

Briefing: European Social Services Conference 2022, Hamburg, Germany

8-10 June 2022

Introduction

The European Social Network (ESN) is the network for local public social services in Europe. ESN brings together people who plan, finance, research, manage, regulate and deliver local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing.¹ This year marked their 30th Annual Conference, which drew over 600 attendees representing 35 countries. The theme of this year's conference was **Rethinking Recovery: Reshaping Social Services with New Tools**, and consisted of several workshops, two plenary sessions, innovation zones, and opportunity for networking and discussion with like-minded colleagues. The conference was attended by Alison White, Convenor, Social Work Scotland, and Jennifer Rezendes, Head of Policy and Workforce, Social Work Scotland.

The following briefing covers the workshops, plenary sessions and innovation zones attended, including the overarching themes emerging from work across Europe.

Themes:

- Digital and the use of technology to support the social work role is a growing feature of practice approaches, through systems development, web based apps, and intelligence gained through algorithms, to support relationship based practice and free up social workers time to carry out the engagement needed to support people better.
- Coordination and Co-Production through engagement over interoperable platforms across professions, direct work with individuals receiving services to create equal spaces to share knowledge and find solutions. Use of data and

¹ European Social Network, [https://www.esn-eu.org/who-we-are-0#:~:text=The%20European%20Social%20Network%20\(ESN,%2C%20employment%2C%20education%20and%20housing.](https://www.esn-eu.org/who-we-are-0#:~:text=The%20European%20Social%20Network%20(ESN,%2C%20employment%2C%20education%20and%20housing.)

information collected to inform meaningful decisions, and measures to evaluate these.

- Resilience of the Workforce and Services, with leadership and vision encouraged to support the cultural changes required to improve service user experiences and workforce wellbeing.
- Quality measures, developed with service users, will inform practice approaches and will support meaningful use of data collected.
- Valuing social services and the professional role they play in multidisciplinary systems will break down the silo approach to working. Maintaining and articulating the core value base of social work in discussions where there are challenging priorities and expectations is key.
- Workforce leadership, wellbeing, and value, should drive recruitment and retention, with training and education playing a key role in strategic planning and future focused solutions for the workforce.

Day 1

ESN Membership Meeting (8 June 2022)

Within the initial opening meeting for the Conference, ESN set out the following working groups they offer:

EU Semester Reference Group: This group is for EU members and focuses on service planning in line with policy.

Transformation and Resilience Working Group: This working group is looking at the different transformations being taken forward in social services in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. The first meeting of the group will be in Madrid in July.

Quality Assessment Working Group: This group is looking at quality assessment practices and evaluation. The meeting for this group is in November in Prague.

Integrated Minimum Income: An annual seminar will be held to look at the work being undertaken through this group on setting a minimum income in Europe. This meeting will be held in September in Bordeaux.

European Social Services Award: The awards are open for application until 15 July 2022, you can find out more about the categories available for nomination here: <https://essa-eu.org/>

Next year's European Social Services Conference will focus on Technology and Social Change and will be held in Malmo, Sweden from 14-16 June 2023

Plenary Session 1: Supporting Strategic Change and Decision-Making

There was a strong focus on IT solutions, shared platforms for accessing data, and using data collected in a meaningful way to shape policy and planning decisions. New Zealand, Spain, and France all gave presentations that centred on information sharing, the systems they use to achieve this, and the planning that they undertook to develop policy and services using their approaches.

Dorothy Adams, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, New Zealand. Using data gathered about the workforce to support development of wellbeing initiatives.

Francisco Cenedese, World Banking Group, Spain. Use of a case management information system developed and informed by social workers and offering a mutually shared platform with other professions.

Louis Schweitzer, Evaluation Committee for the National Strategy Against Poverty, France. Strategic development with those experiencing social exclusion and poverty to develop the evaluation tools needed to analyse effectiveness of the minimum income standard.

All reinforced that IT and systems cannot substitute the need for well-resourced local services, delivered through relationship based practices, by social workers. Each presenter spoke about setting mid to longer term visions, informed by academic research, while identifying short term measures to assess continued progress.

Workshop A: Strength-Based Leadership in Social Care

Robin Miller, University of Birmingham, England, and Ewan King, Social Care Institute for Excellence.

