



European
Social
Network

15 YEARS

PROMOTING SOCIAL
SERVICES IN EUROPE

The Social Services Network for Europe

Annual Review 2014



The European Social Network
is supported by the
European Commission

Introduction

Sharing Moments from ESN's First 15 Years

10

Towards a People's Europe

ESN's first research project analysed personal budgets for people with disabilities and older people in 10 countries. A first of its kind, involving disabled and older persons, the research influenced change in UK government policy, and the OECD invited us to present it to a US government and disability congress in Washington in 1999.

1999



Promoting Inclusion for Unaccompanied Minor Asylum-Seeking Children and Immigrants

ESN member authorities in which were located major airports (Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Schiphol and Frankfurt) worked together with home affairs ministries, human rights and legal bodies to better examine the situation of unaccompanied young asylum seekers. The final recommendations are still highly relevant today.

2005

“As the Chair of the Danish Association of Social Directors and someone who has known ESN from the very beginning, I have appreciated its growing contribution to our professional lives, providing Danish managers of local public social services with the opportunity to share knowledge with colleagues from across Europe to help us improve the quality of our services.”

Olle Pass, Director of Social Services in the Municipality of Rødovre, Former Chair of the Danish Association of Social Directors, Denmark



Managing Diversity in Public Health and Social Care

A unique study of equality of access to services and the labour market looked at race, ethnicity, age and disability in public health and social care, carried out by ESN members and other stakeholders, including service users. A series of three reports led to an index of legislation on service equality in all EU countries.

2003



Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market

ESN's work in promoting service access was taken up by the European Commission in 2008, leading to the Active Inclusion Recommendation. ESN established a working group and published a report on active inclusion which outlined principles that are at the heart of the Social Investment Package launched five years later.

2008



Towards Community Care

We organised a seminar in Warsaw to explore the challenges of managing the transition process from institutional to community services in Europe. This was the starting point of an important strand of work for ESN, which continued with a working group and a training programme for government and civil society representatives from the Visegrád countries.

2009



European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing

We launched a working group to assess and suggest policies for the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing. At the end of the working group's mandate, we published a report with policies and practices to promote a person-centred community approach to mental health services.

2010

“ESN has been very successful on at least three fronts throughout these past 15 years: through its emphasis on the importance of the core values of social services; encouraging the collaboration between social and health services as the foundation of a healthy community; and becoming a knowledge centre for social services across Europe.”

Aðalsteinn Sigfússon,
Director of Social Services
in the Municipality of
Kópavogur, Former Chair
of the Association of
Social Directors, Iceland



Listening to Users

The European Year for Combating Poverty and Exclusion was marked by ESN with the production of a website with stories of service users and a highly acclaimed short film of personal conversations with people using public services and their carers in Belgium, Spain and the Czech Republic, the three countries holding consequently the Presidency of the European Union.

2010



Investing in Children

ESN members responsible for protecting children and promoting their welfare played a central role in ensuring that services were included in the European Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'. The year the Recommendation was published, ESN launched a research project to contribute to its implementation.

2013

100

100 Member Organisations in 33 Countries

We started the year with 100 member organisations in the network, up from 8 founding national members in 1999. ESN has been growing steadily for the past 15 years to reflect the diversity of planning, delivery and evaluation of social services in Europe.

2014



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



As we reach the mid-point of the Europe 2020 social policy strategy, we can reflect on a turbulent period for many of our citizens and for those endeavouring to provide them with quality social services. The economic and social landscape remains challenging, with few signs of growth and improving public finances.

At the same time, we recognise the need for reform to ensure that people are supported and cared for in ways that enhance their capacity to be as independent as possible, to make choices and have control of their lives, in short, to promote an inclusive, caring and cohesive society.

ESN understands that solutions must be found at the local level, and that social services have a central role to play, together with other services and sectors, in improving people's lives in their communities. This requires building local leadership, investing in planning and workforce skills, better data and improved technology.

This is why we are working with our members, the European Commission and national and regional governments, to improve opportunities for mutual learning and development and to build partnerships across services and sectors, and together with service users to deliver effective, efficient and more sustainable services.

The first 15 years for ESN have been a remarkable achievement from small beginnings and we are ready to move forward with confidence to helping improve services for people over the next 15!

John Halloran
ESN Chief Executive

Introduction

Looking Forward

Towards 2015

2015 promises to be a busy and exciting year for ESN. We have many projects planned, working with our members to develop new knowledge and bring innovation to the design and delivery of social services.



Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes

Our research project on children's services continues with a third peer review featuring five additional countries: Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Romania.



Education, Employment and Social Services for Youth

Our work on youth services will include a workshop to identify local practices of coordinated approaches between education, employment and social services.



Quality Services for Older People

Our Working Group on Ageing and Care will hold two meetings to analyse policies and practices in service integration and active ageing.



Independent Living for People with Disabilities

Members of our Working Group on Disability will meet to assess service integration, accessibility and service users' involvement.



