



BRIEFING FOR MEMBERS

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A LEVER FOR YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE

Purpose of this briefing:

This briefing for Eurodiaconia members aims at providing an understanding of the main challenges relating to youth unemployment in Europe, and how non-formal education can act as a lever to counter this. The paper will highlight European initiatives and funding instruments providing a way to enhance young people's opportunities for non-formal education to access the labour market and for personal development, as non-formal education should not be seen as merely a tool leading young people to employment. It also has a purpose in itself. The briefing will also present the work of selected Eurodiaconia members actively working in this field, following a [seminar in Armenia in October 2017](#) showcasing initiatives from our members in Armenia, Ukraine, Italy and Spain. A list of relevant publications for further reading completes the paper.

What is non-formal education and what it is not

The concept of non-formal education is widely discussed for many years, especially in relation to other approaches towards education like formal and informal education. Generally speaking there are two ways to identify learning, i.e. in an institutional sense and a human sense. The **institutional sense** describes something organised and structured from a learner's perspective (e.g. in schools, universities etc.; this can be described as **formal** education). The **human sense** sees learning as something inseparable from human existence as it is a human capability (Kiilakoski, 2015).

Following the latter learning experiences can be divided into non-formal and informal education. **Informal** education or learning is an everyday learning, which is often unintentional and happens e.g. at the workplace or during leisure time. **Non-formal** education or learning takes place in activities which are designed but not necessarily for the purposes of learning. Looking at how non-formal education is linked with formal education in order to better equip young people for being active citizens for being able to enter the labour market three tendencies can be identified: (1) Non-formal learning is *independent* from formal education so there are no linkages necessary. (2) Non-formal education is an *alternative* to formal education, e.g. focusing rather on social skills and the learner. (3) Non-formal education is *complementary* to formal education, aiming at different outcomes and being more practice-based (Siurala, 2012). Often there is no clear distinction

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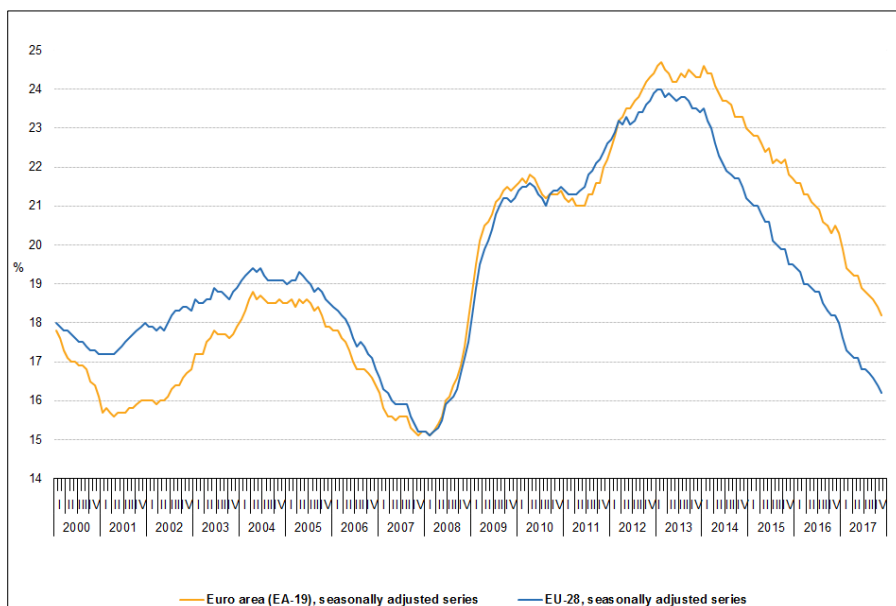




between those three tendencies, but the cooperation between formal and non-formal education to better equip young people for their lives is more and more demanded and growing in practice. The following conclusions can be drawn when looking at this growing linkages in education (Kiilakoski, 2015): It will be necessary to develop new methods of seeing formal and non-formal education as each other supporting parts of a holistic education in order to react to new challenges in education, as traditional curricula often are not able anymore to respond to challenges faced by young people nowadays (e.g. media literacy, environmental education, peace education or entrepreneurial learning). Non-formal education can support and complement formal education significantly. However, the question remains if non-formal education should be seen “just” as a part of formal education or if it should be an approach in its own right. In any case it will help to equip young people with a set of soft- or meta-skills in order to become self-determined, active and literate European citizens. As the quality of a holistic approach is of crucial importance and at the same time to a certain extent hard to measure, there also needs to be a set of recognition tools in order to bring formal and non-formal approaches together and make them work. From a European perspective such tools also should be trans-national and enable young people to have their skills recognised beyond different country contexts.

