



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

Access to essential services for low-income people

Portugal

Pedro Perista



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Contact: Giulia Pagliani

E-mail: Giulia.PAGLIANI@ec.europa.eu

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

**ESPN Thematic Report on
Access to essential services for
low-income people**

Portugal

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Pedro Perista

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Summary

The national definition of essential public services in Portugal currently includes the supply of the following services: (a) water; (b) electrical energy; (c) piped natural gas and liquefied petroleum gases; (d) electronic communications; (e) postal services; (f) waste water collection and treatment; (g) urban solid waste management; and (h) passenger services.

However, there is neither a national nor a subnational definition of low-income people used in the context of the delivery of essential public services. Definitions are provided within the scope of each service in the form of conditions for eligibility. There is also no national or subnational policy framework under which the existing measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people are organised.

Measures with such characteristics can be identified regarding water and sanitation, energy and public transport, all of them taking the form of reduced tariffs. Thus, neither cash nor in-kind benefits are provided. Additionally, no specific advice/training or information services are provided, and there is no guaranteed provision of a basic/uninterrupted supply of water, sanitation and energy. Payment accounts with basic features are intended to facilitate access to financial services. Currently, no measures exist regarding access to digital public services.

The social tariff for water and for waste water collection/treatment is defined at the national level but the actual rules for implementation are decided at the local level. Furthermore, participation by individual municipalities is voluntary – they decide whether to apply the social tariff or not.

Most of the energy social tariffs – for electricity and piped gas – are defined at the national level. The exception is the reduced tariff for bottled gas, which is still at the pilot project stage, but the aim is to achieve national reach in the short-to-medium run.

The existing reduced tariffs for public transport relate to monthly passes only – including the 'passe social+', which exists only in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, and the monthly passes for children and young people aged 4-18 and higher education students aged under 23, which exist throughout the whole country.

Payment accounts with basic features are widespread in the Portuguese banking system and no major issues related to the implementation of EU Directive 2017/92/EU could be detected.

As far as is known there are no ongoing or announced reforms aimed at enhancing effective access for low-income people to the essential services under scrutiny. However, the programme of the government elected for the legislative period 2019-2023 mentions a set of objectives regarding improved access by low-income people to water and sanitation, energy and digital public services.

A more specific focus on access to energy reveals that consumers of bottled gas are a particularly disadvantaged group, especially if not living in social housing. Additionally, as the network of piped gas is concentrated along the coast and does not include the Autonomous Regions of Madeira and Azores, a geographic dimension to relative disadvantage can also be detected. As regards the electricity social tariff, there is a risk that affordability is currently underestimated. The proportion of Portuguese (poor) households saying they are unable to keep their home adequately warm is considerably higher than in the EU as a whole. However, no hard evidence of how these barriers affect the overall social inclusion of low-income people could be identified.

1 Overview of national/subnational measures aimed at supporting low-income people in accessing essential services

According to Principle 20 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), everyone should have “the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications”. Moreover, support for accessing such services should be available for those in need.¹ The importance of ensuring access to essential services is also well established globally in the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which was endorsed in 2015 by all UN countries including all EU countries.² This report investigates the extent to which Principle 20 of the EPSR has already been implemented in the six services under scrutiny in Portugal. The group of “those in need” is restricted in the report to people on a low income and low-income households.

1.1 Definition of ‘essential services’

Law 23/96 of 26 July 1996, as subsequently amended, provides a **national definition of essential public services** in Portugal. The latest amendments were introduced by Law 51/2019, of 29 July 2019, which brought passenger services within the category of essential public services. Thus, currently, the latter include the supply of the following services: (a) water; (b) electrical energy; (c) piped natural gas and liquefied petroleum gases; (d) electronic communications; (e) postal services; (f) waste water collection and treatment; (g) urban solid waste management; and (h) passenger services.

Article 4 establishes that service providers should clearly and directly inform users regarding the conditions under which the service is provided and the respective tariffs, as well as provide all necessary clarifications. Article 5 establishes that supply cannot be interrupted without a suitable period of notice and that interruption of supply on grounds of failure to pay can only take place after the user has been warned in writing, and with a minimum notice of 20 days.

1.2 Definition of ‘low-income people’ used in the context of access to services

There is neither a national nor subnational definition of low-income people used in the context of the delivery of essential public services. Definitions are provided within the scope of each service in the form of conditions for eligibility.