Applied Evidence in Social Services

Members of our Panel on Applied Evidence, both researchers and practitioners, will meet and exchange evidence implementation in a number of social services related areas.



Working at EU Level

Our Reference Group on the European Semester will meet to assess the National Reform Programmes and Country-Specific Recommendations in the framework of the European Semester.



Service Integration

We are analysing the service integration context and will hold a seminar to look at the European context in the field of integration of social services with other sectors.



Connect. Building Partnerships to Improve Lives

Our 23rd European Social Services Conference will take place in Lisbon on **6-8 July 2015** and discuss partnerships across sectors and services to provide better outcomes for people.

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Learn About Current Policy and Practice Trends



Mercè Sanmartí, Director-General, Directorate General for Children and Adolescents, Ministry of Social Welfare and Family, Government of Catalonia, Spain

“Taking part in ESN’s project on children’s services allowed us to see first-hand how our neighbouring countries were facing similar challenges. The work carried out by ESN in recent years has shown us that we all share a commitment to investing in children’s policies to reduce child poverty, care for the most vulnerable and promote children’s participation. And the best way to start is with prevention, implementing a holistic approach which involves all stakeholders, as we have done with the Pact for Children in Catalonia.”



Learn

Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes

The second peer review of our research project on children's services took place in June in Barcelona and was organised in cooperation with ESN member, the Ministry for Social Welfare and Family of the Government of Catalonia. The project brings together delegates from across Europe to analyse the national and legal framework in their countries and compare it to the European Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

Participants at this year's peer review included representatives from national, regional and local government, and public and not-for-profit children's services from Catalonia in Spain, Scotland in the UK, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. They analysed the organisation of children's services in their countries, identified gaps in service design and implementation, and formulated policy recommendations.

Opening the meeting, representatives from the OECD, the European Commission, the European Network of Experts on Social Inclusion and ESN discussed the evidence base for investing in effective child policies. They identified key child poverty challenges which included difficulties in accessing early childcare (due to cost, large social gradient, low uptake of services) and, in some cases, ineffective social transfers.

The evidence presented showed that investment in the early years and throughout childhood increases the efficiency of public expenditure. However, few European countries provide continuous support during childhood, and there remain gaps in many countries, often during the very early years.

Looking at the organisation of children's services in the five countries reviewed, participants identified significant gaps in service provision. In many cases, the economic crisis had had a serious impact on the delivery of services, and delegates agreed that new ways of delivering services were needed to tackle new challenges (e.g. by providing more targeted solutions to reach out to those most in need).

The peer review concluded with proposals for policy and service development. Government representatives from the five countries highlighted the need for a wider concept of child poverty which should not only account for material deprivation, but also for social development, education and participation. In order to implement this, there is a need for systematic and evidence-based approaches, as well as a reinforcement of the role of local authorities as coordinators who bring together professionals across sectors.

The project 'Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes' continues in 2015 with a third peer review which will look at five more countries: Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Romania.

"ESN provides a platform to review comprehensive plans covering children's needs with the acknowledgement that investing in children is key to building a more cohesive society."

Neus Munté i Fernandez,
Minister for Social
Welfare and Family
in the Government
of Catalonia, Spain



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

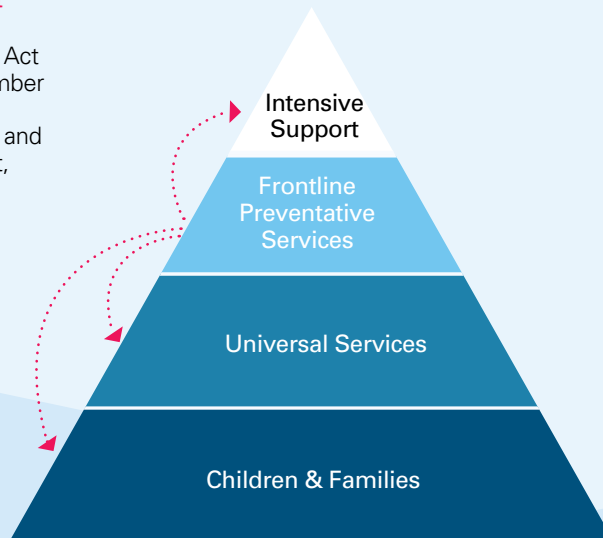


“Investment is a question of language which promotes optimism on the one hand, whilst on the other places a strong emphasis on early childcare and the long-term objective of improving children’s outcomes later in life.”

Helen Happer, Head of Quality and Improvement at the Care Inspectorate, Scottish Government, UK

The Child and Youth Act in the Netherlands

The new Child and Youth Act aims to decrease the number of children in specialised care, increase preventive and early intervention support, and promote the use of social networks.



