

# AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES: OPPORTUNITIES, SKILL INVESTMENTS, AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

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## Key takeaways of the SSE Joint Webinar

27 November 2024



Social Services Europe

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# "Artificial Intelligence in Social Services: Opportunities, Skill Investments, and Regulatory Frameworks"

27 November 2024, 10h-12h30 - Online

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Social Services Europe and its members organised an event exploring the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in social services, focusing on its transformative potential, skill requirements, and regulatory and ethical considerations. Discussions provided insights into leveraging AI to improve service efficiency, personalising care, and addressing workforce challenges while highlighting the importance of regulatory frameworks for ethical AI use.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Highlight the transformative opportunities AI offers for social services, their users and their workforce.
2. Discuss the critical skills and investments needed to develop and sustain AI capabilities in social services.
3. Explore the importance of regulatory frameworks to ensure ethical and responsible AI use in social services.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- **Enhancing efficiency:** AI can automate routine tasks, optimise resource allocation, and support decision-making, addressing labour shortages and administrative burdens.
- **Improving personalisation of services:** Generative AI and predictive models enable tailored care and support for diverse needs, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- **Strengthening inclusion:** AI technologies can empower individuals with disabilities through accessible and adaptive tools.

## CHALLENGES

- **Bias and inequality:** Machine learning algorithms may inadvertently replicate societal biases, leading to inequitable outcomes.
- **Workforce lacking digital skills:** Many workers hesitate to adopt AI due to limited training received and perceived threats to job security.
- **Ethical Dilemmas:** Balancing efficiency with human oversight and safeguarding against intrusive surveillance remain significant concerns.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Co-develop inclusive AI solutions** - Engage diverse stakeholders, including service users, to co-design tools tailored to their needs.
2. **Invest in digital literacy and skills training** - Establish comprehensive education programmes to prepare workers in social services for AI integration.
3. **Implement strong regulatory oversight** - Take into consideration the European AI Act and enforce principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness.
4. **Foster collaborative approaches** - Build partnerships among policymakers, technologists, researchers and service providers to innovate responsibly.
5. **Focus on ethical AI deployment** - Prioritise human dignity, autonomy, and well-being in AI design and application.

# Agenda



## KEYNOTE SPEECH

*Moderator:* **Aad Koster**, SSE President

**Guillaume Hemmert**, Policy Officer, DG EMPL, European Commission



## SESSION 1: OPPORTUNITIES OF AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES

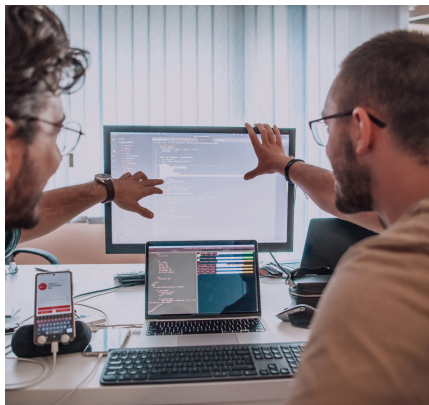
*Moderator:* **Kostantina Leventi**, Head of Policy, EASPD

**Seb Barker**, Co-Founder, Magic Notes, UK

**Judith Schoch**, Head of Unit Institute for Care and Ageing, Evangelische Heimstiftung, DE

**Kave Noori**, Artificial Intelligence Policy Officer, EDF

**Nina Ždanovič**, Associate, Policy Impact Lab



## SESSION 2: INVESTING IN SKILLS FOR AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES

*Moderator:* **Kewan Mildred**, Policy Officer, Eurodiaconia

**Sylvain Renouvel**, Director, Federation of European Social Employers

**Samantha Howe**, Policy Assistant, EPSU

**Borja García Rubio**, IT Manager, Fundación ONCE, ES



## SESSION 3: RESPONSIBLE INTEGRATION OF AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES

*Moderator:* **May Agius**, Chair of EASPD Member Forum on Person Centred Technology, Agenzija Sapport, MLT

**Giada Venier**, Policy Officer, Fondazione Don Gnocchi, IT

**Jolanda Dirckx**, Advisor & Lynn Grijssen, Junior Advisor ActiZ, NL

**Bianca Prins-Honkoop**, Head of Global Accessibility, ING, NL



# Keynote Speech on the Opportunities and Challenges of AI

by Guillaume Hemmert, Policy Officer, DG EMPL, European Commission

*“As the digital world is increasing fast, the Commission is on the forefront and has been working on several legislative initiatives to concretise its support and to ensure that the digital transition and the adoption of AI tools do not leave anyone behind.”*