Regarding access to **water** and also **sanitation**, the definition of low-income people includes households with an annual income equal to or lower than €5,808³ (plus 50% for

¹ The EPSR was jointly proclaimed by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission on 17 November 2017. For more information on the EPSR, see: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

² The SDGs and their targets seek to realise the human rights of all, by promoting an integrated notion of sustainable development aimed at creating synergies between economic, environmental and social policies and objectives. For more information on the SDGs, see: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

³ The pieces of legislation providing the framework for the social tariffs for water and sanitation and energy, notably Law 7A/2016 (República Portuguesa, 2016) which for the first time included means-testing in the eligibility criteria, do not provide any indication of the way the figure of €5,808 was established. Furthermore, a specific evaluation study on the implementation of the social tariff for energy (Martins *et al.*, 2019) also does not provide any indication, rather just mentioning the amount and referring to Law 7A/2016. By way of comparison, in 2020 the threshold used for the national minimum-income scheme (the social insertion income – RSI) is €189.66/month (i.e. €2,275.92/year) for the claimant, €132.76 (€1,593.12) for every other adult in the household and €94.83 (€1,137.96) for each child aged under 18. This means that RSI beneficiaries are, in every case, (significantly) below the threshold for defining low-income people within the scope of the measures.

each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or those where the contract holder is the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income ; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit;⁴ or (e) invalidity social pension.

As regards access to **energy**, the definition used in the context of supply depends upon the specific service. In relation to **electricity**, the definition is exactly the same as the one referred to immediately above regarding water and sanitation: that is, households should have an annual income equal to or lower than €5,808 (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or the contract holder should be the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the RSI; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension. As for **piped natural gas**, the contract holder should be the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension. In other words, for gas there is no element of means-testing. The definition regarding **bottled gas** includes beneficiaries of the electricity social tariff living in a dwelling belonging to a municipality.

For **public transport**, the eligibility conditions for reductions are as follows: within the scope of the "Passe Social+" (see Section 1.3.4 below), beneficiaries of the social insertion income and of the solidarity supplement for the elderly are eligible for a price reduction of 50%. A reduction of 25% may be given to retired people and pensioners on the one hand, and unemployed people on the other, whose monthly pension or unemployment benefit, respectively, does not exceed 1.2 times the social support index (IAS).⁵ The reduction may also be given to people living in households whose mean monthly income does not exceed 1.2 times the IAS. The monthly passes for children and young people aged 4-18 and higher education students aged under 23 are reduced by 60% where they are beneficiaries of the school social action programme.

No definition of low-income people is used in relation to access to **digital public services** and **financial services**.

1.3 Measures for facilitating access for low-income people to services

1.3.1 Access to water

See the next section. Access to water and sanitation are dealt together under the social tariff for water and for waste water collection and treatment.

1.3.2 Access to sanitation

There is a **social tariff** for water, and for waste water collection and treatment, aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to these services. The legal framework of this measure is defined at national level by Decree-Law 147/2017, of 5 December 2017 (República Portuguesa, 2017). According to this piece of legislation, eligibility is granted to people in situations of economic vulnerability. These are understood as households with an annual income equal to or lower than €5,808⁶ (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or where the contract holder is the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension. The text states that, as a means of facilitating access to the social tariff, its attribution should

⁴ It is important to bear in mind that child benefit in Portugal is a mean-tested benefit, similar to the other benefits mentioned.

⁵ €438.81/month, in 2020.

⁶ The pieces of legislation providing the framework for the social tariff for water and sanitation – notably Law 7A/2016, which for the first time included means-testing in the eligibility criteria – do not provide any indication of the way the figure of €5,808 was established.

be automatic. Social security and tax authority services should provide information regarding contract holders, identified through their tax number, in order to establish their eligibility.

Although the legal framework of the measure is defined at the national level, the concrete rules for implementation are decided at the local level. Furthermore, participation by individual municipalities is voluntary; that is, they decide whether to apply the social tariff or not. Should a municipality decide to apply it, it will be responsible for its design, including concrete eligibility rules, and for its funding. For instance, municipalities may individually opt to include other users besides those explicitly referred in the decree law.

The social tariff may consist of an exemption from flat-rate tariffs, a reduction in variable tariffs, or a combination of both. The Regulatory Authority for Water and Waste (ERSAR) issued Recommendation 02/2018 as a means to clarify the criteria to be adopted by municipalities for the implementation of the social tariff.

The document recommends the definition of a maximum amount of water consumption to which the tariff exemption or reduction is applied, in order to promote environmentally sustainable behaviour. It also recommends that reductions are applied in such a way that, for an annual consumption of 120 cubic metres, the tariff does not exceed 0.5% of income.