Source: Caroline Vink, Dutch National Youth Institute, Presentation at ESN Peer Review Investing in Children’s Services, Improving Outcomes, Barcelona, 5 June 2014

Learn

Social Planning

Developing More Cohesive Local Communities

The ESN seminar on social planning was organised in Vienna on 6–7 November, together with our member, the Department for Health Care and Social Welfare Planning of the City of Vienna. Over 80 delegates from 25 countries gathered to exchange expertise and share ideas on effective practices in the local planning of social services.

The presentations and discussions, linking policy, practice and research, provided insights into the social planning process, with a focus on the use of data, planning structures and tools, stakeholder involvement, and local ownership.

The first session explored different models of planning, with examples from the host city, Vienna, and Catalonia. Whilst in Vienna a cyclical approach towards social planning steered the process, in Catalonia community development plans were an effective way of engaging citizens in the planning process.

The session on integrated planning showcased different public management tools with regard to their applicability to up-scaling social planning. Rita Valadas presented geo-maps as an aid to developing area-based social interventions for vulnerable groups in Portugal, and Gabriela Sempruch described the Calculator of Costs of Inaction which is being piloted with local authorities in Poland to plan smarter social interventions.

Health in social planning was also on the agenda. Delegates heard about good governance for better health and wellbeing in the Basque Country, a model based on an inter-agency, intra-departmental and governmental cooperation between public authorities, and Northern Ireland's recent initiatives of integrating health and social planning.

In group sessions, delegates discussed planning of local services for children and families, adults with disabilities, and older people. Marie-Paule Martin-Blachais described how the national child protection observatory in France works with observatories at local level to collect data and provide guidance tools for planning effective children's policies. Harri Jokiranta illustrated a user-driven innovation process, based on seminars and workshops, which helps to design housing solutions for the complex needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

Across the different sessions, delegates agreed that an integrated and collaborative approach that involves all relevant stakeholders (including service users and citizens) is key to a social planning process that promotes inclusive communities. As heard in the final debate, the European framework, with tools such as the European Commission's Social Investment Package, is also meant to support social services to develop better targeted social policies.



Resources from the seminar, including video recordings, are on our website esn-eu.org/events and ESN members can find more in our Members' Area

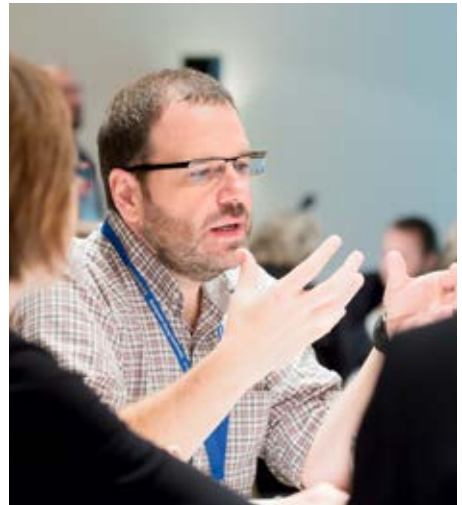


“Social planning is an ongoing process that must not take a top-down approach.”

Rudolf Hundstorfer,
Federal Minister for
Labour, Social Affairs
and Consumer
Protection, Austria

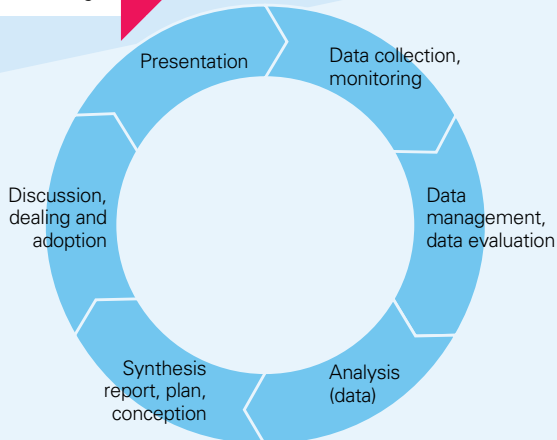
“Austerity has challenged us to be more innovative, to think differently about how problems can be managed, not to rely on traditional methods of problem-solving, but to concentrate on the resources that we have and not those that we don’t have.”

Anne Helferty, Chief
Housing Welfare Officer
City of Dublin, Ireland



The social planning process in the City of Vienna

Implementation
or decision
making



Source: Peter Stanzl, City of Vienna, Presentation at ESN Seminar Social Planning: Developing More Cohesive Local Communities, Vienna, 6 November 2014

Share Effective Practice to Promote Quality Services



Roland Giraud, President of the Association of Directors of Social Care and Health (ANDASS), Director of the Services for Solidarity, Département of Pas-de-Calais, France

“Our exchanges within the European Social Network are, first of all, a truly human experience and useful because they allow us to open ourselves to others and to the European sphere. Sharing has nowadays become a moral requirement; it makes us realise that despite our diverging histories and different organisational settings, we are faced with similar problems and questions, such as how to develop a more holistic approach to benefit the people we take care of.”