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Improvement of supply of treatments and medication, making the care process faster and more efficient.
- Conduct some routine tasks that have high potential for automation (e.g., reminding or helping individuals to take their medication, helping when monitoring their health status, etc.).
- Provide more personalised services to assist people with specific needs (e.g., personal care assistant).
- Support in the planning of working schedule and of task allocations for workers, bringing better time management.

## CHALLENGES

- Machine learning algorithms may inadvertently replicate societal biases leading to inequitable outcomes (e.g., access to services, recruitment, etc.).
- AI can make errors that significantly impact people's life (e.g., misdiagnosis in healthcare resulting in incorrect treatments; inaccurate assessments of needs leading to reductions in social benefits).
- AI tools can be misused for harmful purposes.
- Balancing efficiency with human oversight while protecting beneficiaries from intrusive surveillance remains a critical concern.
- AI comes with changing roles and requires also adapted skills with some functions being subject to automation more than others.

## MOST RELEVANT INITIATIVES FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO ADVANCE SKILLS, RESEARCH, AND ETHICAL AI INTEGRATION

- The **Artificial Intelligence Act**, entered into force in mid-2024 focusing on transparency, risk management, and fundamental rights assessments in sectors such as healthcare, social services, and housing.
- On a broader scope, the **Declaration of Digital Rights and Principles** serves as a baseline to ensure that individuals' rights are guaranteed online as they are offline and puts people at the centre of this process in line with EU values and fundamental rights (highlight on chapter 3 for AI).
- **Ongoing research funds** - **Horizon Europe** to boost innovation and unlock the full potential of new technologies, including AI.
- **Ongoing studies on AI from the EC** - Recently launch of a survey across 27 Member States aimed at exploring AI-based tools' prevalence and impact at the workplace and on the workforce.
- **Skill-building initiatives**, such as the **European Year of Skills** and the **Digital Decade** targets, aim to equip 80% of people with basic digital skills by 2030. To address gaps in specific sectors like social care where training is limited, the **Pact for Skills** was launched.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SESSION 1: “OPPORTUNITIES OF AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES”

- For social care providers, AI is being extensively used to **reduce administrative burden** and improve **time management**, freeing social workers for client-facing activities (Slide set by Nina Ždanovič - Policy Impact Lab, [here](#)). One example presented in the webinar was Magic Notes - an AI-based tool that supports social workers in reporting.

- **Social assistive robots**, such as Navel, demonstrate potential to engage older people in long-term care institutions, providing emotional support and supporting the care workforce in their job (Slide set by Judith Schoch - Evangelische Heimstiftung, [here](#)).

- For service users, **generative AI and assistive technology** like speech-to-text or audio descriptions can be crucial to promote independence, assist with daily routines and improve quality of life (Slide set by Kave Noori, EDF, [here](#)).

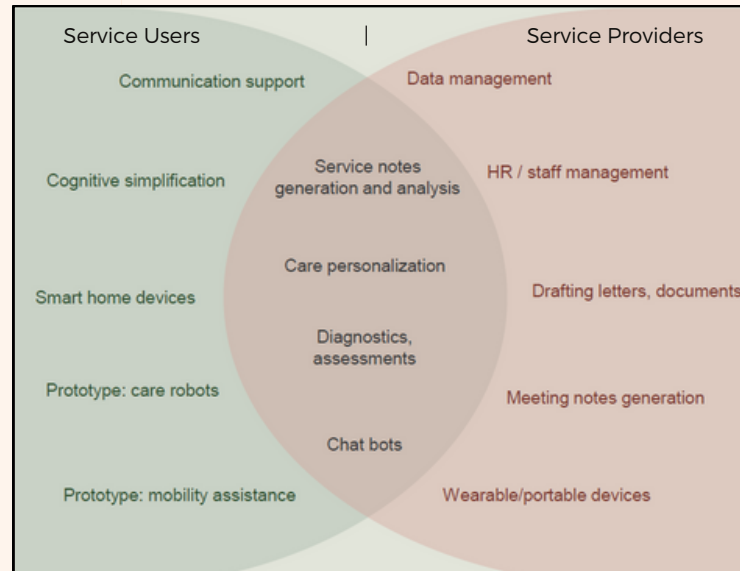


Fig. 1 - Extract from slide set of Nina Ždanovič on **how AI is currently being used in social care sector**.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES

