R5 Universal Basic Services: Towards a Convivial Degrowth Europe

Proposer: FYEG EC
Agenda item: 8. Resolutions

Motion text

Introduction

Capitalism is failing at ensuring basic human needs such as affordable housing, comfortable and sustainable transportation, universal healthcare, and food. As Capitalism is currently the predominant economic system, the degrowth and post-growth researcher Jason Hickel, capitalism relies on maintaining an artificial scarcity of essential services (such as housing, healthcare, transport, etc) through processes of enclosure and commodification. This manipulation of the market enables the ruling class to raise prices and maximise their profits (e.g. rental market, the US healthcare system, or the British rail system), increasing their capital.

As indicated by the Eurostat, housing prices rose by 48% in the EU between 2010 and 2023, 10.6% of the EU population are unable to keep their homes adequately warm in 2023, and Europe is facing an escalating housing crisis (European Commission, 2024). According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2024 (FAO, 2024), In 2023, 281.6 million people (21.5 percent of the analysed population) faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 59 food-crisis countries/territories. Food insecurity in Europe affects roughly 7%–8% of the population, with over 17% of those at risk of poverty unable to afford adequate meals. Driven by inflation, high food prices, and geopolitical tensions, the crisis disproportionately impacts young people, low-income households, and under-privileged regions. The numbers do not lie: capitalism is a war machine against equality. The intersectionality of the struggles and vulnerabilities make it more difficult to respond and recover from shocks.

The only solution to prevent and stop the further development of these inequalities is to move towards a Convivial Degrowth Economy where human wellbeing is sustained while planetary boundaries are respected. Reaching a Convivial Degrowth Economy is a key element of the Green Europe we are fighting for, and the only way to ensure that no one is left behind and universal human needs are satisfied. Universal Basic Services (UBS) will facilitate the development of this system.

About Universal Basic Services

Theorised by Coote and Percy (2020), UBS aims to offer access to essential needs to everyone regardless of financial status, as well as to help against the climate crisis (Coote, 2022). UBS guarantee a public subsidised (affordable and in some cases free) access to food, transportation, healthcare, education, and housing regardless of financial status, gender etc.

These UBS will cover universal basic needs. All of these needs are satisfiable within a threshold, as humans do not require excess in any of them to live comfortably (Coote, 2022). At its core, UBS seeks to redefine consumption from individual and private to public and shared (Coote, 2021).

A core aspect of UBS is the improvement of people's access to services necessary for decent lives, with provisioning systems that require less aggregate energy and material use and which allow us to accelerate decarbonisation. These outcomes can be further enhanced by ensuring strong democratic governance of public systems (Hickel, 2023).

Practical Cases

In Europe there has already been a number of cases where UBS were limitedly implemented.

Romania's Green Friday in Cluj - Free Public Transport Each Friday

With the slogan of "STOP! Today the car is standing still!" Green Friday is an initiative started in June 2021 and active in the city of Cluj and its surrounding municipalities (CTP Cluj-Napoca, 2026). This is a prime example of UBS, with its goals to reduce chemical and noise pollution, traffic, car accidents and congestion, and costs of traveling, as well as to stimulate citizens to use the public transport more.

UBS Housing in Europe

In Vienna, housing costs are kept low because the city owns a large share of the land. Hamburg and Copenhagen use public organisations to manage land, while the whole country of Denmark taxes land and redistributes it to local governments for housing investments (Coote, 2022). In Montpellier, the city partners with special vehicles to develop land. Some regions of Belgium, Austria, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands have a threshold after which rents become capped or subsidized.

Free Access to Food in Schools - The Case of Finland and the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom and Finland, kids receive free lunch in school. While Finland has been offering universal free meals in school since 1943, the UK currently only offers them to kids in reception and in their first and second years of school (Coote, 2022).

Standing for UBS is essential in a global context where public services are put under a lot of pressure, and sometimes being threatened by budget cuts and neoliberal policies encouraging their privatisation. In that regard, employing universal basic services would:

- **Reduce the inequality gap. These services improve the lives of people in the lower-income classes.**
- **Act as a form of prevention against illness or even death (free healthcare, education), thus reducing poverty and mortality by making these needs accessible to everyone.**
- **Improve sustainability by shifting the focus from producing for capital to producing for human needs.**

We, as Federation of Young European Greens, call to:

- **The EU to ensure universal access to nutritious, regenerative, and plant-based food by implementing a public grocery system. Public grocery systems are defined as retail food establishments that are directly owned, partially or fully funded, or significantly supported by public institutions. These institutions can range from local municipal governments and regional authorities to community-based co-operatives that operate under a public mandate. A core principle of their operation is offering goods at affordable and, in some cases, subsidized prices. European governments shall fund regenerative farms and gardens linked to these public grocery stores (Clark, 2021).**
- **The European governments and municipalities to invest more in sustainable public transit systems and make them affordable.**
- **The European Commission to extend the scope and raise the ambition of the European Affordable Housing Plan by prioritising public over private investment and Public Private Partnerships in affordable housing supply.**
- **The EU Member States to design financial and legal solutions to support social and affordable housing.**

- **The European Commission and European national governments to design financial and legal solutions for free healthcare.**

- **The EU to move away from outdated fiscal rules and implement wealth taxes. The potential revenue from wealth taxes could be allocated according to each country's specific needs and political priorities, offering opportunities to invest in energy, education, healthcare, transportation, or unemployment programmes.**

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Reason

The EC proposes this resolution - written by the Beyond Growth Platform (BGP) - to be handled during the General Assembly 2026.

Supporters

Cyn Muthoni (Young Greens of England and Wales)