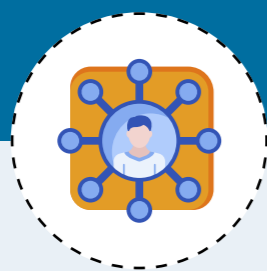


Current Trends 2022

This is a summary of current trends in social services in Europe based on newsletters, publications, conferences, and working groups which were featured on the [European Social Network \(ESN\) website](#) in 2022. This presentation is an update to a previous summary of trends between 2019-2021.

ESN is a network of public and private social services organizations in and beyond Europe. It includes organizations that plan, provide, fund, manage, regulate, or study social services. ESN's aim is to promote knowledge exchanges between social services organizations in the areas of health, education, housing, employment, and social integration. These exchanges are designed to improve policies and practices for the benefit of social services users. The network's programs include working groups, roundtables, and conferences. The trends presented here are also under study at the [Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute](#) in Israel.



Collaborations

Collaborations between organizations, service providers and sectors are necessary for the successful provision of social services, both for efficiently pooling resources and generating person-centered care services. ESN has established an annual award to encourage effective collaborations. In 2022, the collaborative practice award recipients were the Pomurje Social Work Centre and the Association of Centres for Social Work in Slovenia for their Multidisciplinary Group for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. This joint venture established and maintained a multi-agency program in Slovenia for the prevention of domestic violence, crisis intervention, and the reporting of abuse cases. The group connects frontline responders from social, legal, educational, medical, and other public agencies, and educates them on how to coordinate their activities to help victims of domestic violence and raise public awareness of domestic violence and its ramifications for society.



Strengthening community care

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrine fundamental principles to raise the quality of life and level of self-determination, including the right to live in non-institutional settings for persons with disabilities and minors. It is necessary to strengthen community services to effectuate the goals of these UN Conventions. In certain European countries, the transition from a housing services model to one in which individuals are placed in appropriate community settings is subject to continuing challenges. ESN is actively involved in the evolution of the care paradigm model from one with a paternalistic approach in which the individual must adjust to available services, to one in which social services providers must adjust to the individual, with an emphasis on human rights, quality of life, and quality of care.



Innovation through digitalization and other technology

Welfare services have often lacked sufficient resources for technological innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst for public and third sector investment in technological development to support the transition from existing processes to digital technologies and other innovations. Technological improvement of systems and the use of state-of-the-art equipment have the potential to aid professionals in making a wider range of services available to service users, especially to those at risk of social exclusion. ESN has established a working group on digitalization, and its 2023 conference will be dedicated to the topic of technology's role in delivering social services. Two examples of technologies already introduced in Europe are robots to help alleviate loneliness among older adults, and smart keys to enable remote opening of home entrance locks in situations of distress.



Person-centered care

Person-centered social services recognize the independence of service users and their right to determine the best care for themselves. In 2022, European Independent Living Day events were dedicated to young people with disabilities. ESN has published an article that emphasizes the need to strengthen the autonomy and independence of service users. This requires collaboration among social service users, service providers, and policy makers toward changing the model of care and combatting the misconception that the value of offering service users self-determination is outweighed by workload and economic considerations.



Resilience of social services

Recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the population displacement and economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, have led to the need to strengthen the resilience and stability of European social services. In 2022, ESN established a working group to address issues of social services resilience. During its first meeting, the group focused on resilience both for service users and service providers. Initial areas of interest were quick decision-making, legal ramifications of quick decision-making, impact on user autonomy, local government flexibility, and best practices for supporting social workers during public crises and in general.



Inclusive Activation

The purpose of inclusive activism is to support the right of marginalized people to play an active role in society. This requires a multidimensional approach encompassing welfare, health, education, housing services, employment opportunities, and income support. The European Union Commission [EUC] has called on member states to reinvigorate their minimum income programs as part of an ongoing commitment to reduce unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. ESN provides the EUC with data-based information in support of the implementation of minimum income programs.



Quality in social services

Quality social services are essential to improving service users' wellbeing. While there is broad consensus about the need to provide high quality social care, it is more difficult to agree on what "quality" means and how it can be measured, improved, and ensured. Conceptual and practical shifts are taking place in this area. Among them are shifts (a) from sanction-based quality control to that of learning and continuous improvement, (b) from institutional to family and community-based care, and (c) from regimented approaches to addressing specific health and social needs to more integrated provision health and social care. ESN members have chosen to prioritize such shifts in future initiatives. Thus, ESN recently launched a new working group, which held its first meeting on 8-9 November 2022. The group plans to gather evidence about existing quality assurance mechanisms, principles of quality care, and potential directions in developing cross-European quality standards in social care and social services.