



REPORT

Seminar on Non-Formal Education as a lever for Youth Unemployment in Europe. 19-20 October 2017, Etchmiadzin Armenia

On October 19th and 20th, Eurodiaconia ran a seminar on non-formal education in Armenia, hosted by its member the WCC Armenia Roundtable Foundation. Unemployment rates amongst young people across Europe and the European Union are improving, but preventing precarious education and unemployment, and ensuring quality opportunities for young people still remains a significant challenge our members are faced with. With this in mind, Eurodiaconia organized this seminar in Armenia to bring together members of the Eurodiaconia network working on the issue of non-formal education, as well as external speakers active in the field of youth work in the region and in Europe to discuss the topic.

19 October 2017

To begin the conference, **Dr Karen Nazaryan**, Executive Director of the Armenia Round Table Foundation (ART), welcomed participants and underlined the importance of promoting dialogue and exchange regarding



non-formal education as an effective tool for inclusion and employment. **Florian Tuder** welcomed the participants on behalf of Eurodiaconia and explained the agenda and event programme for the two-day seminar.

The first [key-note address](#) was given by **Andrij Pavlovych** from the SALTO-YOUTH Eastern Europe & Caucasus Resource Centre, to present the situation of unemployment at European level, looking at statistics from member states, and also the European average. Further, he presented figures relating to youth mobility, volunteering, and confidence

in young people to undertake studies or work abroad, e.g. through the Erasmus+ programme, as well as on feelings of exclusion in different countries; which he concluded was markedly lower among young people with international experience. He further presented challenges in overcoming youth unemployment and enhancing non-formal education in this regard as figures show that the skills acquired through non formal education do match the skills needed on the labour market. To make use of this potential, the recognition of youth work, the development of training systems, the importance of cross-sectoral participation, and the social inclusion of minorities were mentioned as the most pressing issues.





Next, **Grigor Yeritsyan** from NGO 'Armenian Progressive Youth' presented the situation in Eastern European countries; highlighting the high level of youth unemployment and low participation in the decision-making process. A key barrier to youth inclusion was seen as the lack of awareness regarding programmes and tools directed at youth for their participation and opportunities for employment and inclusion. He also touched upon the question of how to include young people in the design process of such programmes and initiatives.

The importance of social enterprise was discussed as an important lever for youth participation, not just in terms of a means of training and non-formal education, but also as a way to foster community cohesion and development to encourage young people to be change makers in their home communities through social innovation. Nevertheless, the issue and importance of implementing a coherent accreditation process for such social enterprise initiatives remained an important, and potentially challenging component.

To shed further light on the Armenian context, **Marine Hakobyan** from the Ministry of Education from Armenia gave a presentation on the causes and issues at stake with regard to youth unemployment. Drawing from a socio-political perspective, she explained that being a land-locked country situated in a conflict zone has hampered development in the country, and by extension youth unemployment and an ageing population. Relatively high employment was noted in the construction, service delivery and agricultural sectors. Ms Hakobyan reflected on how the EU has injected funds and support in training on service delivery, education and vocational training to enhance these opportunities in Armenia. Concrete steps to improve the situation in the national context were seen as increased awareness of opportunities, increased resilience to challenges faced by young people, and an overall greater flexibility in bringing about alternative options and paths to inclusion and employment to promote confidence, creativity and self-sufficiency. Ms Hakobyan finished by presenting a newly introduced tool for the formal recognition of non-formal education skills on a national level.

The final keynote [presentation](#) was given by **Karine Kocharyan** from the Armenia Roundtable Foundation, who provided further insight into the situation of young people in Armenia by describing the work done by ART and its members across the country. The challenges relating to youth unemployment included lack of jobs in smaller communities, a gap between formal education and the needs of the labour market, low motivation to find a job among those who feel more secure on benefits, and a lack of personal and structural investment in smaller communities, seeing many young people move to urban areas to find employment and therefore a lack of proactivity regarding community participation.



In order to combat such challenges, ART works with socially vulnerable groups and individuals across Armenia, including persons with disabilities, women, young people, children from underprivileged families, and Syrian-Armenian refugees to provide training and skills development from crafts to computer skills. Vocational training is provided for young people between 18 and 30, with 900 young people trained since 2017; 70% of whom being women, and 50 people recruited for jobs following training or



recommendations from ART. The organisations commitment to fostering a sense of belonging, confidence and community among young people remains an important pillar of their work and their mission to enhance opportunities for young people through non-formal education.

Following the keynote speakers, participants had the opportunity to ask questions to the speakers, and the following discussion broached the topic of radicalisation among young people in Armenia, in the importance of soft skills and emotional intelligence, and for a change in attitudes towards non-formal education at regional and European level.