How can non-formal education provide a lever for youth unemployment

The situation for young people finding work in the EU is very diverse and dependent on several factors. While the situation for young people especially in Southern Europe is still tense, the employment rates e.g. in Central Europe are rather low with employment rates of up to 90%. The average **youth unemployment rate in the EU is at about 18%** which marks a substantial recovery after the economic and financial crisis 2008 with a dramatic increase in youth unemployment (see chart below; Eurostat, 2018). There is, however, a substantial



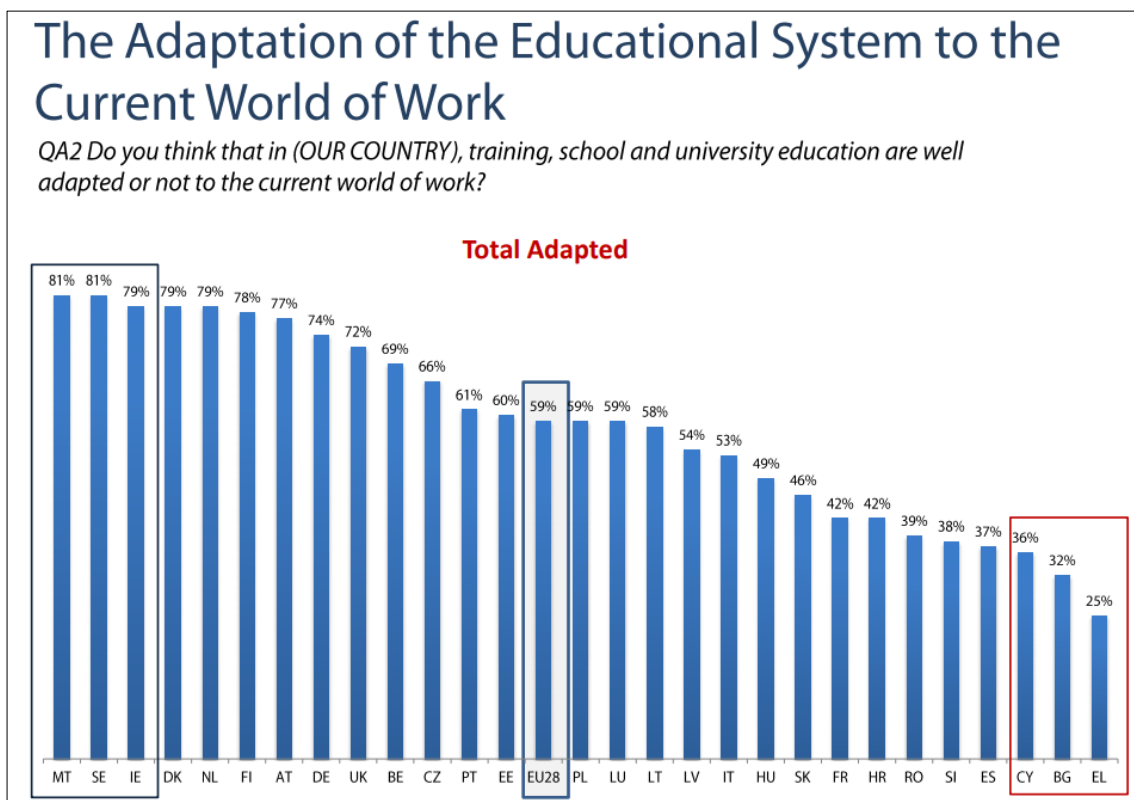
gap between the Eurozone and the EU-28 and in addition there is the important question about the quality of employment of young people. Eurodiaconia members especially from Southern Europe report, that almost every second person is without a job at all and that others find themselves in precarious part-time jobs with limited contracts, sometimes less than a few months without perspectives of extensions or matching their original education or university studies.

