

## European Social Services Awards 2026

### Application Form



Please note that this document is to support your preparation of the application form. It includes the application questions, along with the criteria that the judges will use to assess the answers to each of the scored questions.

**To apply for the 2026 ESSA, complete the application form online [here](#).**

The [European Social Services Awards \(ESSA\)](#), organised by the [European Social Network \(ESN\)](#), recognise excellence in social services and the extraordinary ongoing work by those managing, planning, delivering, and improving public social services across Europe.

#### **IMPORTANT**

Before submitting your application for the Awards, please consult the information for the:

- [Award Categories](#);
- [How to Apply](#);
- [Evaluation Process](#);

on the European Social Services Awards [website](#).

An organisation may submit a maximum of **three applications**. They may:

- **Submit a nomination for ONE PERSON in the Leadership in Social Services Award** category.
- Apply with a maximum of **TWO PROJECTS** across the nine other categories. Each project must be submitted in a **separate category**.

All applications must be submitted in ENGLISH.

**Deadline to submit your application:** 15 June

**Shortlisted applications will be announced by the end of July 2026.**

All **shortlisted** nominees must register and cover the participation fee of minimum **two representatives per application to attend the Ceremony**, which will take place on 19-20 November in Rome, Italy. For further information on the Ceremony, please visit the [website](#).

## Questions

**Mandatory Questions are marked with an \***

### Introduction Details Page

**\*Short title:**

*Please enter the title of your project in English. Maximum ten words*

**Subtitle (if applicable):**

**Short Introduction:**

*What you put here will appear on the Application listing page. If you are not sure what to put, enter the project background or introduction. This question is not scored, and you can choose to come back to it after answering the Application questions. Maximum 300 characters.*

**Image:**

**\*\*Upload an image relevant to your project\*\***

*Size guide: 1024px x 1024px - Max size: 1MB*

**File:**

**\*\*Upload a file relevant to your project\*\***

*Application paper or additional content - Max size: 1MB*

**\* Language:**

**British English**

**\*\*Your Application can only be submitted in English\*\***

## Topics Page

On this page, you choose your category:

I would like to submit an application for the following category:

1. Social Services Delivery Innovation Award
2. Digital Transformation and Technology Social Services Award
3. Strengthening Communities and Social Inclusion Award
4. Public Sector Collaboration in Social Services Award
5. Research for Social Services Award
6. Public-Private Partnership in Social Services Award
7. Children, Families, and Youth Support Award
8. Ageing and Long-Term Care Excellence Award
9. Disability and Accessibility in Social Services Award

## Questions for Projects Award categories 1-9

### Sections Page

1. **Name of project** (in English)

2. **What social problem/challenge does your project address?**

*\*\*The purpose of this question is to provide the judges context for the remainder of the application. The answer to the question is not scored, but make sure sufficient background information is provided for the remainder of your application to make sense\*\**

3. **Practical information about the project**

- Where does the project take place?
- How long has the project been implemented?
- What organisations are involved? Please list the organisation **name** and **country**
- Which professional profiles are involved?

- What is the target group(s)?
  - All Population Groups
  - Children (0-13)
  - Youth (14-18)
  - People with Disabilities
  - Older People (+65)
  - Homeless People
  - People with Addictions
  - Migrants
  - Social Services and Care Workforce
  - Social Services Directors and Managers
  
- How many people does your project cover?
  
- How is your project funded?

#### 4. Status of the project

- Design phase
- Testing or pilot phase
- Temporary practice that has terminated
- Temporary practice that is ongoing and has a termination date
- Implementation and Monitoring Phase
- Consolidation Phase
- Scaling Up and Transformation Phase
- Established and ongoing practice
- Other (please explain)

#### 5. How is your project relevant to the theme of ESSA 2026 and to the Award Category you are applying for? *Please refer to the specific description for the relevance criteria on the separate [category pages](#).*

Ensure that you write your answer clearly to achieve the highest score.  
(maximum 300 words)

