**Access to Essential Services**

**Concept Note**

**Introduction: context and rationale**

EAPN has been working on the issue of ensuring equal access to affordable and quality public services in a context of increasing liberalization and austerity within the EU[[1]](#footnote-1). The newly adopted European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan has brought out the renewed commitment to implement the Social Pillar as well as the ambition to achieve a stronger social Europe in the framework of just transition and recovery plans. One of three targets set in the EPRS Action Plan consists of “15 million people to lift out of poverty or social exclusion, of which at least 5 million should be children” to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and prevent that they become adults at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The COVID-19 epidemic magnified the existing structural inequalities and discrimination affecting vulnerable people and people already experiencing poverty[[2]](#footnote-2) (e.g. access to health and social care for homeless people[[3]](#footnote-3)). Therefore, the EU 2020 Poverty Watch[[4]](#footnote-4) report highlighted that guaranteeing the rights to quality and affordable services is key to preventing and tackling poverty, particularly universal health/care/social services, education, housing and energy.

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and new challenges linked with green and digital transitions, it is essential to assess the impact of unequal access to essential services on poverty and social exclusion and monitor the implementation of policy solutions – at EU and national level – to achieve an EU Action for a Social and Green Recovery[[5]](#footnote-5). It is also of pivotal importance to foster the adoption of an integrated EU strategy to include a social impact assessment into the Recovery Package and Green Deal and Digital Transition proposals, thus ensure inclusive investment decision processes and sustainable transformations[[6]](#footnote-6). In fact, it is needed to monitor Member States’ actions addressing homelessness, housing and energy poverty in their national recovery and resilience plans, with a view to ensuring that social and climate investments and agendas are not mutually exclusive and address any further gap in the next Poverty Watch report.

Covid crisis and the related macroeconomic context showed that public and social services of general interest play an essential role in protecting the poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups, even in the absence of return on investment in the short-term. During the health crisis, good practices have been launched to respond to the new circumstances. [Italy and Spain](https://fsr.eui.eu/measures-to-tackle-the-covid-19-outbreak-impact-on-energy-poverty/), for example, were pioneers in measures aimed at guaranteeing residential energy supplies through interventions prohibiting gas/electricity supply disconnection due to non-payments, or applying social tariffs, bill postponement, simplification of procedures. Recently, the Spanish “[Alliance for the rehabilitation of homes without leaving anyone behind](https://ecodes.org/hacemos/energia-y-personas/rehabilitacion-energetica-de-viviendas/alianza-por-la-rehabilitacion-de-viviendas-sin-deja-a-nadie-atras/manifiesto-de-la-alianza-por-la-rehabilitacion-de-viviendas-sin-dejar-a-nadie-atras)” launched a coalition calling for renovations for energy poor households.

Covid-19 pandemic also reminded that universal health coverage is a human right that everyone should access and that healthcare is one of the most intersectional fundamental rights. Whilst combating discrimination is necessary to assure equal opportunities for everyone (ART. 21 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights), some social groups suffer structural discrimination in access to healthcare due to their sexual orientation, ethnic origin, housing and other social determinants[[7]](#footnote-7).

Furthermore, whilst the digital single market has been set as a pillar in the COVID-19 recovery[[8]](#footnote-8), digital divide and inequality (e.g. women and low-income households) restrict access to information and resources and cause serious implications for equal access to education and healthcare. Further reflection is needed to adequately frame digitalization as a new social determinant[[9]](#footnote-9) for health leading to more/less socio-economic disparities as well as ensure an inclusive digital transformation.

In addition to this, health has been put at the heart of the climate and environmental sustainability under the European Green Deal[[10]](#footnote-10). Therefore, focus is needed to analyze the disproportionate impact of health inequalities and the green transition on people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, in the light of former recommendations and bad/good energy efficiency practices particularly in social housing[[11]](#footnote-11). The European Green Deal can contribute to a new social and sustainable strategy to achieve SDGs and EPRS objectives while ensuring that the poor will not pay for the costs of the transition. There will be no fair and effective ecological and digital transformations if concrete actions are not taken to reduce socio-economic inequalities.