This presentation focused on strengths based leadership programmes delivered through multi-disciplinary cohorts. The group in the session wanted to speak more about social work leadership, and leading the profession, and this highlighted a gap in known resources and programmes specific to social work leadership. There was appetite internationally to explore what social work leadership programmes might look like, and to consider the complexity of practice in integrated structures.

Workshop B: Living the Way I Want: Hamburg's solutions to integration support for people with disabilities: provider budget, community networks, participation

Ute Winklemann-Bade, Directorate Inclusion and Equality of People with Disabilities, Social Authority, Hamburg, and Karen Haubenreisser, Neighbourhood based Inclusion Support, Alsterdorf.

A person centred approach to service delivery, with co-production at its core. The assessment process is guided by the following, asset based questions:

- How do you want to live your life? What is important to you?
- What can I do myself using (assistive devices if necessary)?
- How can friends, neighbours, acquaintances, support me?
- What opportunities can I find in my area? (associations, clubs, community groups)
- What additional professional help do I need? (where funding can support need)
- How can I support others?

The expectation and aspirational elements of this presentation were hopeful and were reflected back to the group as really positive experiences for the people they supported. Having an expectation that the person can do things for themselves, that they have a community to lean into, and that they too can offer support to others, was an element that is worthy of further considerations in our own assessment processes. The project spoke about the balance they consider in the person and the services ability to tolerate risk in and amongst integrating the wishes of the person. The project is funded by 5 different partner agencies and spans 3 regions across Hamburg, the coordination and agreement to work in a collaborative and co-produced way was a positive feature.

Day 2: Let's Go Digital

Day 2 was opened by 3 presenters, Pippa Young, Elia International, Toni Codina, iSocial Foundation, Catalonia, Spain, and Carsten Wuff Hansen, Regional Government of Central Denmark, each offering digital opportunities they are currently working with to promote social inclusion and engagement. The following 2 areas were of interest from that session:

Signs of Safety was showcased as a tool to be used with families to give the option of co-creating supports required during child protection processes. The presenter promoted the use of IT to wrap around the practice model social workers operated within, and focused on the ability to promote shared approaches with families to resolve family crisis.

Flapp, Welcome, and Nidus, are applications supporting social inclusion in Catalonia, Spain. Flapp, an app to support adolescents leaving care and transitioning into adulthood. Welcome, supporting refugees and migrants moving into the area, and Nidus, supporting those who are homeless to obtain the information they need through the dedicated app of services available in their area. Further information on these apps and their impact can be found here:

<https://isocial.cat/en/we-have-launched-the-nidus-project-a-digital-platform-that-will-improve-care-services-for-the-homeless/>

Plenary Session 2: Promoting Workforce Resilience: Sustainable and Integrated Models

The three presentations in this plenary, and the discussion generated, focused on the workforce challenges primarily within social care. Ivailo Kalfin, Eurofound, Simon Bottery, Kings Fund, and Viktoria Stein, Leiden University Medical Centre, Netherlands, all shared perspectives on how a more resilient workforce could be achieved as we move out of the pandemic. Reflections internationally mirrored the concerns experienced in Scotland. Some interesting points raised:

- There are 6.3 million care workers in Europe, of these, 58% are over 50 years old, the majority of whom are women, and the sector is largely underpaid and working to less than advantageous terms and conditions (Eurofound)
- In research around UK unemployment rates it was found that when unemployment is low nationally, adult social care vacancies are high, suggesting the social care industry is not a first choice occupation for those seeking career opportunities (The Kings Fund)
- Cultural change is required within integrated systems to support and value the social care workforce to make it an attractive career option (Leiden University)

The Kings Fund found through its research innovative recruitment practices, such as offering driving lessons as part of employment contracts, drew younger people into the profession. The noted a need to rebrand social care careers and support innovative ways to enter into the career, alongside increasing the value expressed toward the sector. Being flexible and showing value to the workforce supported greater retention of social care workers, and this was reflected in all three presentations. Systems versus Culture were considered to reflect which offered the area that needed the most focus of change to support recruitment and retention into social care. Presenters were in agreement that both needed reform, without the systemic change the cultural change would continue to be a hardship.

