



Rethinking social services: from service volume to real impact

Early policy directions emerging from the EVOSST project — first results, the Western Macedonia Policy Roundtable, and the road to the EU policy framework.

Social services are central to the well-being of European citizens. Yet they remain widely evaluated in narrow administrative terms — beneficiaries served, throughput, unit cost — rather than by the difference they make in people's lives. The EVOSST project is developing the analytical and policy infrastructure to shift this perspective. This first brief consolidates the early evidence and translates it, with stakeholders, into emerging directions for reform.

Key findings

1. Access—not availability — is the main barrier.

Existence of a service is not the same as access to it. Stakeholders consistently report that fragmentation, complex procedures, weak interoperability, and the absence of a functional single reference point continue to undermine effectiveness. People with disabilities, older persons, residents of remote areas, carers, and people with low digital skills are most affected.

2. Digitalisation opportunity — and a new exclusion.

Digitalisation can simplify navigation, improve continuity of care, and reduce administrative burden. Without targeted support for older persons, carers, and people with low digital skills, the same digital tools become an additional barrier rather than a solution.

3. Evaluation must capture social value, not only volume.

Stakeholders strongly support a shift from output counts toward outcome- and value-based evaluation. Autonomy, inclusion, continuity of support, beneficiary-reported well-being and longer-term social return should sit alongside cost and throughput indicators — and evaluation should serve improvement, not punishment.

4. Coordination beats reorganisation.

Beneficiaries do not need more services. They need the existing ones to talk to each other. Interoperable information systems, shared referral pathways, and one accessible first-contact point would have a larger immediate effect than new structures.

5. Frontline staff are a service-quality variable, not a cost line.

Continuous training, structured supervision, and professional support for social services professionals are repeatedly identified as preconditions for higher-quality outcomes — particularly in disability support, digital procedures, and integrated case management.

Why focus on social services now?

Social services shape access to healthcare, education, long-term care, housing support, reskilling and inclusion — areas that determine lifechances. They are also a major investment in human capital, aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU's long-term budget for social inclusion and cohesion. Yet the evaluation infrastructure has not kept pace with this strategic role. Most monitoring still focuses on activity rather than impact, and rarely captures well-being, autonomy, or long-term social return. EVOSST addresses this gap by combining life-course impact analysis, multidimensional well-being measurement, an extended Social Return of Investment (SROI) framework, the integration of Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality in service delivery, and a stakeholder-driven policy framework — to support a more accessible, more inclusive, and more impact-oriented social services landscape across the EU.

The evidence base behind this brief

Three early outputs of the EVOSST project provide the evidence backbone of this brief. Together, they reframe the policy question from “does the service exist?” to “does it improve people's lives, in a measurable, fair and lasting way?”

1. What social services should improve — well-being domains

Work on the identification of well-being domains (*D3.1: Domains Identification Process Report*) shows that social services should be designed and evaluated against four interconnected outcome areas. Barriers such as poor information, low trust, fragmented systems and digital exclusion are not operational details — they are core determinants of whether public support reaches people at all.

Core well-being domains shaped by social services



Source: EVOSST D3.1 — well-being domains identified through stakeholder consultation and literature review.

Figure 1. Core well-being domains shaped by social services (EVOSST D3.1).

2. How to measure them — outcome-led monitoring

EVOSST is developing standardised instruments (*D3.2: Well-being Measurement Instruments*) that gather evidence directly from beneficiaries across these well-being domains. The same service can now be assessed not only by how many people it reaches, but by whether it strengthens autonomy, supports inclusion, or helps beneficiaries navigate daily life.

From counting services to measuring outcomes



Figure 2. The shift from administrative outputs to beneficiary-reported outcomes.

3. How to value them — the holistic SROI framework

The new SROI architecture (*D4.1: New SROI FrameworkArchitecture*) extends the evaluation lens beyond direct costs and outputs. It brings together economic, social, environmental and well-being effects within a life-course perspective, so that the wider public value of a service—including preventive, community-based and innovative interventions — can be assessed. For policymakers, this enables decisions guided by long-term social return rather than only short-term cost containment.

