

Building resilience in Social Services by **Managing Demand**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This is the Executive Summary of the briefing '[Building resilience in social services by managing demand](#)' published as an output of the 2023 annual meeting of the European Social Network 'Social Services Transformation and Resilience' Working Group. Read the full briefing for a complete explanation of demand management in social services, graphs, data, and examples on factors driving demand in social services across Europe and the detailed demand management framework to build resilient social services supported by case studies.

Why do we need to talk about managing demand?

The demand for social care, support, and protection is rapidly increasing across Europe, driven by a variety of external and internal factors. This surge in demand places significant pressure on public social services, which are facing budget constraints and recruitment and retention issues. Failure to meet this rising demand could lead to inequality and division within communities' social services serve. Demand management can help empower social services to address these challenges.

Applying demand management to social services

Demand management involves efficiently addressing the diverse needs of individuals turning to social services. This encompasses a wide range of support, from welfare payments to long-term care, and aims to provide personalised and effective solutions. Managing demand requires a multi-faceted approach that helps plan and allocate resources appropriately to ensure quality outcomes for supported persons. Demand management also provides social services with an opportunity to develop new approaches and adapt services to address the ongoing cycle of crisis management and build resilience.

Factors driving demand

Data collected by the European Social Network (ESN) from various public social service organisations across Europe has identified that demand for social care and support is driven by both external and internal factors. Demographic shifts, economic inequality, and global crises contribute to growing demand. Organisational and workforce challenges within social services can further inadvertently create demand.

A demand management framework for resilient social services

Leaders in social services designing a demand management framework for their organisation need to understand the root causes of the demand in their communities. To address the rising demand for social services, ESN proposes a framework for managing demand to improve the resilience of social service organisations and the care and support provided to their communities. This framework focuses on five pillars:

1. Designing a person-centred journey:

A person-centred approach ensures social services properly address individual needs and promote the autonomy of supported persons, which reduces demand. This involves individualised assessments, empowering individuals to navigate the social system independently, providing support with low thresholds, engaging persons in decision-making around their care and support, and ensuring self-sufficiency as the outcome of services.

2. Model of pro-active care and support:

By investing in prevention and early intervention, social services can reduce demand for more resource-intensive reactive crisis interventions. Universal prevention measures, relationship-based social work, health promotion, and community development contribute to this model.

3. Collaboration and partnership:

To ensure a holistic approach to meeting complex and diverse needs, demand management involves collaboration with relevant organisations, both within and outside the social services sector. Creating formal partnerships, utilising shared IT systems such as case management systems, and securing buy-in from professionals are key aspects of effective collaboration.

4. Data-driven approaches enabled by technology:

Using data to understand and forecast demand is critical to making decisions about where to direct resources for tackling demand. Technology, such as predictive analytics and digital tools, can facilitate data collection, analysis, and communication.

5. A resilient workforce:

A well-planned, skilled, and supported workforce is essential for delivering person-centred and pro-active care and support that reduces demand. Attracting and retaining social workers, redistributing workforce roles and responsibilities based on training and experience, promoting skills development, and nurturing good leadership all contribute to building a resilient workforce.