Innovation Zone: Presentation by EY

This short presentation was previously shared with SWS. EY created a system that allowed analysis of data and indicators to flag increased risk of someone becoming homeless. The project, in Maidenhead, England, found that through this tech approach they were able to identify risk of homelessness up to 8 weeks ahead of the event, and in using that detail, were able to support people earlier, reducing emergency homeless crisis by 40% over the course of a year.

Workshop C: Wiener Sozialmonitoring: The Vienna Social Monitoring Tool

Ursula Ganal and Judith Lengyel-Wiesinger, Department for Social Affairs, Social and Public Health Law, City of Vienna, Austria.

Vienna are considering their approaches to Poverty and Social Exclusion to support policy and service development. To achieve this they have developed a series of 7

indicators of measurement and, using existing data collecting methods, draft a comprehensive report on a quarterly basis to consider the trends emerging against the services and developments being progressed. Looking at details such as income and employment, access to benefits, health, education, housing, and what they have titled “vulnerable people”, national discussions take place with directorate heads across government, informed by analysis from leaders within the sectors to provide context, to consider the impact of initiatives and plan for future developments. They have found that in doing this, they are reducing duplication across directorates and increasing joint accountability.

Workshop D: Safe Places, Thriving Children- Embedding Trauma-Informed Practices into Alternative Care Settings

Florence Treyvaud-Nemtsov, SOS Children’s Villages International, Kresimis Makvic, SOS Children’s Villages International Croatia, and Ivan Saric, young care experienced expert

Using resources developed with the expertise and support of CELCIS to embed a trauma informed approach to alternative living arrangements for children and young people. The resources developed have been used to support trauma informed approaches in 6 different countries. Ivan’s contribution to the session was the most impactful, focusing on the support he received and the benefit of developing resources where human kindness and understanding are expected and shared from those leading the service, with less of a reliance on “profession” input from psychologists and psychiatrists.

Plenary Session 3: Improving Individual and Collective Resilience to Promote Social Inclusion

Sinead Kane, International speaker, Cornelia C. Walther, Poze Global Network, Antonio Lopez, Professor of Social Work and Social Services, UNED, Spain.

The three presenters brought a different perspective to resilience, Sinead is an accomplished woman, blind from birth, who persevered through bullying at school and the physical challenges of her blindness, to achieve 2 PhDs, and to become a world record holder for the most miles run on a treadmill in 12 hours, and for running 7 marathons in 7 countries in 7 days. Very inspiring reflections on her reasons “why” that have helped her in moving forward through adversity with self-confidence and belief.

Cornelia works through UNICEF in Hati using an approach called Poze to support resilience with children and young people there. She spoke about working from an “honesty for humanity” approach, connecting communities, and developing confidence.

Antonio focused his discussion around resilience through digital inclusion, supporting self-care and access to digital democracy. He sees a join between digital and social

inclusion, “without digital inclusion, there can be no digital democracy” and he works toward enabling individual self-reliance through digital enablement in a way that compliments relationship based social work.

The presenters shared a view that increased resilience should not be correlated with success, that there are opportunities when someone’s resilience does not reflect a successful outcome, and that in these spaces social workers are necessary to provide further scaffolding for support. The other important message regarding resilience was a caution not to shift focus from the external structures that impact people’s ability to access social justice, and to hold governments accountable for funding and developing services that are accessible to all citizens.

Day 3

Project Forum

The project forum provided opportunity to consider 8 different international projects ongoing that have supported social service development. The projects briefed during this forum are below:

Vienna: They have created their first elected representative body for people with disabilities. This 14 representative strong group includes 8 women and is a cross organisational representation body for service users to enable engagement on policy and service development.

Spain: Through the development of a rural community centre, The Bodega, the area of Navarra in Spain, is supporting active aging for its older residents to help them fulfil their goals of sustaining autonomous living. Further information:

www.observatoriorealidadsocial.es

Spain: In Adria, the third and public service sectors are sharing information through a compatible platform to enhance support to the individual. The platform allows partners to access the services in place that are supporting someone in the community.