This **skills mismatch** is persisting problem for young people as the market often requires skills young people were not equipped with during their education. Here, non-formal education can be a valuable factor complementing traditional paths of education. According to a study on non-formal education in youth organisations and young people’s employability, the following skills were identified as high in demand by employers: e.g. communication skills, organisational skills, decision-making skills, team-working skills, and confidence (European Youth Forum, 2012). And e.g. youth organisations can be a space for acquiring those skills through non-formal and informal education. The study also shows that there is still a lot to do to improve this potential of organisations providing non-formal education for young people, such as the way they present themselves. The findings suggest that employers are not sufficiently aware about what is being done within such organisations, i.e. the outreach and communications strategy is often not sufficiently developed. Also, youth organisations tend to network among themselves,



successfully also through international networks like Eurodiaconia. But to enhance the chances for young people to benefit from their experiences on the labour market, networking is also needed with employers on a regional, national or European level.

The Eurobarometer Survey of the European Parliament on European Youth 2016 shows the **perception of the skills mismatch among young EU-citizens** (see chart below, Eurobarometer 2016). Especially in countries hit the hardest by the crisis in 2008, this mismatch is obvious today, but also the EU-average only reaches 59%.



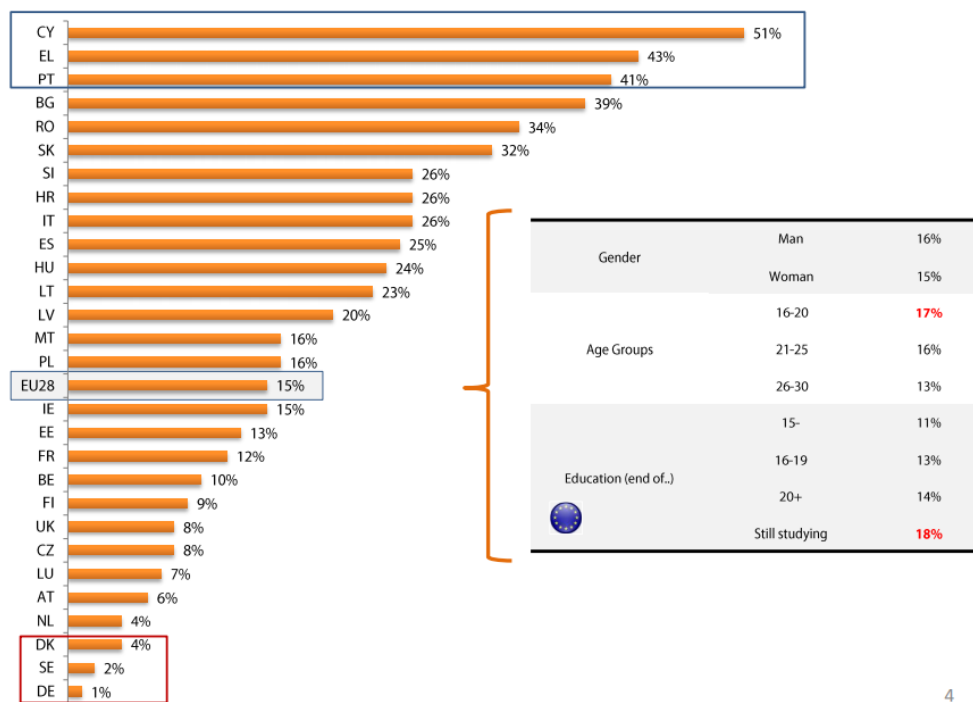
International exchanges and mobility in general are a way to increase young persons' employability and to provide additional important skills, but young people also feel *compelled* to go abroad, in order to receive the necessary qualification in order to find a job at home or in a foreign country. The numbers in this case largely correspond to the perceived skills mismatch (see chart, page 4). The EU offers a big variety of mobility programmes not only for university students, but also for high school students and young people enrolled in vocational training.