Holistic SROI framework: capturing four dimensions of value



Figure 3. The four dimensions captured by the EVOSST holistic SROI framework.

Case study: the Western Macedonia Policy Roundtable

On 31 March 2026, the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia (RDF) — the largest public body in the EVOSST consortium and lead of *Task 6.2: Stakeholder-Centric Policy Development and Implementation Roadmap*, hosted the first national policy roundtable of the project, in Kozani, in hybrid format. The event brought together around 40 stakeholders from public administration, municipal social services, academia, NGOs, frontline structures, and organisations representing people with disabilities, with the explicit goal of validating EVOSST's first findings and co-shaping early policy directions.

Who joined the EVOSST Policy Roundtable?

Kozani, 31 March 2026 | hybrid format | ~40 participants

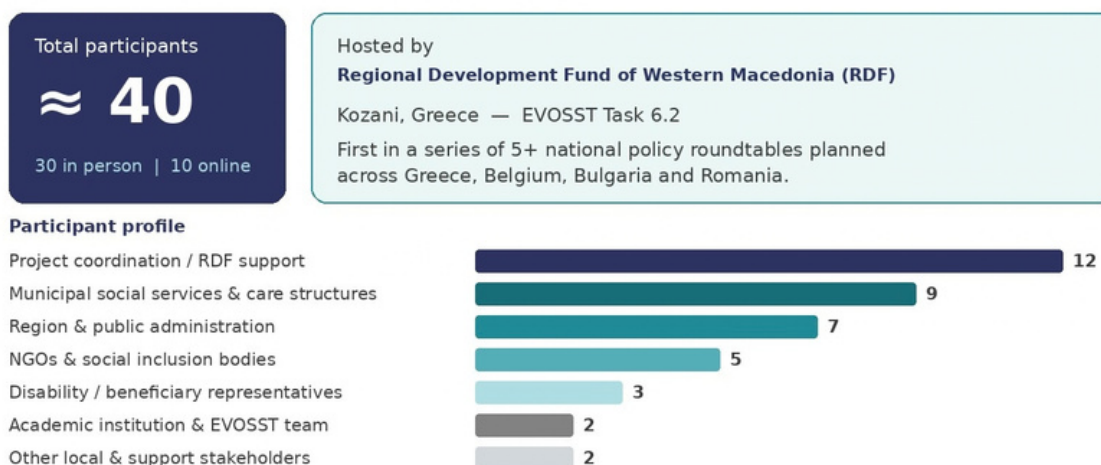


Figure 4. Profile of the participants in the first EVOSST policy roundtable, Kozani, 31 March 2026.



Working session of the first EVOSST Policy Roundtable, Region of Western Macedonia, 31 March 2026.

What stakeholders said

The discussion was organised around two working sessions — one on policy challenges, one on co-creation of recommendations. Participants converged on a broadly shared diagnosis: services exist, but the system does not behave as a system. The most affected groups are people with disabilities, older persons, residents of remote and mountainous areas, refugees and migrants, carers, and frontline social services professionals themselves.

“A person with a disability starts from one service and then goes from office to office to understand what they are entitled to.”

— Representative of a disability organisation

“Digitalisation is an opportunity, but without support it creates a new exclusion.”

— Participant in the consultation

“Evaluation should help us improve, not function in a punitive way.”

— Representative of a social service

Emerging policy directions

The five directions below are emerging policy directions rather than final prescriptions. They will be refined through additional national roundtables in Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania and a second event in Greece, and will be integrated with EVOSST research evidence into the final policy framework (*D6.2: Policy Framework Document*) at month 36.

- **Integrated access model.** Activate a single, functional first-contact point combining service mapping, home-based and mobile support, targeted digital assistance, and flexible opening hours where justified — to reduce the navigational burden currently carried by beneficiaries themselves.
- **Coordination & interoperability.** Develop interoperable information systems and referral pathways across social protection, health-related support, disability services and local social care structures, with clear governance responsibilities and data-sharing conditions.
- **Outcome-oriented evaluation.** Combine quantitative and qualitative indicators capturing autonomy, inclusion, continuity of support, beneficiary-reported well-being, and broader social return — and use evaluation as a tool for improvement and social investment.
- **Workforce strengthening.** Invest in continuous training, regular supervision and professional support for social services staff — recognising workforce capacity as a service-quality and sustainability variable.
- **Participatory governance.** Embed beneficiary organisations and civil society actors — particularly in the disability field — in service design, evaluation and monitoring, on a regular and structured basis rather than ad hoc.