Northern Ireland: To support wellbeing and self-care during the pandemic the regulators in Northern Ireland created 4 covid specific resources that have been well accessed by workers with reports that people feel valued and can work from a stronger position when their own wellbeing needs are met.

France: Taking a planned approach toward increasing participation of those using health and social services has been a work focus in France which has resulted in increased reports of fulfilling engagement from service users.

Ireland: Co-production of National Standards for Children’s Social Services with children, young people and their families has resulted in a set of standards that cover all support and protection services.

Pan European: 18 European countries have developed and adopted a set of Quality Standards and guidance for family support services, producing interactive tools to enable informed policy and practice developments.

Malta: Community services development for people with disabilities is a focus of work for Malta in supporting people living independently in the community with complex needs, enabling active participation in their communities. This multi-disciplinary approach involves social workers, occupational therapists, and social care service providers.

Thematic Panel Discussion: Social Services Transformation in the Wake of Crisis

Arnaud Lopez, Department of Hauts-de-Seine, France, Carmine de Blasio, Consortium of municipalities of Area 5 Atripalda, Region of Campania, Italy, Manual Torres, Health and Public Sector, Accenture, Ina Boge Eskildsen, Denmark.

France, Italy, Spain, and Denmark, shared their experiences and services developed resulting from the system pressures experienced as a result of the refugee need and the covid pandemic and its exacerbated effects on Poverty and Social Inclusion strategies. France used an integrated approach in its plans to support refugees, combining GP, nursing, and social work. They found this approach robust and collaborative and the presentation generated conversation around respecting the social work professional role with colleagues from different disciplines.

The Italian approach to social inclusion and poverty drew from its regional heritage and traditions. The region of Campania in Italy have taken the minimum income standard set in Italy and combined it with opportunities to learn the trade of wine making. The project, co-designed with people in receipt of minimum income benefit, is providing a social and cultural approach to developing vocational skills through direct work experience.

Telecare outreach as a proactive service in Spain supports independent living of older people through a wide reaching service “to improve the quality of life for people through promotion of autonomy”. The service supports over 250,000 people over the age of 65 and employs over 600 staff. Services are responsive, but also include regular telephone calls to service users in an effort to combat loneliness and social isolation. They highlight that they make more calls out to the service users than they receive in, and that the feedback from those they serve is that the service is a valuable one.

In Denmark they are using an Open Dialogue approach to engagement with service users to enable them to be at the centre of the discussions had about their lives. Their approach has been “less system, more citizen” with an ethos that services should be, “stop guessing and start asking”. They have had positive feedback on the approach from both service users and social workers.

Closing Round Table: Key Messages and Game Changers for Future Social Services

In closing the panellists acknowledged the pressures that covid recovery are placing on the already depleted social care sector, making reference to some of the ways countries are trying to engage with younger people to enter the workforce. Covid recovery has also added some value to other countries as they progress with joint working, with others who are further down the path of integration offering caution around ensuring a strong professional social work role is acknowledged and respected.

The international response to the refugee response generated conversations around how could services be more nimble to adapt to the increased pressures where the current services are stretched. There was a call for more social workers, an open mindedness, and support for curious approaches to be embedded into practice and leadership approaches.

Breaking down silos and retaining professional social work role and function in an increasingly complex multi-disciplinary context was raised as a common aim. Potential ways to achieve this were proposed, political interest in social work, growing this and supporting an interest in solving social problems. Using a local approach to consider legislation and policy that can cross or contradict each other through models such as the Vienna Social Model, was also proposed as a potential solution.

Finding effective measures and outcomes to support access to funding to address needs for funding critical services. This can be achieved through collaboration with researchers, ensuring that evidence based approaches are available for proposals. Working together to upscale good practice. Use of data and the acknowledgement that we are often data rich but lack the analytical capabilities to support prevention and planning.

The three, How to be more resilient?, suggestions from the panel:

- Provide financial safety to organisations, when you finance and legislate correctly, services can plan and respond more effectively.
- Invest in workforce education, be more recruitment focused, making social work a more attractive career option
- Be willing to set up a system that is more resilient, creating workforce capacity, with early warning systems, and collaboration in place to enable community and preventative approaches.

The overall message for resilience was to find ways to make the workforce feel valued and cared for, and to take care of the people who are delivering social services.

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