**Problem definition**

Essential services are understood as social services of general interest, namely “*those that respond to the needs of vulnerable citizens, and are based on the principles of solidarity and equal access. They can be both of an economic or non-economic nature. Examples include social security schemes, employment services and social housing*.”[[12]](#footnote-12) In the context of this concept note, focus will be kept on specific services considering the wide range of essential services and the massive work that EAPN has already been done on relevant areas linked to the labor market such as minimum income and social protection.

* Social housing including energy efficiency initiatives
* Health and social care
* Digital Communications

The aforementioned themes should be analyzed from the perspective of equal opportunities for under-represented and/or socially less advantaged groups like children, within the current policy context (e.g. EU Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan; Just Transition Mechanism and European Green Deal; Recovery and Resilience plans; Next Generation EU; European Child Guarantee; European Health Union; Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion). The formulation ‘Digital Communications’ draws on the effective access to essential services of sufficient quality illustrated in the [EPRS Action Plan](https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/#annex2). In the context of this paper, this is understood as equal access to digital skills and devices as a basic need and universal human right, which affects access to all other services thus socio-economic inclusion.

EAPN has recently released a report delving into education and training to prevent and reduce social exclusion (March 2020)[[13]](#footnote-13). Consequently, the present paper does not commit to a full assessment of barriers to inclusive education again. However, access to affordable and quality education being a social determinant of health and an important consequence of digital exclusion, education will be mentioned in relation to the challenges of digitalization across Europe and its effects on certain groups of populations, such as children experiencing poverty, refugees, single mothers, people with disabilities. With regard to education, key messages from this report will be leveraged in preparation for upcoming Commission actions, specifically the Higher Education Transformation Agenda (to unlock the full potential of higher education institutions for a recovery geared towards a sustainable, inclusive, green and digital transition), the initiative on Individual Learning Accounts (to overcome barriers to access to training and to empower adults to manage career transitions) and the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care in 2022.

**Main Challenges and Opportunities**

The post-covid policy context in the EU offers a number of challenges that might be turned into opportunities to break the intergeneration cycle of poverty and social exclusion as well as develop common quality standards on essentials services rooted in a human-rights and social-justice based approach in their aspects of accessibility, affordability and adequacy for all.

* The Slovenian Presidency (1 July and 31 December 2021) will focus on resilient and inclusive societies, particularly equal opportunities[[14]](#footnote-14) for children and gender equality. Important dossiers on their agenda comprise the revision of Regulation on Coordination of Social Security systems and the implementation of the EPSR in the European Semester in 2022 (Exchange on the Slovenian Presidency – Social Platform, 17 June 2021). The Slovenian Presidency is committed to fighting poverty and social exclusion of children and, to this end, it will encourage Member States to deliver ambitious national plans.
* On June 21 2021, EU institutions, civil society, and local and regional authorities launched the [European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10032&furtherNews=yes) and signed a joint declaration to commit to ending homelessness by 2030. The Chair of the EMPL Committee (European Parliament), Ms Nicholsonova, pointed out that the EP is calling on Member States to integrate housing solutions addressing children homelessness into their Action Plan for the Child Guarantee. She also highlighted the importance of dialogue and mutual learning from NGOs on reliable data collection on homelessness and coherent indicators. She urged the maintenance of the exceptional measures adopted during Covid crisis, in support of vulnerable dwellers, such as moratoria on eviction and energy supply disconnection. She believes that the [Housing First program](https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/) should be part of the long-term solution to address homelessness.
* The Affordable Housing Initiative piloting 100 renovation districts is launched in Q2 of 2021. Given that buildings make up 40% of the EU´s energy consumption and cause 36% of greenhouse gas emissions, renovations are central to creating carbon neutral cities. The outputs of the Affordable Housing Initiative, the [Renovation Wave](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave_en) and the framework of the [Energy performance of buildings directive](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/energy-performance-buildings-directive_en) could be an added value for social housing and their energy supplies too if the ecological transition and energy efficiency go hand in hand with a social Europe agenda. Expected outcomes include the mobilization of cross-sectoral partnerships at local level to develop, adapt, design new processes and technologies applied to renovation of social and affordable housing.