Share

Quality and Sustainable Services for Older People

ESN launched a new Working Group on Ageing and Care with senior professionals in local and regional authorities from 12 countries. The first meeting took place in September, and four more meetings are planned for 2015–2016, during which we will be analysing policies and practices of developing quality and sustainable services for older people.

The working group members play an important role in shaping the environment and everyday life for older people. They plan, finance, manage, provide or inspect services for older people, from municipalities with 45,000 inhabitants to regions with over 5 million people. They develop care services in different settings, implement projects to address loneliness and foster participation, and create age-friendly environments.

Services for older people often have the highest share of social services budgets, and the demand for services is likely to continue. At the meeting, Niclas Jacobson, Chair of the Social Protection Committee's Working Group on Ageing, presented the report 'Adequate social protection for long-term care needs in an ageing society' that addresses the challenges for social services. The recommendations in the report, which are in line with those in the Social Investment Package, focus on prevention and rehabilitation, and age-friendly environments. The work of ESN's working group will contribute to the local implementation of these recommendations.

At the meeting, members discussed local case studies which showcased the challenges and solutions for the delivery of local services for older people. Lars Liljedahl from Östersund in Sweden explained how his municipality encourages providers to deliver rehabilitative and quality services through financial incentives and quality criteria. Luis Berrios Novoa from Barcelona Provincial Council pointed out measures to maintain service provision during the financial crisis, such as co-payments, professional training, and increased use of tele-care and home adaptations.

Another topic at the meeting was the use of research and evidence in the development of services for older people. Public social services managers often face difficulties in applying research because of lack of data, political commitment or lack of resources. The working group will be identifying and assessing the potential effectiveness of a number of practices over the next two years.

The next meetings will focus on topics such as service integration, active ageing, workforce and care settings. Alongside core group members from our network, external guests and thematic contributors will also be invited to share their experience at individual meetings.



Find out more about the project at esn-eu.org/ageing-and-care-working-group

The Network of Municipalities



The cooperation work model developed by the Barcelona Provincial Council to optimise human, technical and material resources and encourage local use of new technologies and digital administration.

Source: Luis Berrios Novoa, Barcelona Provincial Council, Presentation at ESN Working Group on Ageing and Care, Brighton, 11-12 September 2014



“We need to move away from doing things because we think they are good for older people to a situation where we actually know the effectiveness of the services we provide. This involves three equally important partners: older persons and their families, professional staff and researchers.”

Lars Liljedahl, Director of Elderly Care and Care for Disabled People, Municipality of Östersund, Sweden

Share

Person-Centred Services for People with Disabilities

In 2014 we also launched a new Working Group on Disability, with the aim of developing practical knowledge and recommendations on the planning, managing and delivery of quality, person-centred services for people with disabilities. ESN members participating in the project were selected for their experience in the field; they have a background in managing services for people with disabilities in local authorities or in applied research.

The opening meeting of the working group took place on 4–5 December in Brighton, marking the International Day of People with Disabilities on 3 December. Despite increased regulations and norms, both at European and national level, people with disabilities continue to face barriers when it comes to social inclusion and integration into the labour market, but also in terms of independent living, choice of services and participation in decisions affecting their lives. During the discussions, members shared their daily challenges in managing services for people with disabilities.

Marion Meany, Head of Operations and Service Improvement of Disability Services at the Health Service Executive in Ireland, described the far-reaching reform currently taking place at national level. Services are being reassessed in order to better meet users' needs, be more cost-effective and ensure the development of community-based care. In Aarhus, the second biggest municipality in Denmark, there is a wide range of initiatives and services to enhance empowerment, active citizenship and user-managed solutions for people with disabilities, as described by Carsten Hansen, Head of the Department of Social Affairs and Employment.

Working group participants also looked at the broader context of European policies and initiatives in the field of disability. Alan Roulstone, Professor of Disability Studies at the University of Leeds, presented the United Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Disability Strategy and the EU 2020 Strategy, and their implications in terms of independent living and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Participants also heard about the work of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on promoting the right to live independently and to be included in the community for people with disabilities. Nevena Peneva described one of FRA's projects, which partly focuses on implementation issues at the local level, a topic to which ESN members have much to contribute.

The working group will hold four thematic meetings in 2015–2016, each focusing on a specific dimension with regard to services for people with disabilities: service integration and inter-sectoral cooperation, accessibility and users' involvement in designing and evaluating services, active inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, and developing quality standards and an adequate market of services.



“In order to provide good quality and personalised services for persons with disabilities, we first need to create a new attitude and staff culture, based on the participation and motivation of all members of the community.”

