

An EU Blueprint for Basic Services

A necessary condition for leaving no-one behind

By guaranteeing access to basic services, the EU not only supports a more stable and resilient society and upholds its commitment to leave no one behind during the green and digital transition, it also lays down a legacy of social cohesion for future generations.

An EU blueprint for basic services will set a critical step towards fulfilling the promise of a fair Europe, elevating it to a tangible policy priority by taking a more active role in strengthening the provision and access to high-quality basic services across the EU, in line with principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In 2024-29, a blueprint for basic services that takes the European Pillar of Social Rights to the next level can contribute to:

1. Forging a common understanding that extends across national frameworks and sets minimum standards to ensure that everyone in the EU has access to high-quality basic services.
2. Taking the next step in coordinated action by monitoring and strengthening evidence on the provision of and access to basic services.
3. Advancing a strategy to enhance affordable access to basic services, by streamlining funding allocation and facilitating support to targeted groups to effectively promote economic resilience and social inclusion.

Rising inequality and social vulnerability in Europe highlight the need to build an economy that ensures everyone's access to high-quality basic services. While the EU has made significant progress since the formulation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), gaps in access to essential services prevail in all Member States. In 2022, 9% of the EU population encountered difficulties in maintaining an adequately warm home. Among lower-income households, this figure soared to 20%.¹ With 1 in 5 of the population (95.3 million) at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU², ensuring everyone's access to basic services has become an increasingly urgent matter.

EU institutions have recognised the importance of addressing the challenges of access to basic services in the context of the green transition, as evidenced by the Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality³ and the Commission

Recommendation on energy poverty⁴. Additionally, the establishment of the Social Climate Fund (SCF) marks a significant step forward in directly safeguarding vulnerable groups amidst the socio-ecological transition. However, these initiatives have been fragmented and limited in scope. For instance, the SCF focuses solely on access to energy and transport, and does not address broader aspects of basic service provision. A harmonised, horizontal and cohesive approach to effectively tackle these challenges is needed.

At a time when the long-term wellbeing of the European population is insecure, an EU blueprint for basic services can provide an actionable approach to the provision and funding of these essential services, and

¹ [European Commission \(2023\) - Access to essential services: key challenges for the most vulnerable.](#)

² [People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022 - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality 2022/C 243/04](#)

⁴ [Commission Recommendation \(EU\) 2020/1563 of 14 October 2020 on energy poverty](#)

put Principle 20 of the EPSR at the heart of EU social policy. Such an approach can ensure stability and inclusivity for EU citizens and inhabitants, promote active participation in society and break the cycle of intergenerational exclusion. It emphasises a systemic, long-term strategy that prioritises well-being as a central focus of the EU agenda. **More specifically, an EU blueprint for basic services would aim to:**

1. Forge an actionable approach to basic services with common standards across Member States:

- In the short term, the EU should **articulate a common understanding of basic services that extends across national systems and sets minimum quality standards** based on an updated review of the Voluntary European Quality Framework (VEQF) principles: availability, accessibility, affordability, person-centeredness, comprehensiveness, continuity, and outcome orientation.
- In the medium term, embed **a common definition of basic services into the EU's acquis** that builds on Principle 20 of the EPSR on essential services (that includes water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services, and digital communications), and broadens the scope towards the specific targeting of vulnerable groups⁵ including services with preventive and mitigative functions against poverty and social exclusion (e.g., housing, long-term care).
- In the long term, **a directive of minimum standards** would establish **an actionable common framework to ensure that everyone in the EU has access to high-quality basic services**. Such a directive would formulate clear policy goals at both the EU and Member State levels.

2. Enhance availability and monitoring of evidence on basic services across Member States:

- Due to highly fragmented monitoring schemes, there is no centralised data to evaluate and compare the provision and access to basic services across Member States. To ensure effective and coordinated action, monitoring of evidence and availability of data across Member States should be substantially improved. This could be achieved through complementing the **Social Scoreboard** with indicators on access, quality, and affordability of basic services. At the same time, relevant indicators should be included in the Commission's forecasting models and foresight activities.
- Indicators on basic services should be comprehensively incorporated into the **European Semester**. In particular, relevant evidence, developments, and policy interventions could be assessed in the Commission's **Joint Employment Report** or in the **Annual Sustainable Growth Survey** under the fairness pillar, and integrated into the **Social Convergence Framework**. To encourage Member State action in line with Chapter 3 (Social Protection and Inclusion) of the EPSR, basic services can be increasingly considered in the formulation of country-specific recommendations.

3. Streamline EU funding and resources allocated to access and provision of basic services:

- An EU blueprint for basic services should support Member States to make the best use of EU funds in their provision of accessible and affordable high-quality basic services. A blueprint can **introduce a benchmark**; Member States surpassing the EU average rate of individuals at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion could allocate a minimum of relevant EU funds (European Social Fund Plus and the European Regional Development Fund) beyond a threshold value to address this challenge. This benchmark shall enter into force with the next 2028-2033 Multiannual Financial Framework and apply to all EU funding instruments that facilitate investments in human capital, infrastructure development, social services, and education.

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⁵ The concept of "vulnerable groups" refers to groups of people considered to face a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than the average population because of physical disabilities, gender, age factors, ethnic origins, lack of housing, among other characteristics.