In June, Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, announced the launch of a [Climate Action Social Fund](https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-plans-climate-action-social-fund-to-shield-citizens-from-rising-carbon-prices/) aimed at achieving an inclusive Green Deal. This is meant to be a social mechanism to compensate for any possible adverse effects of rising carbon pricing, especially for most vulnerable citizens.

It is essential that the EU and the Member States provide targeted low-income renovation and decarbonization programs and that minimum performance standards may be designed to address social housing issues. In this context, EAPN advocate for the environmental and social aspects of the European Green Deal[[15]](#footnote-15) - a Just Transition, will not be just, if the poor pay for it; a European Green Deal must be a European Social Deal. In the framework of accessing quality housing services, affordability is an increasingly important obstacle in Europe.

* Energy poverty, particularly the distributional effects of the energy transition and measures targeting vulnerable groups, was listed as one of the key priorities in the recent [Recommendation on Energy Poverty](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1563&from=EN). Due attention should be paid to barriers to investment in energy-efficient housing and the measurement of energy poor households, in the context of national long-term renovation strategies. Furthermore, the lack of a common definition of energy poverty and related indicators hinders the understanding of energy poverty from a multidimensional and integrated perspective at EU, national and local level. EAPN believes that renovation programs should target and subsidize social housing, low-income tenants and landlords and avoid higher housing and energy costs to deliver decent and affordable housing for all.
* On July 14, the European Commission will present the “Fit for 55” legislative package, aiming at updating the European 2030 climate and energy laws, in the light of the 55% net emission target for 2030. Unambitious targets for the “Fit for 55” would leave energy poor households on the frontlines of climate change in unfit housing and precarious energy security[[16]](#footnote-16).

A potential source of concerns regards the proposal for the extension of the European Emission Trading System to buildings and energy obligations and its likely negative distributional effects and effects on higher energy prices and rents[[17]](#footnote-17). However, it is currently being discussed that EU Member States will need to use all their revenue from ETS for climate-related purposes, including support for “low-income households’ sustainable renovation”. If confirmed, instead of the creation of a Climate Action Social Fund, the Commission will set a 50% target to go to low-income households nationally[[18]](#footnote-18).

* The Recommendation on Energy Poverty is in line with the revised [Energy Efficiency Directive 2018/2002](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/targets-directive-and-rules/energy-efficiency-directive_en) affirming the need to reduce energy poverty in the context of national obligations regarding energy efficiency and measures to address households affected by energy poverty. As member of the Right to Energy Coalition, EAPN supports the integration of 4 elements into a socially-just directive: i) sufficient and appropriate funding ii) specific energy efficiency programs for low-income, energy-poor households, iii) technical assistance for Member States, iv) practical assistance to low-income households. For EAPN, energy is a public good and the right to affordable energy is a universal human and social right. This approach also implies direct income support for low-income households (by means of social/reduced tariffs, specific heating/housing allowances or supplements to social assistance benefits), a ban for disconnections and/or the supply of a minimum amount of energy for all[[19]](#footnote-19).

In addition to this, models of decentralized production and consumption, such as energy communities, could be explored in order to unlock models of energy efficiency and energy services that return profits to the community[[20]](#footnote-20).

* Some Member States have already included within their [National Recovery and Resilience Plans](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en) specific actions aimed at addressing housing, homelessness, and energy poverty. Belgium, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Spain address homelessness through dedicated de-institutionalization reforms and the provision of legislative and financial support to create accommodation and temporary housing for homeless and vulnerable groups. Fifteen Member States (BE, BG, HR, DK, FR, DE, IT, LT, LV, LU, PT, RO, SI, ES, HU) have included in their Plans measures targeted at investing in social and adequate housing, whereas only a few countries (AT, FR, GR, ES, CY) included measures to tackle energy poverty. In this scenario, the involvement of civil society organizations in all the steps of the process will be pivotal to ensure that poorer people as well as poorer regions may benefit from funds, and that a climate-neutral economy leaving no one behind is reached. In this respect, the policy delivery model provided by the [Assist Project](http://www.assist2gether.eu/) should be further examined to ensure the best interest of PEPs in addressing energy vulnerability, with CSOs acting as reliable and trusted agents.

