

Social Services as key players in Europe’s sustainability transition: Unpacking the EU 2023 Strategic Foresight Report

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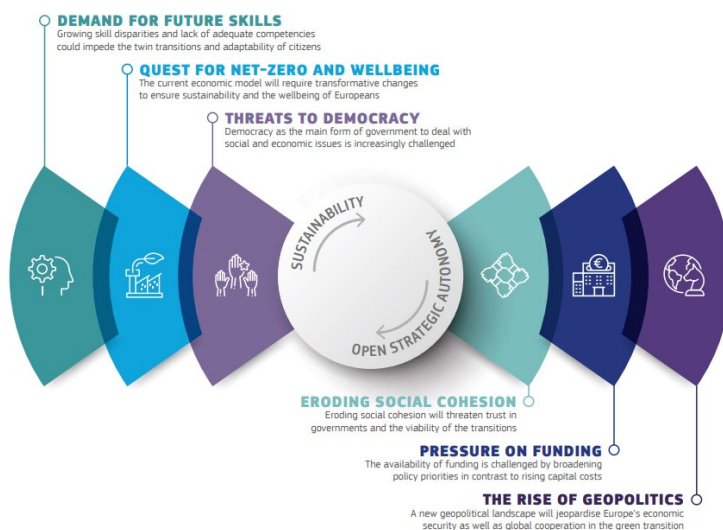
What is the 2023 Strategic Foresight Report about?

On 6th July the European Commission (EC) released its 2023 [Strategic Foresight Report](#). Titled “Sustainability and people’s well-being at the heart of Europe’s Open Strategic Autonomy”, the report aims to provide concrete actions to ensure that a successful transition towards a more sustainable Europe that improves the well-being of those living within it. Since the release of the first Strategic Foresight Report in 2020, the reports have been used to inform the Commission’s core priorities and Work Programme for the coming years. This year’s report places the delivery of high-quality social services as a top area of action for the years ahead.

It is no secret that **Europe is experiencing multiple intersecting crises** – on security, economic and social fronts. Against a new socio-economic reality and an evolving geo-economic role of public and private actors, the Report addresses how to strengthen the EU’s Open Strategic Autonomy, ensure its long-term competitiveness, uphold its social market economy model, and consolidate its global leadership in the new net-zero economy, while also remaining focused on people’s well-being.

The Report outlines **6 major challenges** which Europe is facing in its quest to sustainability.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE EU’S SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION



These issues include:

- The demand for future competencies and increasing skills gap.
- The need to address climate change and meet net-zero.
- Challenges to democracy and existing social contract.
- Eroding social cohesion and rising inequalities.
- Funding pressures with boarding political priorities and rising costs.
- A new geopolitical landscape and reconfiguration of globalisation.

Considering these structural trends and strategic challenges, the report highlights that **social services are an essential means to address augmenting “cracks in social cohesion”**, positively contributing to the pursuit of “ensuring a new European social contract fit for a sustainable future”.

The Report goes on to identify ten key areas for action to promote a coordinated intervention across all policy domains for the achievement of a sustainable Europe by 2050. Four of these areas (1, 7, 8, 9) are especially relevant to the work of EASPD and our members:

- **Develop a new European social contract.** With renewed welfare policies and a focus on high-quality social services.
- **Further, shift policy and economic indicators towards sustainable and inclusive wellbeing,** including adjusting GDP for different factors.
- **Ensure that all European can contribute to the transition,** by increasing labour market participation and focusing on future skills.
- **Strengthen democracy by with generational fairness at the heart of policymaking,** to reinforce the support for the transitions.

What does it imply for support and care services?

Social services will play a crucial role in delivering Europe’s just and inclusive transition where “no person is left behind” (Area 1). How will this be possible? The Report stipulates 3 conditions: social services should be **inclusive, high-quality,** and guided by the **purpose to “enhance people’s capacity to contribute to the economy and society while realising their potential and aspirations.”** The commitment to addressing root causes of mental health issues, like social exclusion and discrimination - as also found in the by the recent EC [Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health](#) - highlights the Commission’s much-welcomed interest in building a truly holistic and inclusive social contract. Likewise, by considering additional indicators to GDP, EU policymakers will better account for the interdependence between economic activity, people’s wellbeing, and the environment (Area 7). Hence political strategies will be designed with a more people-centred approach which will undoubtedly benefit persons with disabilities.

The report recognises the need for sustained efforts, including in the form of financial investments, to close inequality gaps and increase labour market participation of persons with disabilities who are underrepresented in employment, education, and training (Area 8). Examples of this include adapting workplaces and working conditions to the needs of workers as well as encouraging innovative ways of teaching and increasing flexibility of learning. EASPD’s project [work](#) promotes and enhances such types of good practices. To bolster and fortify social services, the Report further stresses the necessity to receive skills as well as financial and technological resources so that they may contribute to and reap the opportunities of the twin transitions (Area 9). In accordance with this point, we note EASPD’s involvement in the [Helpdesk](#) project, as a way to help social services access and use EU funds, and managing authorities to use EU funds to finance quality interventions in the field of social services.

EASPD welcomes the report and its key findings. We look forward to working with the European Commission and its members to support the delivery of high-quality social services through Europe, which in turn, contribute to the achievement of more sustainable and inclusive transition. To [read the report in full, click here.](#)

About the Annual Strategic Foresight Reports

Annual Strategic Foresight Reports have been produced as of 2020 to inform the Commission priorities, Commission Work Programmes, and multi-annual programming exercises in support of President von der Leyen's [six headline ambitions](#). This Report is based on the inclusive and participatory foresight exercise conducted by the [Joint Research Centre](#), complemented by broad consultations with Member States, other EU institutions in the framework of the ESPAS and with citizens through a call for evidence published on 'Have Your Say'. Together with work conducted on foresight by the current Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, this 2023 Report is [expected](#) to inform the upcoming discussion of Leaders at the informal European Council in Granada in October.