

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional and local public services, as well as in privatised services of general interest. As such, CESI represents numerous unions with affiliates across essential services including in the fields of public administration and taxation, care and health care as well as law enforcement and justice.

CESI **welcomes the initiative of the European Commission** to issue a Staff Working Document to identify and take stock of challenges pertaining to access to essential services for all European citizens, irrespective of income, social status or residence, as sketched in its background note of May 4 for a dedicated hearing with ETUC and the horizontal European employer social partners on May 12.

Overall, **CESI agrees with the analysis of access to essential services** in the EU laid out in sections 2 and 3 of the background note.

In view of the questions laid out in section 4,¹ **CESI notes:**

- The succession of recent crises – the Covid pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – combined pressure on labour markets with disruptions on global production and supply chains and scarcity of food and energy resources. The result has been rising unemployment and/or lower incomes coupled with rising prices and financial instability of increasing numbers of low- and middle-income households. **More and more people become vulnerable**, and among them women, young people, those with disabilities, migrants and refugees are particularly affected. In addition, the digital and green transitions will also have impacts on the most vulnerable. This means that many **public services are under additional pressure**, as increasing numbers of persons are in need of, for instance, social services and financial assistance, medical care and public employment services.

¹ (1) What are in your view the most important barriers impeding access to essential services at national and local level, and what are the most affected groups?; (2) What are in your views the most effective measures to support access to essential services at EU level? What are concrete examples of good practices from the national and local level?; (3) In what way can the social partners contribute to improving the access to essential services?

- Pressure on public essential services can be partially mitigated by a **fairer taxation**. Lower income taxation and higher tax credit thresholds, as well as direct support e.g. via energy vouchers for lower income households could strengthen the financial capacity of the most vulnerable. This can be counter-financed through a closure of loopholes for tax avoidance and tax evasion and higher taxes on capital.
- In line with Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on access to essential services, the EU's principles of cohesion, the protection of human and social rights, democratic values and the rule of law, more efforts should be done by the EU and the Member States for an **improved access to essential services** which guarantee a decent level of healthcare, education and well-being for all citizens and in particular for the most vulnerable that cannot buy in private substitutive services. No one should be left behind, especially in the current times of crisis with pressure on employment and rising prices.
- A strengthening of essential services is all the more important as a lesson learnt against the experience of the multiple unpredictable crises that Europe has been facing during the last years: Essential services must be sufficiently **performing to also deliver in difficult times**. They must be sufficiently resilient and prepared to mitigate the economic shocks in markets, not least also to provide adequate social protection coverage and effective active labour market policies, including economic and labour re-integration measures.
- A particular emphasis should be placed not only on access to essential services but on access to **high quality essential services** too. Essential services must be readily available, sufficient in scope and adequate in quality.
- As CESI has repeatedly voiced during the last years,² the above necessitates adequate levels in **public investments** at the EU and national Member State level. The costs of the digital and green transitions must not be borne by the most vulnerable. Rather, the opposite is true: They are in need of support and assistance to face these transitions, including through and improved provision of essential services.
- The global Covid pandemic highlighted to what extent access to essential services is key for a strong, resilient and reliable society. In light of potential (and surely upcoming) future crises, Member States, guided by an EU integrated approach, should make the proper investments for fixing the systemic weaknesses showcased during the pandemic and to value accordingly the public administrations delivering essential services.

² See CESI's recent position papers on precarious work: <https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-CESI-position-Precarious-work-202106-EN-final.pdf>

- i. In particular, the EU's new **Recovery and Resilience Facility** should be mapped considerably more against social considerations (which includes access to essential services) next to its two priorities on climate change mitigation and digitalisation.
 - ii. Moreover, the funding of essential services should be taken into consideration in the context of the current **review of the EU's economic governance**. The EU should make it easier for Member States to pursue necessary adequate investments in essential services without being penalised straightaway by the EU's fiscal deficit rules of the Stability and Growth Pact.
 - iii. As with **fairer taxation for vulnerable households**, financing improved essential services can be ensured by increasing capital taxation and VAT for high consumption and luxury products, as well as by the closure of loopholes for tax avoidance and tax evasion by investors and multinational companies. This remains an important playing field for the EU to deliver, together with Member States and further international actors such as the OECD.
- For high accessible, available and high quality essential services, these **investments** must target both facilities and infrastructure as well as equipment and, above all, **human resources**. Many essential services are **understaffed** while **working conditions are precarious and pay for personnel is often inadequate**. As long as these shortcomings persists, quality services cannot be delivered. This is confirmed by a recent study commissioned by the European Parliament on 'Revaluation of working conditions and wages for essential workers'.³

³ See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695491/IPOL_STU\(2021\)695491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/695491/IPOL_STU(2021)695491_EN.pdf)