According to the latest data made available by the ERSAR (regarding 2016), around 1 out of 4 Portuguese municipalities still did not apply a social tariff for water. A higher proportion did not apply a social tariff for sanitation.

Moreover, in some cases, the specific rules implemented by municipalities hamper effective access to the tariffs. This applies, for instance, to the imposition of minimum and/or maximum limits for water consumption.

It should also be mentioned that the price paid for water supply differs between municipalities. Thus, it is possible that the price for supply of the same amount of water is higher for a beneficiary of the social tariff in a municipality with higher water prices for than for a non-beneficiary in another municipality with lower water prices.

Neither cash nor in-kind benefits are provided. Additionally, there is **no provision of a guaranteed basic/uninterrupted supply, and no specific advice/training or information services.**

1.3.3 Access to energy

Assistance with energy costs consists of gas and electricity social tariffs, and of the extraordinary social support to the energy consumer (ASECE). These measures consist of **reduced tariffs** to be applied both to demand charges and to energy consumption. In addition, regarding electricity, the beneficiary is exempted from paying the special tax on electricity consumption (linked to the implementation of the Kyoto protocol) and a discount regarding the audio-visual tax. These measures are established at the **national level** and the total amount of discounts is defined regularly on the basis of a government dispatch. For 2019, it was defined as 33.8% of transitional tariffs.⁷

The contract should relate to the supply of gas or low-tension electricity exclusively for domestic use in a dwelling used as a permanent home; contracted power should not exceed 6.9 kVA in the case of electricity and annual consumption should not exceed 500 cubic metres in the case of gas. Eligibility rules regarding electricity are the same as for water: that is, in order to be eligible households should have an annual income equal to

⁷ Transitional tariffs are defined by the Regulatory Agency of Energy Services and are applicable to clients who have not yet made a contract for the supply of electricity in the liberalised market after the end of regulated tariffs.

or lower than €5,808⁸ (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or the contract holder should be the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension. The eligibility rules for the gas social tariff also include the beneficiaries of these social benefits but, contrary to electricity, exclude any form of means-testing.

Attribution of the social tariff/ASECE should be automatic. Social security and tax authority services should provide information regarding contract holders, identified through their tax number, in order to establish their eligibility.

According to the latest statistics issued by the Portuguese Directorate-General for Energy and Geology (DGEG),⁹ in September 2019 there were around 763,600 beneficiaries of the social tariff for electricity and a little over 34,200 beneficiaries of the social tariff for gas.

According to a recent study on the implementation of the energy social tariffs in Portugal: *'everything indicates that the most immediate objectives of the social tariff for electricity, aimed at mitigating problems of economic accessibility of the most vulnerable, are being achieved. The definition of vulnerable consumer used for defining access to the benefit involves a number of people similar to the number of people at risk of poverty in Portugal. (...) The discount granted to vulnerable consumers adds to other social benefits, contributing for decreasing the vulnerability of the poorest cohorts of population'* (Martins *et al.*, 2019: 69).

There is also a reduced tariff for bottled gas, the 'GPL solidarity tariff'. This is still at a pilot project stage. As from August 2018 it started to be implemented in only 10 municipalities for an experimental period of one year. However, Order 167/2019, of 29 May 2019, acknowledged that: *'as existing social tariffs have national reach, it was decided to already extend the pilot-project to all municipalities wishing to join, thus ensuring a higher number of beneficiaries'* (República Portuguesa, 2019: 2717).

Each beneficiary of the GPL solidarity tariff is entitled, each month, at a reduced price, to up to three gas bottles of 8 to 15 kilos or to one gas bottle of over 15 kilos. For households with more than four people these limits are increased for four bottles/month and 16 bottles/year, respectively.

Only beneficiaries of the electricity social tariff are eligible for this tariff. As such, the DGEG should provide municipalities with the identity of eligible users in their territory. However, the order also states that the beneficiary's dwelling of residence must belong to the municipality, which means that, at least during the pilot phase, only those living in social housing owned by municipalities are eligible.

Neither cash nor in-kind benefits are provided. Additionally, there is **no provision of a guaranteed basic/uninterrupted supply, and no specific advice/training or information services.**

⁸ The pieces of legislation providing the framework for the social tariffs for energy – notably Law 7A/2016, which for the first time included means-testing in the eligibility criteria – do not provide any indication of the way the figure of €5,808 was established. Furthermore, a specific evaluation study on the implementation of the social tariff for energy (Martins *et al.*, 2019) also does not provide any indication, rather just mentioning the amount and referring to Law 7A/2016.