However, such mobility should be perceived as a positive opportunity to increase knowledge and skills rather than a necessary need in order to be qualified for the job market in one's home country. Although almost every second young person in countries like Cyprus, Greece or Portugal feels compelled to go abroad in order to prevail on the job market, the EU-average is at about 15%, i.e. a large majority of young people do not feel the need to go abroad in order to be successful on the European job market.



Youth and Mobility within the EU

QA1.3 Because of the crisis, **you feel compelled** to study, undergo training or work in another EU country than (OUR COUNTRY)



4

European tools for the recognition of non-formal education

One of the main obstacles identified by Eurodiaconia members regarding the usefulness of non-formal education is the difficulty to measure and to recognise non-formal education of young people in a standardised way. There are difficulties not only at the national level, but also on a European level, which makes mobility of young people wanting to acquire skills more complicated. It can lead to great frustration if the skills acquired abroad in order to improve the employability of a young person are not recognised in the person's home country. Also, having skills from non-formal learning experiences compiled in a standardised way, will help young people not only to showcase their skills towards potential employers but also to have a record and the awareness of their own personal development achievements through non-formal education in their home countries or abroad.

On a European level there are several ways to offer young people and also youth trainers tools to transparently capture the acquisition of non-formal learning experiences. Several Eurodiaconia members use one or more of those tools to support their non-formal education actions. The most commonly used tools are:

- **Youth Pass:** It is a Europe-wide recognition instrument by the European Union for non-formal learning in the youth field. It strengthens the social recognition of youth work and documents key competences acquired on a certificate. It is a tool to document and recognise learning outcomes from youth work activities, to support employability of young people and youth workers, and can be used in Erasmus+ funded projects.



- **Youth Work Portfolio**: It is a tool developed by the Council of Europe at European level, but it is not primarily for people and organisations working at the European level or internationally. It is addressed to youth workers and leaders working at any level from local to international. The portfolio is a tool to help those doing youth work, primarily youth workers and youth leaders, but also managers and administrators, to assess and further develop their youth work competence and that of the people under their supervision.
- **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**: It is a tool to compare national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. Covering qualifications at all levels and in all sub-systems of education and training, the EQF provides a comprehensive overview over qualifications in the 39 European countries.
- **Europass**: This tool provides a set of five standardised documents and a skills passport available for free in 26 languages, designed to enable users to present their skills, qualifications and experience across Europe in an easily accessible and clear way to document their competencies and highlight their experiences in non-formal education.

Political frameworks in Europe to strengthen non-formal learning

Although, based on the principle of subsidiarity, youth work and non-formal learning in the European Union is largely a matter of the EU member states, it started in fact very often through Churches and ideological movements during the 19th and 20th century evolving to government-funded youth organisations (Lejeune, 2015). On the EU level, programmes from Youth for Europe (1989) to Erasmus+ (since 2014) facilitated non-formal learning for more than 2.5 million young people and youth workers. Currently, the [framework for European cooperation in the youth field \(2010-2018\)](#) is in place, which focusses on **eight fields of action**:

1. **Education and Training**
2. **Employment and Entrepreneurship**
3. **Health and Wellbeing**
4. **Participation**
5. **Voluntary activities**
6. **Social Inclusion**
7. **Creativity and Culture**
8. **Youth and the World**

Two prominent initiatives in place on the EU level are:

- **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)**: A financial resource that supports young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), including the long-term unemployed, with targeted support in areas where challenges are most acute. Typically, the YEI funds the provision of traineeships, further education and apprenticeships and funds the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (see below). Increased in 2017 for regions with youth unemployment higher than 25% in 2016.
- **Youth Guarantee**: The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship, within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Since its launch in 2013, there are almost 1.8 million fewer young unemployed in the EU and 1 million less young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), and youth unemployment has dropped from a peak of 23.7% in 2013 to 18.7% in 2016.

Eurodiaconia members play a crucial role to implement this strategy in Europe, not only in the EU. The instruments to implement these fields of action reach from evidence-based policy making, mutual learning, stakeholder consultations and the use of EU-funding programmes to dissemination actions. Our members and



the secretariat in Brussels are strong actors in those actions through their networks, European projects, and advocacy work. A selection of our members' work in this field at the end of the paper.