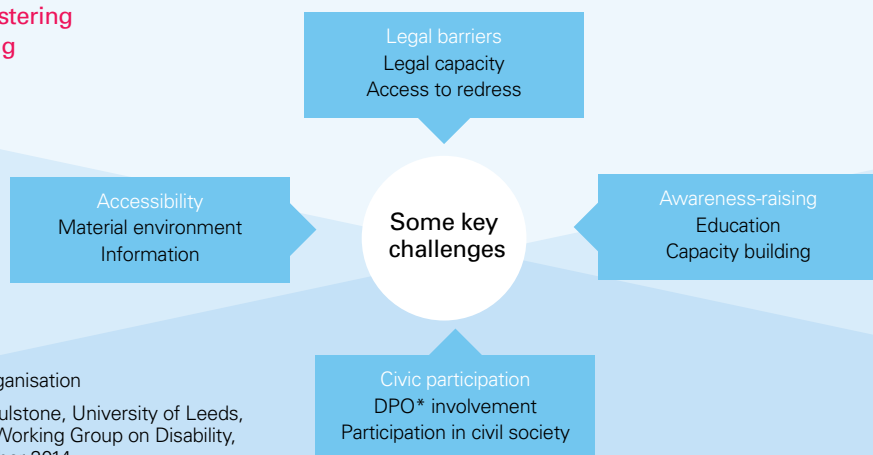
Jouni Nummi, Director of the Joint Municipal Authority for Social Services, Finland

“Effective information sharing is crucial; when implementing our national database, we wanted to avoid time-consuming duplication of work, and above all, make a difference for service users.”

Marina Drobi, Project officer at the National Solidarity Fund for Autonomy, France



Challenges for fostering independent living



*Disabled People's Organisation

Source: Prof. Alan Roulstone, University of Leeds, Presentation at ESN Working Group on Disability, Brighton, 4-5 December 2014

Influence European and National Policy-Making



Sergo Kurulishwili,
Director of the Institute
for the Development of
Social Services (IRSS),
Poland

“Our ESN membership gives us a chance to understand the challenges faced by public social policy organisations from across Europe, as well as seeing how those challenges are tackled. It is an excellent opportunity to connect with other professionals. ESN projects, such as the European Semester Reference Group, give us invaluable knowledge and the tools to participate in the policy-making process at the national and European level.”



Influence

Connecting European with Local Policy-Making

ESN launched a Reference Group to make social issues and the challenges faced by social services visible in the framework of the European Semester, the annual economic and social policy coordination process between Member States and the European Commission. In 2014, the group brought together senior managers working in public social services from 15 countries.

The Reference Group on the European Semester explores how public social services for children, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues and older people are addressed within the policy cycle to monitor the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The input from the group brings valuable first-hand knowledge of the key social challenges affecting people at local level, useful for both national and European policy-makers.

In 2014, Reference Group members analysed the national key documents of the process, the National Reform Programmes and the Country-Specific Recommendations, discussed their analysis and identified public social policy priorities for the following year's European Semester cycle. Their views were then published in the report 'Connecting Europe to local communities' which includes a cross-country analysis and 15 country profiles with recommendations for 2015.

Key issues addressed in the report included: differences in data collection across Member States, ways of tackling inequality and social exclusion, the quality of public social services provision, and the importance of local authorities' involvement to ensure the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations.

ESN members underlined that the European Semester process needs better coordination between economic and social policies in order to address poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, they stressed the need for investment in human capital that does not only focus on job creation.

One of the key messages of the report is that the support provided by public social services needs to be taken into account in order to develop sustainable and inclusive growth. Local authorities are essential as they have an immediate impact on the wellbeing of people and their communities – by supporting people with disabilities to live independently, enabling older people to live in dignity and receive adequate care, or helping children to get the best possible start in life.

Over the next few years, ESN's Reference Group on the European Semester will continue to analyse the National Reform Programmes and the Country-Specific Recommendations and develop policy proposals for a more social, inclusive and sustainable Europe.



Find the 'Connecting Europe to local communities' report on our website esn-eu.org/publications