In general, the potential reform of the European Semester might be a key window to leverage our asks addressing the structural causes of poverty, in the monitoring process following [Commission’s assessments](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_1659) of the substance of the recovery and resilience plans. Council Implementing Decisions on the NRRPs have been scheduled for some countries (Luxembourg, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Slovakia, Latvia, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and France). Upcoming Council Implementing Decisions concern Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Czechia and Poland. [Key messages](https://www.eapn.eu/is-the-2019-european-semester-more-social-eapn-assessment-of-the-european-semester-2019/) that could be leveraged include:

* The Commission should promote a rights-based antipoverty strategy based on integrated active inclusion across key social rights comprising access to quality services;
* All countries must be monitored on how they are delivering on all social rights and the poverty target, through the assessment of systematic impact at national level;
* Dialogue with people with direct experience of poverty is essential to signpost what is/not working and propose viable solutions.
* The EPSR Action Plan advanced the proposal of new tools to better measure barriers and gaps in access to healthcare (2021—2022). The Commission also encouraged the digitalization of health systems to tackle health inequalities. EAPN could use these opportunities to gather statistical and monitoring tools that may map health inequalities across national members and highlight the perspective of vulnerable/marginalized patients experiencing unequal access to healthcare.
* In February 2021, the Expert Group on Health Systems Performance Assessment presented the [opinion on the organization of resilient health and social care following the COVID-19 pandemic](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/expert_panel/docs/026_health_socialcare_covid19_en.pdf). Recommendations included the development and deployment of online trainings for frontline health and social care professionals regarding care provision to vulnerable groups. The report also revisited the issue of health inequalities, particularly the vicious cycle between health and poverty (health sector inequalities and poverty; poverty and poor health outcomes). In this framework, EAPN could explore common needs and societal impact of multiple intersectional vulnerabilities, such as medically vulnerable, mentally vulnerable and socially marginalized people. Particular attention should be paid to how health inequity exacerbates vulnerabilities at different levels (EU, Member States, regions). A political response could be proposed in collaboration with other relevant initiatives such as the [Joint Action on Health Equity in Europe](https://jahee.iss.it/).
* The [European Health Data Space](https://ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/dataspace_en) will be launched in the fourth quarter of 2021, with the aim of promoting access to health data for better healthcare, research and policy making, and fostering the development and application of digital services for the provision of healthcare. There is a lot at stake: data protection concerns for vulnerable people like undocumented migrants[[21]](#footnote-21), accessibility to digital healthcare for those who do not have digital skills or devices, non-harmonized approach to data portability across Member States. A [Public Consultation](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12663-Digital-health-data-and-services-the-European-health-data-space_en) is open for feedback until July 26, 2021.
* The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) has just adopted the Commission proposal on establishing a [European Child Guarantee](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10024&furtherNews=yes). The latter aims at providing every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion with access to essential services like health care, education, early childhood care and housing. The Child Guarantee requires Member States to submit Child Guarantee National Action Plans within 9 months since its adoption and to nominate a national Child Guarantee Coordinator. It promotes a right-based and multidimensional approach to addressing child poverty and social exclusion. The European Child Guarantee effectively responds to [Thematic area 2 of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en), namely socio-economic inclusion, health and education. Child Guarantee might provide opportunities to leverage EAPN policy recommendations on Ensuring Education, Vocational Trainings and Lifelong Learning in relation to access to essential services, within the national Child Guarantee Action Plans and vulnerable children consultation regarding their planning, execution and evaluation. Lastly, the Child Guarantee Action Plans (by March 2022 tbc) should be monitored to ensure that it feeds into the European Semester process and it triggers concrete reforms at national level ([Manifesto on Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU](https://www.eapn.eu/manifesto-on-child-poverty-and-social-exclusion-in-the-eu/)).
* The Revision of the Social Scoreboard offers the opportunity to advocate for the use of disaggregated data to monitor EU countries’ policies detecting inequalities and intersectional discrimination and promoting non-discriminatory access to essential services. We should monitor any change regarding indicators (social protection and inclusion ones, in particular) that may have an impact on perception of poverty in the EU and that may complement the assessment of economic performance and stability. The headline indicators of the revised social scoreboard ([Annex 2 of the EPRS Action Plan](https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/#chapter2)) have already been endorsed by EPSCO, but discussions on the secondary indicators are still ongoing.
* The European [Communication on the Digital Compass](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0118): the European way for the Digital Decade agreed on a set of digital principles including the launch of important multi-country projects. Principles encompass universal access to internet services, access to digital systems and devices that respect the environment, access to digital health services, universal digital education and skills. The Commission also proposed to include such a set of digital principles and rights in an interinstitutional declaration between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council, complementing the experience of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Commission will publish annually the European State of the Digital Decade Report to report on the progress towards targets and principles. EAPN could trigger an internal reflection within the network of members to identify solutions for an inclusive and sustainable digital society. Questions that may be asked include the following:

What type of digital services vulnerable people need the most? Do we have good practices/recommendations to ensure that people benefit from non-discriminatory access to online services and digital infrastructure? Can we advocate for a multi-country project closing the digital gap and fostering equal opportunities for the digitally skilled population? The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) Regulation recognizes the importance of developing such projects by combining investments from national recovery and resilience plans.

**Key objectives**

* Strengthen public support in Europe in favor of indicators and strategies to tackle [multidimensional poverty](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAPN-Poverty-Explainer-Web-1-4331.pdf) through a new European Strategy against Poverty, based on an integrated, person-centered approach promoting the equal commitment to ecological, digital and social goals and mainstreaming gender and racial equality of treatment in access to services. We could capitalize on members’ experiences and outputs of other related policy documents such as Poverty Watches and the gender mainstreaming report.
* Build our competence on digital exclusion, digital being a service but also a transversal access/enabler condition, with a view to forming a coalition on digital exclusion with EU Commission/DG EMPL and potentially interested organizations such as EDRI.
* Build consensus about key messages aimed at anticipating and addressing EU’s expectations about the integration of green and digital transitions into the agenda of poverty and social exclusion through the assessment of their impact on PEPs’ access to essential services as well as good practices to make green/digital transitions inclusive and conducive to the break of the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.
* Unlock concrete mechanisms for structured engagement of PEPs and CSOs in the Child Guarantee action plans by featuring a model for their structural participation in all social policies. The Child Guarantee will serve as a transversal hook to discuss structured engagement in designing solutions that address homelessness, unequal access to education, healthcare and digital literacy, with a view to combating multidimensional poverty.
* Advocating for EAPN main policy asks ahead of the final text of the first EU Report on Access to Essential Services in 2022, by making the link between EAPN position statements and upcoming EU initiatives and preparing the ground for public policy and investments in universal, affordable, quality services through an integrated approach across sectors and policies.