EU funding for non-formal education and to tackle youth unemployment

An ongoing struggle for Eurodiaconia members is the question how to finance their services for young people helping them to develop skills through non-formal education and eventually improve their employability. The European Union provides several funding instruments in order to support diaconal organisations through different approaches and different themes. The most important programmes are listed below with links to their programme websites where there is more information to be found:

- **[Erasmus+](#)**: The programme supports actions aimed at non-formal learning, such as youth exchanges, opportunities for volunteering, training, and networking opportunities for youth workers.
- **[European Solidarity Corps](#)**: This is the new EU initiative which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe.
- **[European Voluntary Service](#)**: It is an international volunteer program funded by the EU. It enables young people in Europe, aged between 18 and 30 years, to carry out an international volunteer service in an organization or in a public body in Europe, Africa, Asia or South America for a period ranging from 2 to 12 months.
- **[European Social Fund](#)**: Actions supported under this fund are helping young people e.g. to make the transition from school to work, or training less-skilled job-seekers to improve their job prospects.
- **[EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\)](#); [EURES Axis](#)**: This programme can help developing employment mobility across EU. The **[PROGRESS Axis](#)** under this fund aims at enhancing information sharing and learning on tackling youth unemployment and promoting social inclusion. **[Social Entrepreneurship Axis](#)** - Supports the development of social enterprises, in particular by facilitating access to finance.
- **[Europe for Citizens Programme](#)**: This fund can support actions in terms of awareness raising of EU remembrance, encourage the democratic and civic participation of young citizens at EU level.
- For further information about EU funding and non-EU sources like foundations, please have a look at the **[Eurodiaconia Funding Toolkit](#)**, which provides more information about different programmes and also on international project management.

What are Eurodiaconia members doing?

Eurodiaconia members with their initiatives for young people are key actors in Europe to foster social cohesion, giving young people personal and professional perspectives and also to implement the afore mentioned fields of actions within the EU policy framework for European youth work. Some selected examples of your members works are presented below, not only showcasing the diverse work of our membership but also to serve as an inspiration and an offer to get in touch with those organisations or the Eurodiaconia secretariat for potential future cooperation in the field of youth work.



Social Education Centre, Gyumri (Armenia Roundtable Foundation (ART), Armenia)

The social educational centre in Gyumri, within the Shirak diocese in northern Armenia 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 woodwork. Over 25 staff and volunteers working in the Gyumri social educational centre and support an estimated 100 families and young people in the areas of education and social work.

Specific projects implemented are e.g. the *Hope Belief Love* project to clean churches with young people, the *Let's 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.

Lifelong learning, Participation & Volunteering – Approaches To Tackle Social Exclusion of Young People in Ukraine (Living Hope, Ukraine)

Our member *Living Hope* (Ukraine) works with young people from a life-long-learning perspective. A big obstacle to youth inclusion in the country is the notion of inherited poverty among poorer families, and the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. Living Hope's aim is to promote lifelong learning starting 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 is one the several successful initiatives of this organisation.

Neet – Let's find work together. (Diaconia Valdese, Italy)

A successful project of our member in Italy, Diaconia Valdese, is called '[Neet – Let's find work together.](#)' The project aims at helping young people in the Turin region to integrate in the labour market, through acquiring important skills through the *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. Another example are 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.

Employment & Job Training for young people. (Asociacion Nueva Vida, Diaconia Espana, Spain)

The *Asociacion Evangelica Nueva Vida* from our member Diaconia Espana in Spain are inter alia working on the project called '[Employment & Job Training in Spain for young people.](#)' 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 authorities to enhance community participation and communication, especially with young people.



Relevant Documents and Links

Eurodiaconia Funding Toolkit (2017), <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/toolkit/>.

Eurodiaconia Event Report on a seminar on non-formal education as a lever for youth unemployment (2017), <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/cs/2017/11/event-report-on-non-formal-education-seminar-in-armenia-now-available/>.

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