What comes next: from D6.4 to D6.2

The Western Macedonia roundtable is the first of at least five national policy events that will be organised across Greece, Belgium, Bulgaria and Romania. Their outputs will be integrated with the technical evidence from WP2: Lifecycle Impact Analysis with Dynamic Modelling, WP3: Social Service Well-being Metric Development, WP4: New SROI Framework Development and WP5: Advanced Technology Development, Integration, and Impact Evaluation (technology pilots) into a single EU-level policy framework, delivered as D6.2 at the end of the project.

From D6.4 to D6.2: a three-phase pathway to the EVOSST policy framework



Figure 5. Three-phase pathway from this Policy Brief (D6.4) to the final EVOSST Policy Framework (D6.2).

About this brief

This is the first Policy Brief of the EVOSST project, prepared in the framework of WP6: Policy Framework Development and Dissemination Activities. It is part of a series of policy outputs that will inform the development of the final EVOSST Policy Framework (D6.2, Month 36). The brief was prepared by the EVOSST Consortium. The findings draw on EVOSST deliverables D3.1, D3.2 and D4.1, and on the outcomes of the EVOSST Policy Roundtable held in Kozani on 31 March 2026 (Month 14).

The EVOSST project has received funding under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 101178789. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or of the EVOSST Consortium partners.



Funded by
the European Union

Key reference documents

- EVOSST Consortium, "EVOSST Grant Agreement No 101178789," 2025.
- EVOSST Consortium, "D3.1: Domains Identification Process Report", September 2025.
- EVOSST Consortium, "D3.2: Well-being Measurement Instruments", February 2026.
- EVOSST Consortium, "D4.1: New SROI Framework Architecture", December 2025.
- EVOSST Consortium, "D6.4: Policy Brief", April 2026.
- European Pillar of Social Rights — Action Plan.
- EU Council Recommendation on Access to Affordable High-Quality Long-Term Care, 2022.

About Project Identity

The EVOSST project (Horizon Europe — HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-04, GA No. 101178789) aims to improve the efficiency and understanding of social services within the European Union, aligning with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU's long-term budget for social inclusion and cohesion. By integrating dynamic impact modeling, comprehensive well-being measures, and an enhanced Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology, EVOSST aims to elevate societal well-being, ensure environmental sustainability, and foster inclusive economic growth across Europe.

Coordinator: University of Western Macedonia (Professor Panagiotis Sarigiannidis, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Western Macedonia, Kozani Greece)

Consortium:

- PANEPISTIMIO DYTIKIS MAKEDONIAS, GREECE
- ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA, ITALY
- INNOVATION SPRINT, BELGIUM
- UNIVERSITATEA NATIONALA DE STIINTASI TEHNOLOGIE POLITEHNICA BUCURESTI, ROMANIA
- UBITECH LIMITED, CYPRUS
- UNIVERSITE DE PICARDIE JULES VERNE, FRANCE
- METAMIND INNOVATIONS IKE, GREECE
- RESEARCH SEED LTD, UNITED KINGDOM
- PERIFEREIAKO TAMEIO ANAPTIXIS DYTIKIS MAKEDONIAS, GREECE
- TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF SOFIA, BULGARIA
- Z-PLUS, BELGIUM
- CENTRUL EURO-ATLANTIC PENTRU REZILIENTA, ROMANIA
- ESPERITY, BELGIUM
- STOLICHNA OBSHTINA, BULGARIA

Type of action: HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions

Funding under: Culture, creativity and inclusive society

Duration: 1 February 2025 – 31 January 2028 (36 months)

Budget: 2966 625,00 EUR

Website: <https://evosst-project.eu/>

More information:

- Panagiotis Sarigiannidis | psarigiannidis@uowm.gr
- Anna Triantafyllou | atriantafyllou@uowm.gr
- Info Email | info@evosst.eu