#### **Judging Criteria:**

*Judges will assess the alignment with the **Award Category** and the overall theme “Breaking Down Silos, Building Systemic Change.” They will be asked to consider the extent to which the initiative **addresses previous fragmentation before the project, promotes collaboration across professionals, teams, sectors or borders, and ensures a user-centred approach to the design and delivery of social services for example by specifying how the project involves people using services in design and delivery.***

*Then assign a score as follows:*

- **23-30 points (Outstanding):** Convincingly addresses the theme and chosen category, clearly demonstrating user-centred, collaborative, and systemic thinking. The answer should be written clearly and cohesively.
- **15-22 points (Strong):** Good alignment with the theme and category, with good evidence of new forms of collaboration to address social challenges.
- **8-14 points (Adequate):** Partial relevance and limited reference to systemic change or collaboration.
- **0-7 points (Limited):** Poor alignment with the theme and category.

**6. How is your project innovative for your respective context/environment? (maximum 200 words)**

**Judging Criteria:**

Judges will be asked to assess the **originality** of the approach in addressing challenges with respect to the applicant's local context or environment. ESN assumes that the evaluator has a base level knowledge of how advanced the social services sector is in different parts of Europe. For example, a project might be considered more innovative if it were conducted in Eastern Europe as opposed to the Nordic Countries. Regardless, the applicant must clearly outline the situation before and how, by implementing a new programme or model, change happened.

Then assign score as follows:

- **12-15 points (Outstanding):** Highly innovative approach that meaningfully addresses former fragmentation and promotes new forms of collaboration that take place currently.
- **8-11 points (Strong):** Some innovative elements that improve existing practices or collaboration though not full picture of the situation beforehand and there are some gaps in implementation.
- **4-7 points (Adequate):** Limited innovation and strong reliance on standard approaches.
- **0-3 points (Limited):** No clear innovation.

**7. Has the project been evaluated? If so, what methodologies were used?**

- Feedback through people's experiences of services
- Feedback from staff and leaders
- Feedback from partners e.g. regulators/inspection agency
- Quantitative data collected internally
- No evaluation has taken place
- Other (please explain)

**Judging Criteria:**

Judges will assess the **appropriateness and reliability** of the chosen methods in relation to the initiative, the extent to which **multiple sources of feedback** are combined, the ability of the chosen methods to capture **outcomes related to**

*integrated delivery of services across sectors, the level of transparency about limitations.*

*Then assign scores as follows:*

- **12-15 points (Outstanding):** *Comprehensive and credible evaluation using multiple methods, with strong and consistent evidence supporting the results.*
- **8-11 points (Strong):** *Sound evaluation using at least one or two relevant methods.*
- **4-7 points (Adequate):** *Limited evaluation relying on a single source of feedback or partial data.*
- **0-3 points (Limited):** *No evaluation or unclear unsubstantiated evidence.*

**8. What impact has been measured? (maximum 500 words)**

Please provide concrete evidence in the form of qualitative and/or quantitative data. Please refer to indicators used to evaluate the project, outcomes achieved as a result, and whether the project is scalable or transferable.

***Judging Criteria:***

*Judges will assess the **tangible outcomes** achieved for individuals, families, or communities based on the description provided by the applicants, the use of qualitative and/or quantitative **evidence** described by the applicants the clarity and relevance of **indicators used by applicants**, the contribution to **improved coordination, accessibility, and quality** of services, the evidence of **systemic change** such as reduced fragmentation or stronger coordination between professionals or evidence of an integrated delivery of multiple services or programme(s), evidence of the (potential) **scalability and transferability** of results.*

*Then assign score as follows:*

- **31-40 points (Outstanding):** *Strong, comprehensive evidence clearly demonstrating significant and sustained impact, together with well-defined indicators and a clear contribution to systemic change with strong potential for scaling or transfer.*
- **21-30 points (Strong):** *Clear positive impact supported by evidence, some contribution to coordination or service improvement, and some consideration of scalability or transferability.*
- **11-20 points (Adequate):** *Limited or partial evidence of impact, with weak or unclear indicators and limited demonstration of systemic change or transferability.*
- **0-10 points (Limited):** *Minimal or absent impact, based on unclear or unsupported claims, with no evidence of meaningful outcomes nor indication of scalability or transferability.*