**Further information to consider in the collective reflection and input exchanges:**

* [European Social Policy Network report on Access to essential services for people on low incomes in Europe](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8340&furtherPubs=yes) – an analysis of policies on access to six essential services (water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications) in the 27 EU countries.
* EAPN, Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in European Semester 2021 – What do EAPN members say? - Report elaborated by the EAPN Secretariat, with input by EAPN members; Final Version (25 March 2021).
* EAPN, [Toolkit for EAPN Members on Engaging with the European Semester](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EAPN-1-EAPN-Toolkit-Stakeholder-Involvement-ES-2020-4313.pdf), 2020.
* [Social Platform position on an EU strategy to develop a resilient ecosystem](https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/social_platform_position_quality_social_services_for_all_2021.pdf) for social services and implement the European Pillar of Social Rights during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
* [OECD Housing Project](https://www.oecd.org/housing/#OECD-Housing-Project): better housing for better lives.
* European Commission, [Inequalities in access to healthcare - A study of national policies 2018](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8152&furtherPubs=yes).
* [EU4Health 2021-2027 – a vision for a healthier European Union](https://ec.europa.eu/health/funding/eu4health_en) – specifically, strengthening health data, digital tools & services, digital transformation of healthcare; improving access to healthcare.
* [State of Health in the EU](https://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary_en), particularly the Individual Country Health Profiles assessing the strengths and challenges in the national health systems.
* [European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies](https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/).
* [Health inequalities portal](https://health-inequalities.eu/eu-beyond/eu-action/).
* CHAIN, EuroHealthNet, [the COVID-19 pandemic and health inequalities: we are not all in it together](https://eurohealthnet.eu/sites/eurohealthnet.eu/files/CHAIN_infographic%20_covid19_and_inequalities_final.pdf).
* [Policy Paper: Empowering Citizens – The Key to a Successful Digital Health Transformation](https://healthyeurope.eu/2020/12/policy-paper-empowering-citizens).
* [EU energy poverty observatory](https://www.energypoverty.eu/).
* [EU Alliance for Investing in Children welcomes the EPSCO Council adoption](http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-welcomes-the-epsco-council-adoption-of-the-council-recommendation-establishing-the-european-child-guarantee/) of the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee.
* [EU Alliance for Investing in Children statement to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-statement-to-the-european-pillar-of-social-rights-action-plan/).
* [Social Platform, Open letter on an ambitious and comprehensive revision of the Social Scoreboard](https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Social-Platform-open-letter-on-the-revision-of-the-Social-Scoreboard.pdf).
* European handbook on equality data.
* [European Parliament, Bridging the digital divide in the EU](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/573884/EPRS_BRI(2015)573884_EN.pdf).
* [European Commission, Shaping Europe's digital future](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_3.pdf).
* [European Parliament, COVID-19: MEPs call for measures to close the digital gap in education](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20201016IPR89550/covid-19-meps-call-for-measures-to-close-the-digital-gap-in-education).
* [EU4Digital, Europe’s Digital Decade: setting the course towards a digitally empowered Europe by 2030](https://eufordigital.eu/europes-digital-decade-setting-the-course-towards-a-digitally-empowered-europe-by-2030/).
* [EESC conference on Energy poverty at the crossroads of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/presentations/eesc-conference-energy-poverty-crossroads-european-pillar-social-rights-and-european-green-deal).
* Frans Timmermans, [Speech at European Economic and Social Committee plenary on social issues in the European Green Deal](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/timmermans/announcements/speech-european-economic-and-social-committee-plenary-social-issues-european-green-deal_en).
* Rights2Energy Coalition, [FEANTSA calls for the Renovation Wave to deliver for energy poor](https://righttoenergy.org/2021/06/02/will-the-renovation-wave-really-deliver-for-europes-energy-poor/).
* ETUI, [Climate change: the key challenge - A framework for an eco-social contract](https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Climate%20change-the%20key%20challenge-A%20framework%20for%20an%20eco-social%20contract_2021_0.pdf).
* Housing Europe, [Promoting the area-based approach to tackle Energy Poverty Highlights from our European Energy Poverty Observatory Workshop](https://www.housingeurope.eu/resource-1408/promoting-the-area-based-approach-to-tackle-energy-poverty).
* EUROFOUND, [Education, healthcare and housing: How access changed for children and families in 2020](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/dc247116-771b-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-198514239).
* EUROFOUND, [Housing in Europe Statistics visualized : 2020 edition](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da50a71e-5b97-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-HTML/source-198514239).
* EUROFOUND, [Policies to ensure access to affordable housing](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2fc74716-e745-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-198514239).
* [FEANTSA Report: Investment in Affordable & Social Housing Solutions: Reaching the “Locked Out” in Europe](https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2021/02/12/feantsa-report-investment-in-affordable-social-housing-solutions-reaching-the-locked-out-in-europe?bcParent=27).
* FEANTSA, [European Homelessness and COVID 19](https://www.feantsa.org/en/other-observatory-publications/2021/04/01/european-homelessness-and-covid-19).

**Output:**

Develop a report on access to essential services drawing from the experiences of members and focusing on challenges, good practices, national policy initiatives and concrete recommendations contributing to equal access to essential services and eradication of social exclusion for people living in the EU.

**Target audience:**

* Input: EAPN members led/coordinated by EUISG. 2 potential interviews with a PEP and one of the European organizations (e.g. Eurochild, FEANTSA or PICUM) to collect first-hand experience with digital transition and access to healthcare/education and green/social transition to reduce energy poverty within the context of delivering affordable housing to people with low income and most vulnerable households.
* Final audience: EU Institutions (Commission, Parliament, European Council, European Economic and Social Committee), national EAPN networks, national ministries, cities.