⁹ Available at: <https://www.tarifasocial.dgeg.gov.pt/estatistica.aspx> (accessed 6 January 2020).

1.3.4 Access to public transport

There are **reduced tariffs** for public transport. These relate to monthly passes only; there are no reductions regarding individual tickets. There are three types of monthly passes with reductions. The first is the **"Passe Social+", which exists only in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto**. Beneficiaries of the social insertion income and of the solidarity supplement for the elderly are eligible for a price reduction of 50%. A reduction of 25% may be given to retired people and pensioners on the one hand, and unemployed people on the other, whose monthly pension or unemployment benefit, respectively, does not exceed 1.2 times the IAS – as well as people living in households whose mean monthly income does not exceed 1.2 times the IAS.

There are also reduced tariffs in relation to the **monthly passes for children and young people aged 4-18 and for higher education students aged under 23, which apply throughout the whole country**. In both cases, a reduction of 60% applies for beneficiaries of the school social action programme. All other students are eligible for a reduction of 25%.

Neither cash nor in-kind benefits are provided. Additionally, **no specific advice/training or information services are provided.**

1.3.5 Access to digital public services

Currently, there are **no measures aimed specifically at facilitating access by low-income people to digital public services**. However, it may perhaps be interesting to mention that there are assisted digital services, which are provided through the national network of 'citizen spaces', run by public or private entities through a protocol established with the Portuguese agency for administrative modernisation. Besides assisting citizens with access to digital public services, the workers at citizen spaces should also fulfil a pedagogical role in promoting citizens' literacy in the use of digital public services.

1.4 Access to financial services (Directive 2014/92/EU)

No major issues could be detected in relation to the implementation of EU Directive 2017/92/EU on the right for consumers to open and use payment accounts with basic features. These accounts are widespread in the Portuguese banking system and the total annual costs that may be levied on these accounts cannot exceed 1% of the amount of the IAS (i.e. €4.35 in 2019).¹⁰ The latest development in this respect is that the major banking entity in Portugal (Caixa Geral de Depósitos – CGD), deemed to represent around half of all accounts of this type, decided to start levying a charge on these accounts as from January 2020. According to media reports, the CGD argues that it will continue protecting the most vulnerable consumers, as the exemption from payment will continue for accounts that are credited with salaries, pensions or social benefits below the minimum salary (€635/month in 2020).

¹⁰ The figure for 2020 will be included in the revised version to be delivered in February 2020.

2 National/subnational policy frameworks and reforms

2.1 National/subnational policy frameworks

There is no national or subnational policy framework under which the measures described in the previous section are organised.

2.2 Ongoing or announced reforms

As far as is known, there are no ongoing or announced reforms aimed at enhancing effective access for low-income people to the essential services under scrutiny. However, the programme of the government elected for the legislative period 2019-2023 mentions a set of objectives regarding improved access by low-income people to essential services.

The text emphasises that: *'higher social protection of those most vulnerable is crucial (...) and that it is vital to reduce costs with essential goods and services such as housing, energy and transportation, translated in the access to income in-kind that may compensate monetary inequality'* (Governo de Portugal, 2019: 126).

In more concrete terms, regarding access to **water**, the text refers to the government's intention to review the model through which the water social tariff is implemented, 'so that more people may, automatically, enjoy this benefit' (Governo de Portugal, 2019: 138).

The text makes no specific mention of facilitating access for low-income people to **sanitation**. However, as mentioned above (see Section 1), the existing social tariff includes water and waste water collection and treatment. Thus, sanitation is also included under the aforementioned objective.

As for **energy**, the government intends to widen coverage of the gas social tariff to city gas and to liquefied petroleum gas (bottled and piped).

As regards **public transport**, there is a strong emphasis in the programme on supporting price reductions in public transport, which allowed a sharp reduction in the prices of many monthly passes:¹¹ but there is no mention of specific measures targeting low-income people.

The government's programme emphasises that, regarding access to **digital public services**: *'priority should be granted to ensuring that the whole population has access to internet services which should be envisioned as a universal and affordable right, thus eliminating situations of discrimination regarding access and usage of online public services'* (Governo de Portugal, 2019: 183). To that end, it envisages: (a) creating a social tariff for access to internet services; (b) supporting the creation of additional free public internet access points, through the creation of additional free wireless access areas supported by the EU programme WiFi4EU; (c) ensuring free access to digital services in public service facilities and in central and local government facilities; and (d) supporting information/training measures aimed at increasing digital literacy. According to the Portuguese national authority for communications, 82% of Portuguese municipalities have already been awarded vouchers within the scope of programme WiFi4EU in order to create additional free public wireless internet access points.¹²

No mention is made of access to **financial services** or to EU Directive 2014/92/EU.