### 01 Co-design and implement AI to be inclusive and to consider human diversity.

People are far more complex and diverse than AI systems can fully comprehend at the moment. For instance, speech-to-text technologies often fail to recognise the speech patterns of hard-of-hearing individuals, and 'anti-cheating' software for home exams frequently flags behaviours typical of people with disabilities as suspicious. If AI-based tools are designed exclusively for a majority (e.g., 80%), they risk overlooking the needs of the remaining 20%, potentially leaving individuals in vulnerable situations caused by inadequate assessments or insufficiently tailored support.

### 02 Technology in social care should augment human capabilities rather than replacing them.

AI should always increase the accessibility of users to social services, supporting the empowerment of individuals, as well as the quality of life of the services' users. However, it should never replace fully the "human experience". For example, robots can provide companionship and emotional engagement to older people in long-term care settings, but cannot replace the value of human relationships, neither genuine interactions.

### 03 Ensure freedom of choice, control and transparency in the use of AI, setting realistic expectations from the start.

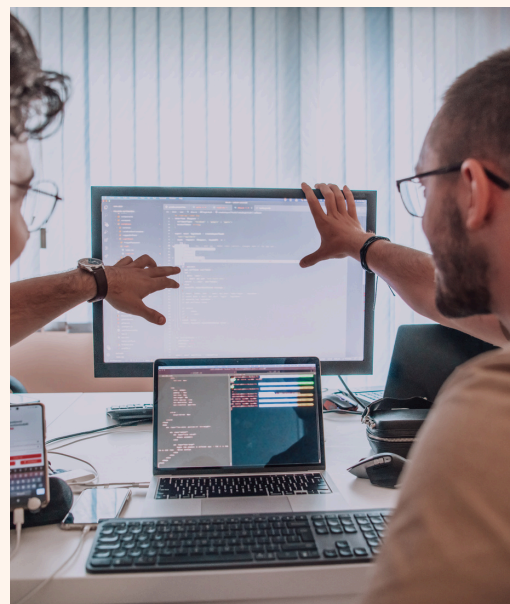
AI systems must ensure transparency, giving users control over their data and the option to disconnect if desired. Additionally, managing expectations about AI's current capabilities is crucial, as overestimating its potential can lead to disappointment and hinder future adoption of AI-based applications.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SESSION 2: “SKILLS FOR AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES”

- Approximately 20% of social and care workers have never used digital devices and 61% of health and care professionals had never received dedicated **digital skills training**. This situation creates the need to raise awareness about how technology can ease their work and invest in their skills, taking a collaborative approach (Presentation by Sylvain Renouvel, Federation of European Social Employers).

- Care relies on individuals and human-to-human interaction, which AI cannot replace. **Quality care must prioritise the human element**, avoiding over-reliance on algorithms. Entities should remember AI is a tool to support workers with a potential of automating repetitive tasks, not a replacement tool for their roles (Slide set by Samantha Howe, EPSU, here).

- **A notable good practice is Inclunia**, an AI-based tool that supports entities to recruit individuals with disabilities by ensuring that decisions are skills-based, incorporating bias control mechanisms, and adhering to ethical and regulatory standards (Slide set by Borja García Rubio, Fundación ONCE, here).



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES

### 01 **Include frontline workers in the AI design and implementation process.**

Lack of participatory approaches in implementing AI systems and a top-down approach is ineffective, likely to exacerbate resistance and to become a burden. Successful AI integration requires involving all stakeholders, including workers, employers, and representatives of users of social services from the start.

### 02 **Offer targeted training programs focusing on integrating AI into daily tasks.**

Initiatives like the [Care4Skills Project](#), offering MOOCs on digital care and technologies can play a vital role in equipping workers with the necessary skills and motivation. Educating workers on data protection and managing risks helps alleviate fears about technology use. Digital training should be accessible to all, during working time and free of charge. Collaboration between the education sector and the industry as well as funding are also essential to successfully bridge the gap between the current provision of digital skills in the education system and the demand for skills in the digital health sector.