During the afternoon, the group participated in a **study visit to the Shirak region in Northern Armenia** to visit the social educational centre in Gyumri, within the Shirak diocese. The group were given a tour of the centre, which includes facilities for homework support, a meeting and activity space for elderly people, a day care centre for children, and several workshops for crafts, sewing and woodworking. Over 25 staff and volunteers working in the Gyumri Social-Educational centre support an estimated 100 families and work in the areas of education, social work and youth.

The presentation also highlighted specific projects implemented from the Gyumri social centre, such as the 'Hope Belief Love' project to clean churches, 'Lets Dance Together' initiative for traditional dancing, and the '1 card, 1 home' project to raise funds for homeless families in the town. The centre in Gyumri is a particularly successful initiative within the ART network, and represents an institution with a strong diaconal voice in the region in giving support to young people, providing a space for training and also allowing local inhabitants to volunteer for the centre and support the community whilst also furthering their own opportunities and experience.

Friday 20th October

On the second day of the seminar on non-formal education as a lever for youth employment in Europe, the group participated in a second **study visit to the village of Gai, to see the St Nshan Church Community Centre**. The group were given a tour of the community centre, which included a sewing and textile workshop for young women, a space for young children to come to after school, and an arts centre.



In the afternoon, members of the Eurodiaconia network had the chance to showcase what is being done in their organisations in terms of youth, and current projects and initiatives to tackle social exclusion and unemployment. Presentation were given from representatives from members in Ukraine, Spain and Italy.



Project Presentations of Eurodiaconia members

Nicole Borisuk from Living Hope, Ukraine, presented on 'Lifelong learning, Participation & Volunteering – Approaches To Tackle Social Exclusion of Young People in Ukraine.' In her presentation she outlined additional obstacles to youth inclusion in the country such as the notion of inherited poverty among poorer families, and the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. She explained Living Hope's aim of promoting lifelong learning and starting working with children as early as possible to break the cycle of unemployment and exclusion by helping young people engage in the local community. Living Hope uses specific methods such as the 'Pedagogical Lunch Table', which helps children understand the importance of a healthy meal and develops life skills. The 'Petrivka Project', a day care centre for children and young people from excluded backgrounds.

Next, **Laura D'Apote** and **Morgana Cartarasa** from Diaconia Valdese in Italy presented '[Neet – Let's find work together.](#)' The presentation showed the methods used by our member in Italy to help young people in the Turin region to integrate in the labour market, with examples from their NET Art+1 Project working on the issue of employability among 15 to 29 year olds not engaged in education, employment or training (NEETs). The project features internship workshops that helps support young people in a 2-4 month intern to help them gain experience and find a way to access the job market. Further, they gave another example of their JocAct workshops, which are training workshops and other initiatives such as theatre activities that help young people acquire new social skills useful in the workplace such as confidence, autonomy and creativity.

Finally, **Julio David Garcia** from the 'Asociacion Evangelica Nueva Vida' from Diaconia Espana in Spain gave a presentation on '[Employment & Job Training in Spain for young people.](#)' He began with information on the situation of unemployment in Spain which remains high, also explaining how the manufacturing and construction industries are high, 20% and 10% respectively in the region of Cantabria where the association is based. The Nueva Vida association works with many groups including refugees, the homeless, young people and women in order to help break the cycle of exclusion faced by many minority or marginalized groups in Spain.



Specific projects include the Integrated Employment Programme which supports 200 young people per year to find work through alternative opportunities including volunteering and through a focus on personal skills, interview techniques, and self-employment. The association also has specific programmes to combat human trafficking, gender violence and homelessness, and works closely with the local council to enhance community participation and communication, especially with young people.

Following the project presentation, **Florian Tuder** (*Eurodiaconia*) led a session on project development. He presented Eurodiaconia's project work on youth, giving participants an overview of the Erasmus+ Empower You(th)! Project of which Eurodiaconia is a lead partner among a consortium of members of the network. Following this, participants were invited to reflect on how they foresee future transnational project cooperation in the area of youth work. This enabled those present to then offer further insight into the topics they wish to work on, the actions they wish to implement, and which EU funding instruments or other sources they see as appropriate means of financing their projects. The majority of participants felt that further engagement with the



Erasmus+ programme and a development of exchange among youth workers would be fruitful for future development.

At the end of the seminar, **Florian Tuder** (*Eurodiaconia*) summarised the meeting. On behalf of Eurodiaconia he thanked the hosts of the event from the Armenian Roundtable Foundation, and also all participants and speakers. With a brief evaluation exercise the seminar ended.

For the content of the speeches and presentations, please contact Florian Tuder (florian.tuder@eurodiaconia.org) & Sarah Phillips (sarah.phillips@eurodiaconia.org).