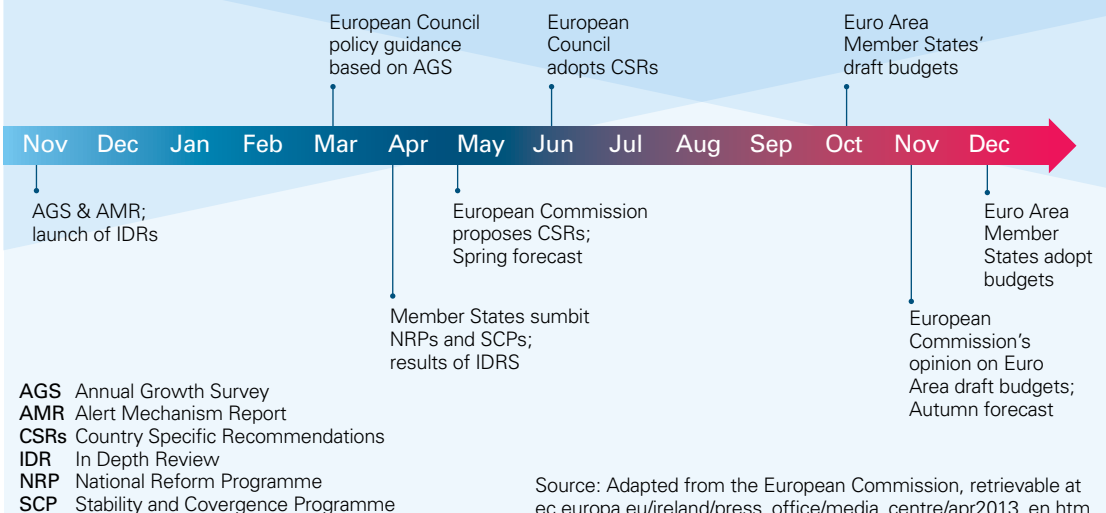


“We shall endeavour to ensure that the European Semester treats employment and social issues on an equal footing with macroeconomic issues.”

Marianne Thyssen, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, at the 4th Annual Convention against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Brussels



The European Semester Process



Influence Working at EU Level



European Initiatives on Active and Healthy Ageing

Throughout the year, ESN has been involved in several European projects on ageing and care, representing the role of 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, a project that promotes mutual learning between stakeholders and develops innovative evidence-based solutions for age-friendly environments across the EU. We have also become a member of the Action Group on Integrated Care within the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. The group focuses on the development of integrated care models to meet the needs of older people.

European Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing

As a member of the European Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing, launched under the EU Health Programme to address issues relevant for the Europe 2020 Strategy, ESN has been actively involved in three work packages throughout the year: 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 meetings of the Joint Action.

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

ESN managed the EU Joint Action to support the 2014 programme of the European Expert Group (EEG) to promote developing community care for children, those with disabilities and mental health conditions, and older people. Seminars were organised in five countries to raise awareness and encourage the use of European Funds to build community-based social services. ESN Chief Executive John Halloran gave opening addresses at seminars in Latvia, Poland and Serbia, where ESN members from public authorities in those countries also participated. The programme concluded with a meeting in the European Parliament together with MEPs, the European Commission and organisations from the seminar countries.



EU Alliance for Investing in Children

In 2014 ESN joined the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, together with 20 other European networks sharing a commitment to end child poverty and promote children's wellbeing in Europe. The Alliance was launched to support the implementation of the European Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' by facilitating stakeholder cooperation at EU, national, regional and local levels. There were several joint activities developed throughout the year, aimed to keep the fight against child poverty on the policy agenda; this included celebrating 25 years since the launch of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

How to access EU Structural and Investment Funds

EU Structural and Investment Funds are the main financial instrument for the implementation of the EU's regional policy which aims to reduce the economic and social disparities between Europe's regions. Drawing knowledge from ESN members' experience with European Funds, we published a guideline for public authorities working in the field of social services on the new rules and regulations surrounding the use of EU Funds in the financial period 2014–2020. The guideline aims to contribute to the improvement in knowledge of public authorities on how to access and, once secured, how to use the Funds to generate sustainable impact in their country, region or local community.

“The European Social Network has provided us with valuable learning about the development of community-based service planning and deinstitutionalisation for my country and the opportunity to access good practice from across Europe.”

Nenad Ivanisevic, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Serbia

Network with Other Key Decision-Makers from Across Europe



Jim Thomas,
Programme Head for
Workforce Innovation
at Skills for Care, UK

“As Programme Head for Workforce Innovation at Skills for Care, the adult social care workforce organisation for England, ESN is important to my learning and understanding about social care innovation across Europe, providing me with an opportunity to network and share ideas that has helped me to build relationships with colleagues in many European countries. Many of the issues facing social care organisations across Europe are the same and ESN has enabled me to explore different ways of working, adapt and incorporate European thinking into the programmes of social care workforce innovation I support in England.”



Network

A Growing and More Diverse Network



New Members in 2014

- 01 Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland
- 02 Piedmont Region, Social Policies Department
- 03 Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Department of Affairs for Disabled
- 04 European Children's Rights Unit, University of Liverpool
- 05 Ministry of Social Policy and Youth
- 06 Pas-de-Calais County Council
- 07 Institute for Research in Social Sciences, University of Ulster
- 08 Santa Casa da Misericordia de Lisboa
- 09 Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies, National Research Council
- 10 National Specialised Institute of Territorial Studies of Angers
- 11 Göteborg Region Association of Local Authorities
- 12 Consortium of Social Action of Catalonia / SUMAR – social welfare company
- 13 Region of Southern Denmark
- 14 Centre for Health Services Studies, University of Kent
- 15 Directorate-General of Health of the Ministry of Health



 This symbol indicates existing members

Network Working with Members

ESN has been supporting members in their work at the national level, but also promoting the sharing of knowledge and expertise at a cross-national and European level, through conferences, peer learning visits, working groups and other projects.