### 03 **AI implementation should be carefully planned and include ethical considerations of gender, workforce ageing, and workers' rights in the face of automation.**

Many organisations adopt AI solutions simply to stay updated, often neglecting to assess existing challenges and explore how AI could address them effectively. This rushed approach, driven by fear of missing out on the ‘AI boom’, can lead to poorly aligned implementations. Additionally, the intention behind AI applications, particularly in data use, must be critically examined to safeguard trust and ensure AI aligns with a rights-based, personalised, person-centred and users-oriented care approach.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF SESSION 3: “RESPONSIBLE INTEGRATION OF AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES”**

- The **European AI Act** is as a pivotal measure to ensure safe and trustworthy AI deployment. Most AI-based medical devices and AI systems used to evaluate eligibility for essential public services or recruitment are classified as high-risk AI systems, creating an additional need to ensure integration between horizontal and sectorial regulations (Slide set by Giada Venier, Fondazione Don Gnocchi, [here](#)).

- **Pre-deployment rights assessments** are essential for safeguarding against harm (Slide set by Jolanda Dirckx, Advisor & Lynn Grijssen, ActiZ, [here](#)).

- With the introduction of AI a huge responsibility comes in for the organisations offering AI driven applications in **support of protecting data, transparency of AI-use, accessibility and privacy of customers** (Presentation set by Bianca Prins-Honkoop, Head of Global Accessibility, ING, [here](#)).



## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE AI IN SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **01 Establish an impact assessment framework to evaluate AI systems before implementation, monitor their performance during use, and analyse their outcomes post-deployment.**

Innovation requires carefully selecting the most impactful applications of AI from a range of possibilities. The benefits of AI must be weighed against the significant costs of procurement, training, and investments in technology and infrastructure, as these may divert resources from more critical priorities.

### **02 Raising awareness on the regulation of AI, horizontal and sectorial regulations, is crucial.**

Social service providers require support from the EU and national governments to safely and legally utilise the potential of AI tools. A clear understanding of regulations from the outset is essential to successfully transform an idea or a research project into a commercialised AI tool that aligns with the requirements of the social care market.

### **03 For a responsible integration of AI and to deliver meaningful innovation, a multidisciplinary team is required.**

Innovation is not a one-man show. It requires the finding of a common language to exchange practices and experiences with other actors like the industry. Creating or mapping specific bodies of knowledge regarding impact assessment (e.g., health economics), exploitation (e.g., industrial networking and market analysis), policy and regulatory aspects (e.g., training on EU regulations) and engineering might be key before planning to integrate AI.



# What is next?

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Stay updated for follow-up webinars and workshops on Social Services Europe website; LinkedIn and X platforms.



Become a valued member of the Large-Scale Skills Partnership on Long-Term Care (code: 1067) where a working group on digital skills will be created in the beginning of 2025 as an initiative integrated in the project Care4Skills).



*“By bringing together experts from various fields, we sought to foster an exchange about existing experiences and the potential of AI in the field of social services as well as collaborative approach to leveraging AI for the improvement of social services for the persons working in the sector and for their users.”*

*/Aad Koster, SSE President.*



## More resources...

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- [Report: Digitalisation in Social Services: The uptake of AI and digital tools amongst Eurodiaconia Members \(2024\)](#)
- [EPR Briefing: Ethical use of AI in Services for Persons with Disabilities \(2024\)](#)
- [EAN Report: Accelerating the Digital Transition \(2024\)](#)
- [Amnesty International Report: “Coded injustice surveillance and discrimination in Denmark’s automated welfare state” \(2024\)](#)
- [EPR 2024 Annual Conference Report: AI and New Technologies for Inclusion: Leaving no one behind in the digital transition \(available soon\)](#)
- [European Health Parliament Report: Digital Skills For Health Professionals Committee On Digital Skills For Health Professionals \(2016\)](#)
- [Healthy Europe Report: Bridging the gap: Digital skills in Health and Care](#)


*“We can now say that AI will likely not replace jobs, but will more likely replace the nature of jobs and replace and change the tasks that are conducted within our jobs. And for this reason, it's particularly important that workers, including the services sector, have the right skills to know how to use these tools in order for AI-based tools to complement their work.”*

*Guillaume Hemmert, Policy Officer, DG EMPL, European Commission*



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