- 9. Please upload any supporting material (data, press articles, endorsements from other actors, material produced in the project, photos) in English. (max. three documents)**

*If you have multiple files of a similar type, e.g. photos, please join them all together in one PDF file and upload them together.*

**Judges will then be asked to decide which Award Category the application most suitable for?**

1. *Social Services Delivery Innovation Award*
2. *Digital Transformation and Technology Social Services Award*
3. *Strengthening Communities and Social Inclusion Award*
4. *Public Sector Collaboration in Social Services Award*
5. *Research for Social Services Award*
6. *Public-Private Partnership in Social Services Award*
7. *Children, Families, and Youth Support Award*
8. *Ageing and Long-Term Care Excellence Award*
9. *Disability and Accessibility in Social Services Award*

### **Questions for Leadership in Social Services Award category**

- 1. Name of the person (in English)**
  
- 2. Provide a short professional biography of the person (maximum 150 words)**

*\*\*The purpose of this question is to provide the judges context for the remainder of the application. The answer to the question is not scored, but make sure sufficient background information is provided for the remainder of your application to make sense\*\**

- 3. Why is this person deserving of the Leadership in Social Services Award? (maximum 300 words)**

Explain how the person has shaped the governance, strategy, and long-term sustainability of social services. Highlight visionary leadership that made efforts to drive systemic improvements, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, develop the workforce, and/or introduce innovative reforms. Focus on contributions that promoted coordination between professionals and between services or sectors, integrated delivery of services, as well as inclusive, user-centred approaches.

### **Judging Criteria:**

Judges will be asked to evaluate the leadership in terms of **vision and strategic influence**, contribution to **governance**, promotion of **workforce development**, ability to drive **systemic improvements and cross-sector or cross-border collaboration**, and implementation of **innovative reforms** in line with this year's ESSA them e.g. **on integrated/coordinated delivery of service(s)/programme(s)**

Then assign score as follows:

- **31-40 points (Outstanding):** Transformative leadership with clear evidence of system-level influence and vision.
- **21-30 points (Strong):** Well-demonstrated leadership with measurable contributions to governance, coordination, and innovation.
- **11-20 points (Adequate):** Visible leadership but limited in scope, or reach.
- **0-10 points (Limited):** Minimal or unclear evidence of leadership contribution.

#### **4. What impact has this person's leadership had? (maximum 500 words)**

Please provide concrete evidence in the form of qualitative and/or quantitative data. Describe the impact of the person's leadership on service users, organisations, or social services systems, highlighting systemic improvements, cross-sector collaboration, workforce development, integrated service delivery, and evidence of sustainable or transferable change.

### **Judging Criteria:**

Judges will be asked to assess the effects of the leadership on practitioners, **service users, organisations and social services systems**, the evidence of **systemic improvements** in integrated service delivery, workforce cooperation and workforce development, the actual implementation of **cross-services collaboration**, the potential unlocked in terms of **sustainability and transferability of change**.

Then assign score as follows:

- **51-60 points (Outstanding):** Strong, well-documented impact, with clear evidence of systemic improvements, a coordinated approach and sustainable outcomes for service users, staff and collaborating organisations.
- **36-50 points (Strong):** Clear impact supported by relevant evidence of observable improvements in services, coordination, and workforce.
- **20-35 points (Adequate):** Partial evidence of impact, linked to modest changes or localised outcomes.
- **0-20 points (Limited):** Minimal or no evidence of impact based on unclear or unsupported claims.

#### **5. Please upload any supporting material (data, press articles, endorsements, material produced in the project, photos) in English. (max. three documents)**

*If you have multiple files of a similar type e.g. photos please join them all together in one PDF file and upload them together.*

## **Declaration**

If my nomination is selected, I confirm that the submitted photos and details of the project may be used by ESN for promotional purposes.

If my application is shortlisted, I confirm that the fees, travel and hotel costs for **two delegates** to the Awards Ceremony in Rome will be funded by my organisation.

Signature (please enter your name to sign this form)

Date

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For any questions, please contact us at [essa@esn-eu.org](mailto:essa@esn-eu.org).