¹¹ These relate to overall reductions, and are not specific to low-income people. For further insights into the programme supporting price reductions in public transport, please refer to Perista (2019).

¹² '82% dos municípios portugueses já receberam vouchers do WiFi4EU', ANACOM, 30 October 2019, available at: <https://www.anacom.pt/render.jsp?contentId=1492004> (accessed 6 January 2020).

3 A focus on access to energy

As mentioned above, measures are in place aimed at facilitating access by low-income people to energy. However, barriers still exist, regarding access to both the gas social tariff and the electricity social tariff. One **barrier to accessing the gas social tariff** is that the tariff only applies to users of piped natural gas, thus excluding users of bottled gas. Additionally, as mentioned above, only those living in social housing are eligible for the social tariff for bottled gas, which means that **low-income people not living in social housing are particularly disadvantaged in this respect**. There are fewer than 120,000 social housing units in Portugal (according to Statistics Portugal), which means that less than 15% of the total number of beneficiaries of the electricity social tariff are eligible.

Thus, despite the pilot project currently in place, the conclusions of Martins *et al.*, highlighting the fact that **consumers of bottled gas are a particularly disadvantaged group in access to the service**, seem to be still largely valid: *'As the natural gas network does not cover the whole country, vulnerable domestic consumers of bottled gas do not benefit from any support to gas consumption. Considering that the majority of the Portuguese population (around 75%) has to resort to bottled GPL, we witness situations of iniquity (...). Moreover, GPL consumers are particularly exposed to a rise in prices and the price of GPL is higher than the price of natural gas'* (Martins *et al.*, 2019: 63-64).

Barros *et al.* also address this issue, emphasising that the energy social tariff: *'in its current shape, has a very limited reach regarding gas because it is not available in many municipalities and (...) only recently it was initiated a discussion on the creation of a specific regime for bottled gas, so that the social tariff reaches the whole country and the contexts where many of the most grievous situations of isolation and poverty are'* (Barros *et al.*, 2019: 3).

Indeed, the network of gas pipelines is concentrated on the coast and, as noted by Martins *et al.*: *'there is no home consumption of natural gas in the Autonomous Regions of Madeira and Azores'* (Martins *et al.*, 2019: 8), which adds a **geographic dimension** to relative disadvantage. This issue is particularly relevant taking into account the extremely high rates of the population who are at risk of poverty in both regions – 27.8% and 31.8%, respectively, compared with 17.2% in the whole country in 2018 (Statistics Portugal).¹³

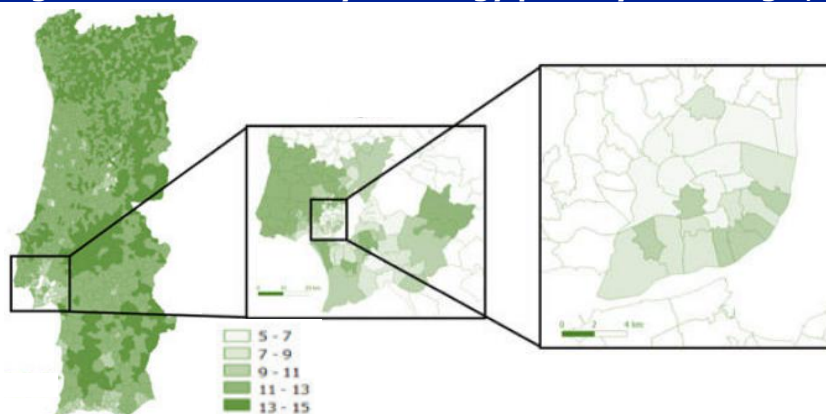
Interestingly, a project to map vulnerability to energy poverty in Portugal seems to confirm these conclusions (see Figure 1), as the most vulnerable municipalities on the mainland (in darker shades of green) tend to be concentrated in inland areas.¹⁴ As put by the authors, there is a *'higher prevalence of significant EPVIs¹⁵ in the inland region and the islands, particularly in rural civil parishes'* (Gouveia *et al.*, 2019: 187).

¹³ Available at:

https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0009821&contexto=bd&selTab=tab2 (accessed 30 January 2020).