Romanian Social Services Conference – Investing in Children and Young People

The conference took place in Arad on 27–29 May and was organised by ESN member, the Directorate for Development and Community Assistance of the Municipality of Arad, with support from the ESN Secretariat. The event brought together over 130 specialists working in children and youth services across different municipalities and NGOs in Romania, as well as ESN members from Hungary, Scotland and England, willing to share their experiences and discuss local practices and common challenges. ESN Policy Director, Alfonso Lara Montero, shared lessons from our research project on children's services across Europe, emphasising the need for a more systematic and evidence-based manner of investing in policies that produce better outcomes for children.

“First hand exchange of knowledge is the best way to approach new projects and ideas. Our visit to the Municipality of Mechelen in Belgium was very useful, we're already thinking about projects we can develop in our region.”

Jesús Marcial Méndez Magán, Deputy Director-General of Planning and Innovation, Regional Ministry of Labour and Welfare, Regional Government of Galicia, Spain





“We had a great learning experience in Nacka, thanks to Carina Smith and her colleagues. They were absolutely perfect in explaining their approach and discussing every issue we were interested to know about. Overall, the visit was a complete success.”

Sergio Murillo,
Director-General for the
Promotion of Personal
Autonomy, Provincial
Authority of Biscay,
Spain

Contemporary Issues in the Public Management of Social Services in Europe

Working together with social services managers and directors from ESN member organisations, we published a series of four public management papers in which we look at contemporary issues: responding to the economic crisis and austerity, innovation, research and evidence-based practice, working in partnerships, and leadership and management. The series is based on the work of ESN's Working Group on Leadership, Performance and Innovation throughout 2012–2013. The group met again in 2014 to present the key findings of their work in a dedicated workshop at the 22nd European Social Services Conference in Rome.

4th Annual Convention against Poverty and Social Exclusion

The annual event of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion in Brussels in November engaged over 700 participants in discussions about the way forward to fight poverty and social exclusion. This year's focus was on social innovation – how can it stimulate private-public partnerships, encourage social entrepreneurship and investment? ESN was represented by members from Italy, Germany and the UK who shared their experiences on integrated services and evidence-based practice. John Halloran chaired a plenary roundtable with city mayors, Alfonso Lara Montero reported at the workshop on evidence for social investment, and more ESN members from different levels of government participated in the discussions.

ESN Peer Learning Programme

Another project we launched in 2014 to connect ESN members with each other and promote innovative and sustainable service development was a series of peer learning visits. During the pilot phase, the programme was directed at member organisations that participated in new or recent working groups in order to continue the mutual learning processes. Representatives from the Regional Government of Catalonia and the Italian Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies within the National Research Council, the Provincial Authority of Biscay and the Municipality of Nacka, the Autonomous Region of Galicia and the City of Mechelen visited each other and discussed common challenges in providing quality services, but also concrete initiatives that could be implemented on the ground. Taking into account participants' feedback, we will be developing the project further in 2015.

ESN Panel on Applied Evidence in Social Services

As part of our 4-year programme, we launched a Panel on Applied Evidence with ESN members and selected external stakeholders to discuss the evidence-based policy and practice phenomenon in the field of social services across Europe. Participants met for the first time in November to look at the approach to evidence-based policy and practice in Denmark and the Netherlands. Applied researchers in the field of social services reviewed and made reference to the situation in their own countries. The project continues in 2015 with a forum with practitioners and applied researchers, and the publication of a report afterwards.

Network

Rome 2014 22nd Annual Conference

Investing in people and communities
social inclusion and social development

Our 22nd European Social Services Conference took place in Rome on 7–9 July, in cooperation with the Italian Presidency of the EU. Gathering over 400 delegates from over 30 countries in Europe and beyond, social services directors, key policy-makers, service users and representatives from academia and the private sector, the event focused on social reform and investment in Europe.



“There is a wonderful opportunity for local authorities to be more effective at what they do by unlocking private capital and aligning the motivation of that private capital with their own objectives, and the way to do that is through social impact investing.”

Karl Richter, CEO of Engaged Investment, UK



Throughout three days of intense discussions, four plenary sessions and 30 workshops emerged a clear message about the need to transform services to deliver better outcomes for people and communities. In particular, four directions for change have been highlighted as essential to building a more caring and inclusive society.

Social investment, key to the future of a social Europe

At a time when the European social model has come under pressure because of difficult socio-economic circumstances, increasing social needs and decreasing public budgets, the conference debated the future shaping of the welfare state and public services. With poverty and social exclusion increasing dramatically in recent years and leading to growing inequalities and a fragile economic recovery, social investment becomes key to improving the quality of people's lives and making a positive contribution to economic development. Delegates heard from Nicola Zingaretti, the President of the Lazio Region in Italy, and Loukas Tsoukalis, Professor of European Integration at the University of Athens, among others.

