants came together to reflect on the evolution of social policies and services over the last 25 years. Among the themes highlighted were the refugee crisis, and the importance of quality social and housing services at the local level.

ESN visits Cologne

ESN carried out a membership visit to Cologne on 3-4 December. This visit was hosted by Stephan Santelmann, who represents the Group of 16 large German cities. The visit gathered representatives from the City of Cologne, the City of Wuppertal, and the City of Duisburg. Presentations at the meeting highlighted recent challenges for public social services such as the impact of large numbers of refugees on local public services.

ESN visits Galicia

On 16 March, ESN Policy Director Alfonso Lara Montero spoke at a social innovation seminar at Galicia's School of Public Administration in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. This event was organised by an umbrella organisation of private providers of social services in cooperation with ESN member, the Department for Social Welfare of the Regional Government, and looked at the role of ICT in fostering social innovation.

Oct

Nov

Network
Lisbon 2015
23rd Annual
Conference

Building partnerships to improve lives

Organised in cooperation with the Government of Portugal, our 23rd European Social Services Conference took place in Lisbon on 6-8 July 2015. Gathering over 400 participants from 32 countries in Europe and beyond, ESN's annual flagship event brought together social services directors, policy makers, practitioners, service users, academics and private sector representatives, who discussed how a wide variety of partnerships can bring the best outcomes for users and society.

“Partnerships are extremely important. We need strong partnerships with the [social] sector to ensure that they can respond to users’ needs.”

Sarah Johnson
National Disability
Insurance Scheme
Australia





Throughout three days of intense discussions over four plenary sessions and twenty-four workshops, the need to work further across departments and sectors in order to improve communities emerged as a key issue.

Three sub-themes were identified as key in building successful partnerships to improve people's lives: local partnerships, a life-cycle approach and the role of technology.

Local partnerships

Across Europe, different stakeholders and services have responded to new challenges brought about by the economic crisis and lack of funding by developing effective local partnerships between professionals and sectors through an understanding of demographic change, and the coordination of services and actions at city level.

Inspiring practices from a range of European organisations – including ESN Members such as the German Association of Public and Private Welfare, the Flemish Association of Directors of Social Services and the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland – illustrated recent developments on partnership building across Europe.

A life-cycle approach

Early intervention and prevention were also highlighted as key to implementing a successful life-cycle approach in public services, one that emphasises early years' support, preventive approaches in later life and service users' enablement to overcome difficult situations throughout their lives.

Delegates heard keynote presentations from Paola Milani from Padua University, Sarah Johnson from the National Disability Insurance Scheme in Australia, Wolfgang Müller from the German Federal Employment Agency and Mirella Minkman from the Dutch Centre of Expertise in Long-term Care (Vilans).



“Delegates got inspiration from the exchange of knowledge and experience. We also saw that connections were made among the audience for future exchanges and peer learning.”

Hanne Ramsbol
Danish National Board
of Social Services and
Marianne Damsgaard
Hansen, Municipality
of Aarhus, Denmark

Network Lisbon 2015 23rd Annual Conference

Integrating technology into social services

The benefits of technology have been recognised at different policy levels, not least by the European Commission's work on the Digital Single Market and its impact on social services. Jasmin Battista (DG Connect, European Commission) highlighted the importance of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and social innovation in facilitating a community-based approach in social services.

At the local level, digital tools can enable policy makers and practitioners in social services to respond to the complex needs of different societal groups. A variety of examples for the application of digital technologies in social services were featured, including examples from Esri, Diona, IBM and SAP's Institute for Digital Government.

To convert their potential into a working reality, public and private sector resources can be combined through partnerships of different types. Private stakeholders can bring about the desired know-how and capacities to support the public sector in developing and implementing technical infrastructures.

Messages for the future

The final round table brought together representatives from the European Commission, national and regional governments, and national associations of social services directors, who discussed key messages about the shape of future social services:

- At EU level, an integrated approach is recognised as essential to delivering social inclusion and this should be high on the political agenda.
- For the Social Protection Committee, it is essential to go beyond exchange and focus on monitoring performance to guarantee policy efficiency.
- At national and regional levels, government has a strategic responsibility to set a framework in which citizens can better access services, and building partnerships is crucial to achieving that end.

For services, a focus on people and their local communities and encouraging local social and economic partnership development is key to creating better outcomes.

“Building partnership is easy to say but from words to action, that’s different. We have a family in Malmö challenged with drug abuse and unemployment who have a disabled child. During one week, they see 18 people from different services. There has to be a better way!”

Anna Balkfors
Director of the Institute
for Sustainable Urban
Development
Malmö, Sweden



The video from the 23rd Conference is now available here: esn-eu.org/videos/49/



I am very pleased that the next annual conference will take place in the Netherlands in cooperation with the Dutch Presidency of the European Council. If it's as great as this conference in Lisbon, then it will be an event not to miss. I hope to see you all there!"

Jetta Klijnsma, Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Affairs, the Netherlands.