¹⁴ According to the source, a figure up to 5 denotes low vulnerability; 5-10 moderate vulnerability; 10-15 high vulnerability; and 15-20 very high vulnerability. Please note that the non-exclusiveness of the thresholds and the absence of (direct) correspondence between these and the scale in the figure derive from the source.

¹⁵ EPVI stands for energy poverty vulnerability index.

Figure 1 – Vulnerability to energy poverty in Portugal, 2018

Source: <https://www.fct.unl.pt/noticias/2018/07/investigacao-nova-cria-mapa-da-vulnerabilidade-pobreza-energetica-do-territorio-portugues>.

Regarding the energy social tariffs, Martins *et al.* highlight the risk of underestimating the issue of affordability where only data on actual expenses are used. Where people restrict their consumption for economic reasons, this may lead to low energy-affordability ratios,¹⁶ which may mistakenly be read as indicating there are no problems of access for low-income groups (Martins *et al.*, 2019: 43).

The authors also highlight the fact that, even if the mean affordability ratio is usually not particularly problematic in Portugal, an analysis of the percentage of households with an affordability ratio deemed as problematic (higher than 10%) reveals that '*mean values are not revealing the real dimension of the problem of affordability of Portuguese families regarding energy services*' (Martins *et al.*, 2019: 46).

The energy-affordability ratio is higher than 10% for over 20% of households in all Portuguese NUTS II regions apart from Lisbon metropolitan area and Algarve. In the Autonomous Region of the Azores it is even higher than 30%.

Affordability does indeed seem to be an issue, even if the number of households benefiting from the electricity social tariff is higher than the number of households in poverty – measured by dividing of the number of people at risk of poverty¹⁷ by the average number of people per household¹⁸ – estimated at approximately 711,000.

In 2018, 19.4% of Portuguese households said they were unable to keep their home adequately warm. Among poor households the rate almost doubled, amounting to 37%. These figures are considerably higher than those registered in the whole of the EU, of 7.4% and 18.1%, respectively.

For Rodrigues *et al.*, there is a '*close association between energy poverty, monetary poverty and material deprivation*', further noting that, in 2017, 87.3% of households experiencing severe material deprivation were considered not to have the ability to keep their home adequately warm (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019: 4).

In their 2019 overview of housing exclusion in Europe, the Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA illustrate the Portuguese situation (with data for 2017) regarding housing exclusion indicators, clearly highlighting the fact that inability to keep the home adequately warm is the problem most commonly experienced by Portuguese households,

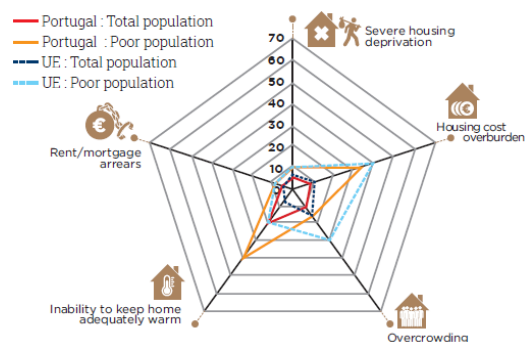
¹⁶ The energy affordability ratio regards the weight of energy costs on the household's income.

¹⁷ 1,777,000 in 2018, according to the Eurostat. Available at: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_li02 (accessed 06/01/2020).

¹⁸ 2.5 in 2018, according to Pordata. Available at: <https://www.pordata.pt/en/Portugal/Average+private+households+size+-511> (accessed 06/01/2020).

and especially by poor households, contrary to the situation in the EU as a whole where housing cost overburden is more problematic (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Housing exclusion indicators, Portugal, 2017 (%)



Source: Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA (2019): 96.

A recent study argues that: *'the fact that most of the interviewees claimed that the main reason for not using heating or cooling devices was the high cost of energy indicates that a thermally comfortable home is not a priority for them'* (Horta et al., 2019: 16). Additionally, it emphasises that households that have experienced living on low incomes for a long time may underestimate thermal discomfort and may indeed consider this as normal and acceptable, which *'can hinder the social recognition of the energy poverty problem and the need to tackle its negative consequences on the well-being and health of the population'* (Horta et al., 2019: 2).

Furthermore, the study considers that, as thermal discomfort is often associated with the poor quality of buildings, and there is a resistance to the use of heating or cooling devices due to the perception that energy is too expensive, the measures for alleviating energy poverty should *'first and foremost, focus on financing improvements in dwellings and specifically target households with low income [and include] an effective public awareness strategy on the effect of indoor extreme temperatures in the health condition, and the significant magnitude of the energy poverty issue that is currently affecting the population. This should be implemented together with reinforced efforts for increased building retrofit and energy efficiency'* (Horta et al., 2019: 17).