**Timeline:**

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| EAPN EU sends the concept note to the steering group and EUISG | **5 July 2021** |
| Preliminary comments from the steering group | **9 July 2021** |
| First discussion in the EUISG meeting | **13 July 2021** |
| EAPN EU circulates the revised concept note/questionnaire and sends invitations for interviews | **16 July 2021** |
| Deadline for input from members | **11 August 2021** |
| EAPN sends the first final drat paper to the EUISG | **3 September 2021** |
| Second discussion in the EUISG meetings | **9 September 2021** |
| Second draft | **12 October 2021** |
| Discussion in the EUISG meeting | **16 November 2021** |
| Finalization/Dissemination | **December/January 2022** |

**EAPN position paper on the Access to Essential Services**

***Template fiche for mapping national realities***

**Name of the person filling in the fiche:**

**National Network / European Organisation:**

1. ***What are the main barriers facing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in getting access to essential services in your country? What was the impact of COVID-19 on barriers and/or good practices?*** *(Please take into account different aspects of accessibility for one/more of the identified services - Social housing including energy efficiency initiatives; Health and social care; Digital Communications. E.g.: affordability, geographical coverage, discrimination, equal opportunities, quality of services).*
   1. ***Challenges***
   2. ***Good practices***
2. ***What is the space for the social dimension in RRPs and green and digital transitions, in the national policies in your countries? Any recommendation to improve equal access to affordable and quality essential services through a socially-just recovery, green and digital transition?***
   1. ***National Policy Initiatives:***
   2. ***Recommendations:***
3. ***How do changes in accessibility and exclusion from essential services affect the situation of poverty and social exclusion in your country?***
4. ***To what extent digital divide restrict access to health and social care services and education in your country/community? How could digitalization be used to reduce discrimination in access to these/other essential services and social exclusion?*** *(Please take into account challenges of specific vulnerable communities)*
5. ***Could you mention any exceptional measures for housing and energy efficiency, adopted during the Covid pandemic, which you would like to be maintained at the end of the health crisis? Why?***
6. ***What is your members/community experience with funding programs and/or practical assistance to low-income or marginalized people on affordable energy efficiency in social housing? What could be improved at EU, national and local level?***
   1. ***Current experience***
   2. ***Recommendations***

1. ***What actions national NGOs and policy makers took/may take to foster the integration of a social impact assessment into the Recovery Package, Green Deal and Digital future at EU level?***
2. ***Which groups of people face the biggest problems in accessing health care services?*** *(please mention what problems, health care services and group of people)*

***Can you highlight any good practices in your organization/community/country to reduce the impact of poverty/social exclusion on health outcomes and/or the impact of health inequalities on people experiencing poverty?***

* 1. **Challenges**
  2. **Good practices/opportunities**

1. ***What actions do your network/organization play in supporting greater access and fighting exclusion from the aforementioned essential services?*** (assistance and counseling services, advocacy actions, direct involvement of users, for example).

***Please give examples/data with links if possible:***

1. **How national action plans under the EU Child Guarantee could improve access to essential services and reduce child poverty and social exclusion?**

1. **Do you have any further consideration/data on the situation of social services of general interest or of other public social services besides housing/energy, health/social care and digital communications?**

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4. [EAPN,](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EAPN-EU-Poverty-Watch-2020-final-version-4937.pdf) *[2020 Poverty Watch Report](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EAPN-EU-Poverty-Watch-2020-final-version-4937.pdf)*[, November 2020.](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EAPN-EU-Poverty-Watch-2020-final-version-4937.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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6. The European Commission is currently working on a Guidance on distributional impact assessment (EAPN Policy Conference, 29 June 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [FRA, Inequalities and multiple discrimination in access to and quality of healthcare, 2013.](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inequalities-discrimination-healthcare_en.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [European Parliament, Digital Agenda for Europe, 2021.](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/64/digital-agenda-for-europe) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [WHO, Social Determinants of Health](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health" \l "tab=tab_1) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [EPHA, a Healthy European Green Deal?, July 2020.](https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/green-deal-briefing.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [EAPN, Energy Poverty Handbook, November 2016;](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/EAPN-handbook-energy-poverty-2016-1235.pdf) [EAPN, Working for a Green and Social Deal that ends poverty!, January 2020](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/EAPN-EAPN-Response-to-the-Annual-Sustainable-Growth-Strategy-2020-4040.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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