How We Work Bringing Skills and Knowledge from Across Europe



Christian Fillet
ESN Chair and
Director of Social
Services at the
City of Bruges
Belgium

“As a director of a large city and member of the Flemish Social Directors Association, I know only too well the challenges facing public services today with increased demand and restricted finances. In ESN we therefore share the experience and skills of colleagues from all levels of government to improve the delivery of effective, person-centred, community services. It’s our mission.”



Governance and Leadership

Dear Colleagues,

It was a great honour for me to be elected the Chair of ESN, the second ever person to have held this post, following the retirement of Lars-Göran Jansson. I had the pleasure of working with him as Treasurer and later Vice Chair and appreciate the unique contribution he brought to the development of the network since its earliest days.

The European Social Network (ESN) is now a very different organisation with significant growth in its membership and in the range and quality of its activities. This is mirrored in its governance, which balances skills, commitment and experience.

As we look forward to the next period I would like the board and the wider membership to take a little time to look at our challenges and opportunities to ensure ESN is well placed in its governance and organisation to build an even more successful and sustainable future.

I would like to welcome the new Business Committee members Carlos Santos Guerrero from Galicia, and Harri Jokiranta from Finland as well as the new representatives to the Board.

As we enter 2016 we are aware of refugee migration and we are working as a social network to share experiences and improve the plight of those caught up in this humanitarian crisis.

With my best wishes,



Christian Fillet
Chair of ESN

“ESN provides something enormously valuable: space to think, reflect and be inspired by other colleagues. In this way it keeps us united and connected, allowing us to contribute significantly to strengthening European policies on social services.”

Carlos Santos Guerrero
member of the ESN
Business Committee
and Head of Services
for Community
Social Services
Regional Government
of Galicia, Spain

ESN Board

The Board of ESN is composed of 20 member organisations from 16 countries, mainly professional associations of directors of social services and local and regional governments. It plays a key role in ESN's overall direction and financial management.

Three Board meetings took place in 2015; the first in Copenhagen in February hosted by the Danish Directors Association, the second prior to the Annual General Meeting at the 23rd European Social Services Conference in Lisbon in July at which Business Committee elections took place and thirdly in Brighton in October where members shared experiences of the refugee crisis in their own countries.

This year, the Board welcomed the following new member representatives: Stephan Santelmann from the social service directors of the 16 largest cities in Germany, Kate Bøgh from the Association of Social Directors (FSD) in Denmark, Unnur V. Ingólfssdóttir President of the Association of Social Directors in Iceland, Emmanuel Gagneux from the French National Association of Directors of Social Services, Nereo Zamaro Regional Social Director of the Lazio Region, Nicole Wagner from the Swiss Towns and Cities, Karl Gudmundsson from the Swedish Social Directors Association (FSS) and Val de Souza from Social Work Scotland.

Business Committee

The Business Committee was elected in July. The Board delegates regular operational decision-making responsibility to the Business Committee (to include financial matters; strategy; conference; risk review; other operational business matters). It is composed of Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Chief Executive who is also Company Secretary.

Annual General Meeting Lisbon

The Annual General meeting took place at the beginning of the Lisbon conference and was attended by over 100 members. ESN's programme for the previous year was presented by policy officers together with members who had participated in various working groups, seminars and workshops. The AGM also provided members with an updated summary of the accounts and membership development. The Lisbon meeting was also an opportunity for members to thank Lars-Göran Jansson for his very special contribution and to wish him well for the future.

Funding

ESN signed a four-year framework agreement for 2014-2017 with the European Commission under the EaSI programme (2014-2020) and receives a grant for its annual work programme.

The annual European Social Services Conference organised by ESN is a separate self-funded activity.

ESN accounts are annually audited, reviewed by the ESN Board and submitted to the European Commission (with regards to the annual work programme), and to Companies House and the Charity Commission in the UK.

The annual accounts are available online at Companies House, which incorporates limited companies and registers and makes public all legally required information, and the Charity Commission in the UK.

How We Work

Meet the Team

in Brighton



The ESN Secretariat

ESN has an international and multi-skilled team from all across Europe and speaks over 12 languages, led by John Halloran, Chief Executive. Our Secretariat is based in Brighton, a city with a large diverse population and a vibrant cultural and music scene.

Policy

The policy team is led by Alfonso Lara Montero, ESN Policy Director, who is responsible for managing the European Commission (EC) programme and relations with the EC. The policy team works on a number of themes. Alfonso leads children and families, evidence-based practice and EU policy. Dorothea Baltruks works on ageing and care, active inclusion and employment; Kim Nikolaj Japing, on mental health and young people; Marianne Doyen on disability and European Structural and Investment Funds. Throughout the year, we have welcomed young graduates joining our policy and communications internship programme.

Communications

Susan Clandillon, Senior Communications Officer, and Anita Alfonsi, Communications and Data Officer promote our work through different media and communication channels. They look after our website, publications, videos, podcasts and newsletters.

Membership and Administration

Jonas Bylund, Operations and Development Manager, is in charge of membership and partnership development. Alberto Dotta takes care of the organisation of all the activities funded under the EC programme. Sofia Ransom is Office Manager and PA to the Chief Executive.

European Social Services Conference

Our annual conference is organised by David Scurr, Conference Manager, and Aurelia Mandato, Conference Organiser.

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