Gouveia et al. argue that an assessment of energy poverty vulnerability at a disaggregated regional scale, such as using a methodology like the energy poverty vulnerability index *'could bridge the gap between common overall country analyses and local-scale initiatives targeting vulnerable households'* (Gouveia et al., 2019: 187).

Finally, it should be mentioned that **no hard evidence could be identified of how barriers to accessing essential public services affect the overall social inclusion of low-income people.**

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Annex

Table A1: Essential service – Water

1) Definition of “low income” used in the context of the delivery of the service in the country:¹⁹

Households with an annual income equal or lower than €5,808 (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10) or where the contract holder is the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension.

2) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to water (for hygiene purposes, cooking) in the country:

	National (*)	Subnational	
		Regional (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)	Local (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)
Reduced tariffs	No	No	Yes-most
Cash benefits	No	No	No
In-kind benefits	No	No	No
Advice/training or information services	No	No	No
Provision of a basic/uninterrupted supply	No	No	No

(*) For each measure: Does the measure exist in the country at national level (“Yes”/“No”)?

(**) **Only** if the measure does not exist at national level **and** if the service is organised at subnational level: Does the measure exist at regional level (Yes in all regions; Yes in most regions; Yes but only in a few regions; No)? And at local level (Yes in all local entities; Yes in most local entities; Yes but only in a few local entities; No)? Important: if a measure exists as a **general social support measure**, not specifically aimed at facilitating access for low-income people, the answer is “No”.

¹⁹ **National definition** used in this context (most frequently used definition if there is more than one definition). **Only if** there is no national definition **and if** the service is organised at subnational level, most common definition used in this context at regional (if any) or local (if any) level.

Table A2: Essential service – Sanitation

- 1) Definition of “low income” used in the context of the delivery of the service in the country:²⁰

Households with an annual income equal or lower than €5,808 (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or where the contract holder is the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension.

- 2) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to sanitation (i.e. systems for taking dirty water and other waste products away from dwellings in order to protect people's health) in the country:

	National (*)	Subnational	
		Regional (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)	Local (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)
Reduced tariffs	No	No	Yes-most
Cash benefits	No	No	No
In-kind benefits	No	No	No
Advice/training or information services	No	No	No

(*) For each measure: Does the measure exist in the country at national level (“Yes”/“No”)?

(**) **Only** if the measure does not exist at national level **and** if the service is organised at subnational level: Does the measure exist at regional level (Yes in all regions; Yes in most regions; Yes but only in a few regions; No)? And at local level (Yes in all local entities; Yes in most local entities; Yes but only in a few local entities; No)? Important: if a measure exists as a **general social support measure**, not specifically aimed at facilitating access for low-income people, the answer is “No”.

²⁰ **National definition** used in this context (most frequently used definition if there is more than one definition). **Only if** there is no national definition **and if** the service is organised at subnational level, most common definition used in this context at regional (if any) or local (if any) level.

Table A3: Essential service – Energy

1) Definition of “low income” used in the context of the delivery of the service in the country:²¹

Electricity: households should have an annual income equal to or lower than €5,808 (plus 50% for each member without income, up to a maximum of 10), or the contract holder should be the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension.

Conducted natural gas: the contract holder should be the beneficiary of: (a) the solidarity supplement for the elderly; (b) the social insertion income; (c) unemployment social benefit; (d) child benefit; or (e) an invalidity social pension.

Bottled gas: beneficiaries of the electricity social tariff living in a dwelling belonging to a municipality.

2) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to energy (to light dwellings, heat or cool dwellings, or use home appliances) in the country:

	National (*)	Subnational	
		Regional (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)	Local (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)
Reduced tariffs	Yes		
Cash benefits	No	No	No
In-kind benefits	No	No	No
Advice/training or information services	No	No	No
Provision of a basic/uninterrupted supply	No	No	No

(*) For each measure: Does the measure exist in the country at national level (“Yes”/“No”)?

(**) **Only** if the measure does not exist at national level **and** if the service is organised at subnational level: Does the measure exist at regional level (Yes in all regions; Yes in most regions; Yes but only in a few regions; No)? And at local level (Yes in all local entities; Yes in most local entities; Yes but only in a few local entities; No)? Important: if a measure exists as a **general social support measure**, not specifically aimed at facilitating access for low-income people, the answer is “No”.