Working in partnerships across sectors

Cooperation within the public sector and with the private sector is important for the design of services that promote economic and social investment. Local authorities play a vital role in establishing infrastructures that support the right kind of social investment, based on local issues and needs. Lucina Caravaggi, Professor at La Sapienza University in Rome, presented an innovative example of cooperation between the care sector and architecture of building engaging community spaces, and Karl Richter, CEO of Engaged Investment in the UK, talked about social impact investment as a productive way of combining the values of the social sector with commercial interests.



“The lack of positive outcomes for people is not just costly, but also unfair to all who experience inefficient interventions from the public sector. We need to know what we are doing and we need to do the things that work.”

Knud Aarup, CEO of the Danish National Board of Social Services, Denmark



Network

Rome 2014 22nd Annual Conference

Evidence-based practice in social services

The economic crisis has revealed that service users have not always benefited from social care, even in countries with high public spending, such as Denmark. The limited level of knowledge about successful practice, the lack of clear targets, and the poor implementation of policies in terms of quality and leadership meant that there is a need to review the effectiveness of social policy. José-Luis Fernández from the London School of Economics in the UK and Knud Aarup, CEO of the Danish National Board of Social Services, shared their views of the need to create evidence-based knowledge of what works and apply it in the delivery of social services.

User participation, personalised services

Involving service users and their families in the design, delivery and evaluation of services is key to ensuring that those who are 'experts by experience' have a say in how services are delivered. In this way, demand-steered support works best and services are more responsive to the needs of users, rather than users having to adapt to the structure of service provision. As Peter Lambreghts from the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) emphasised, investing in people directly, for example by promoting personal budgets, enables those with care needs to live independently.





"Often when I talk with policy-makers they say: 'Independent living is all right for you, Peter; you are a strong-minded and educated wheelchair user!' For other people with multiple disabilities or mental impairments, they lower the standards, but I have seen many examples which show that independent living is possible for all."

Peter Lambreghts,
Policy Officer, European
Network on Independent
Living (ENIL)



How We Work Bringing Skills and Knowledge from Across Europe



Lars-Göran Jansson,
ESN Chair, Secretary,
Göteborg Region
Association of Local
Authorities, Sweden

“Since the start 15 years ago, ESN has grown from an informal network to a well-established player on the European scene, representing more than 100 member organisations. This remarkable development has taken place during a period when Europe has been facing tremendous challenges for social services, including demographic change and the financial crisis. Throughout the years, ESN has developed a strong role representing the regional and local social services, and is now the obvious meeting place for social directors in Europe. The annual European Social Services Conference in particular plays an important role for our members.”



How We Work

Governance and Leadership

The Board of ESN is composed of 20 member organisations, mainly professional associations of directors of social services, who come from 16 countries. Throughout the year, Board members have been actively involved in steering the direction of ESN's annual work programme, sharing their expertise and representing ESN at European and national events.

Three Board meetings took place in 2014, one of which was prior to our Annual General Meeting in Rome, at the 22nd European Social Services Conference. An impressive number of members gathered to celebrate 15 years of ESN, share stories from the early days of our network and plan for the future.

Funding

ESN signed a four-year framework agreement for 2014–2017 with the European Commission and receives an annual 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.





“After more than 10 years with ESN, I have had the honour and pleasure to see this unique organisation grow. Today ESN is a network that has no equal in Europe. Skilled employees, strong leadership and excellent seminars and conferences ensure quality of information exchanges for all those committed to social services development in Europe. The next 15 years promise to be even better.”

Christian Fillet, ESN Vice chair, Secretary, OCMW Brugge, Belgium



How We Work

Meet the Team

in Brighton



ESN has an international and multi-skilled team that comes 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 diverse European 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 the European Commission programme. The policy team works on a number of themes. Alfonso works on children and families, evidence-based practice and EU policy. Lisa Schöenberg works on ageing and care, housing and active inclusion, Kim Nikolaj Japing on mental health and young people, and Marianne Doyen is responsible for disability and Structural Funds. At the end of the year we also introduced an internship programme.

European Social Service Conference

Our annual conference is organised by Maria Capozzi, Conference Manager, and Aurelia Mandato, Conference Organiser.

Communications

Irina Savin, Communications Officer, and Sam Crossfield, Communications and Data Assistant, look after our website, publications, videos, news and newsletters.

Administration

Jonas Bylund, Operations and Development Manager, is in charge of membership and partnership development. Alberto Dotta is Projects Officer, in charge of organising events and working groups. Sofia Korkiamäki is Office Manager and PA to the Chief Executive.

We would like to thank David Scurr, Adrienn Sz Nagy, Alice Young, Marie Vinet and George Intzesiloglou for their dedication and commitment to ESN and wish them best of luck for the future.

European Social Network
Victoria House
125 Queens Road
Brighton BN1 3WB
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1273 739 039
Fax +44 (0) 1273 739 239

Email info@esn-eu.org

www.esn-eu.org

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