²¹ **National definition** used in this context (most frequently used definition if there is more than one definition). **Only if** there is no national definition **and if** the service is organised at subnational level, most common definition used in this context at regional (if any) or local (if any) level.

Table A4: Essential service – Public transport

1) Definition of “low income” used in the context of the delivery of the service in the country:²²

Passes Social+: beneficiaries of the social insertion income and of the solidarity supplement for the elderly are eligible for a price reduction of 50%. A reduction of 25% may be given to retired people and pensioners on the one hand, and unemployed people on the other, whose monthly pension or unemployment benefit, respectively, does not exceed 1.2 times the social support index (IAS), as well as to people living in households whose mean monthly income does not exceed 1.2 times the IAS.

2) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to public transport in the country:

	National (*)	Subnational	
		Regional (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)	Local (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)
Reduced tariffs	Yes		
Cash benefits	No	No	No
In-kind benefits	No	No	No
Advice/training or information services	No	No	No

(*) For each measure: Does the measure exist in the country at national level (“Yes”/“No”)?

(**) **Only** if the measure does not exist at national level **and** if the service is organised at subnational level: Does the measure exist at regional level (Yes in all regions; Yes in most regions; Yes but only in a few regions; No)? And at local level (Yes in all local entities; Yes in most local entities; Yes but only in a few local entities; No)? Important: if a measure exists as a **general social support measure**, not specifically aimed at facilitating access for low-income people, the answer is “No”.

²² **National definition** used in this context (most frequently used definition if there is more than one definition). **Only if** there is no national definition **and if** the service is organised at subnational level, most common definition used in this context at regional (if any) or local (if any) level.

Table A5: Essential service – Digital public services

1) Definition of “low income” used in the context of the delivery of the service in the country:²³

Not applicable.

2) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to digital public services (e.g. digital post, digital fiscal services, digital social security services, digital healthcare appointments) in the country:

	National (*)	Subnational	
		Regional (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)	Local (only if <i>no</i> for national) (**)
Reduced tariffs	No	No	No
Cash benefits	No	No	No
In-kind benefits	No	No	No
Advice/training or information services	No	No	No
Provision of a basic/uninterrupted supply	No	No	No

(*) For each measure: Does the measure exist in the country at national level (“Yes”/“No”)?

(**) **Only** if the measure does not exist at national level **and** if the service is organised at subnational level: Does the measure exist at regional level (Yes in all regions; Yes in most regions; Yes but only in a few regions; No)? And at local level (Yes in all local entities; Yes in most local entities; Yes but only in a few local entities; No)? Important: if a measure exists as a **general social support measure**, not specifically aimed at facilitating access for low-income people, the answer is “No”.

²³ **National definition** used in this context (most frequently used definition if there is more than one definition). **Only if** there is no national definition **and if** the service is organised at subnational level, most common definition used in this context at regional (if any) or local (if any) level.

Table B1: Essential services – Summary table

- 1) Measures aimed at facilitating access for low-income people to the different services that exist at national, regional and/or local level in the country.
- 2) Broader policy framework under which all or some of these measures are organised in the country.
- 3) Ongoing or announced reforms of the measures and/or related frameworks aimed at (further) enhancing effective access to the service for low-income people in the country.

	1. Measures (NAT, SUBNAT, BOTH, NONE) (*)	2. Policy framework (**)		3. Ongoing or planned reforms (Yes/No)
		National (Yes/No)	Subnational (Yes/No)	
Access to water	SUBNAT	No	No	Yes
Access to sanitation	SUBNAT	No	No	Yes
Access to energy	BOTH	No	No	Yes
Access to public transport	BOTH	No	No	No
Access to digital public services	NONE	No	No	Yes
Access to basic financial services (***)	NAT	No	No	No

(*) This column summarises the response provided in Tables A1-A5 above. "NAT" means that all the measures that exist in favour of low-income people are national measures; "SUBNAT" means that there are no national measures but some of/all the measures that exist are subnational measures; BOTH means a mix of NAT and SUBNAT; "NONE" means that there are no measures, be it at national or subnational level.

(**) Is there a broader national policy framework under which all or some of these measures are organised in the country for some of/all the services under scrutiny ("Yes"/"No")? **Only if** there is no such national framework for one service **and if** the service is organised at subnational level: Is there a broader subnational policy framework under which all or some of these measures are organised for this service ("Yes"/"No")?

(***) Open and use payment accounts with basic features (Directive 2014/92/EU).

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