

*Good practice from Eurodiaconia
members on Skilling interventions for
work and social inclusion*

Eurodiaconia is a **dynamic**, Europe wide **community** of organisations founded in the **Christian faith** and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of **solidarity, equality** and **justice**. As the **leading network of Diaconia in Europe**, we connect organisations, institutions and churches providing **social and health services and education** on a Christian value base in over 30 European countries.

We bring members together to **share practices, impact social policy** and **reflect on Diaconia in Europe today**.

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Eurodiaconia  Connecting faith
and social justice
through action

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Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a dynamic, Europe-wide community of social and health care organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconal service, that are committed to promoting equality and social justice. Eurodiaconia represents more than 46 members working in over 30 countries and its members include churches, not-for-profit welfare organisations and NGOs.

The Eurodiaconia network facilitates exchanges and cooperation among its members in examining social needs, developing ideas, influence policies and promote a social Europe. Together, it works to enable inclusion, wellbeing and empowerment of the most vulnerable and to ensure dignity for all.

Many of Eurodiaconia's member organisations are providers of training services and skilling interventions which often target people with lower employability, or who are perceived as such. These people include groups such as long-term unemployed persons, young people, migrants, persons with disabilities, persons with mental health issues or recovering from an addiction, among others. In many cases, these people face multiple vulnerabilities that are keeping them away from employment and require specific support to reach work and social inclusion. One of the main goals of Eurodiaconia, as a network, is to facilitate mutual learning among members and help them build strategic partnerships. The work of Eurodiaconia members provides many examples of effective and innovative projects related to services which help people reintegrate in society through skilling, employment and full social inclusion. This year, Eurodiaconia has carried out a consultation among its member organisations to gather information about running initiatives aimed at the work and social inclusion of different users' groups through skilling interventions.

Eurodiaconia members look at skills as a bridge towards inclusive jobs, but also as op-

portunities for self-realisation and fulfilment. As a Christian-based organisation, we firmly believe that skills have the power to materialise the intrinsic value inherent to each person. From this perspective, the promotion and continued development of skills is vital to help each individual to achieve its full potential and make a positive contribution to the society.

Employment constitutes a primary space to enable such potential to be fulfilled. In this regard, skills play a very important role in maximising people's chances to get quality jobs. However, the scope of skills goes well beyond the job market, as do people capabilities. For this reason, Eurodiaconia members stress the importance of non-formal, informal and life or soft skills.

This publication aims at showcasing the work of diaconal organisation among decision makers and strategic partners, raising awareness on innovative practices and well-established, effective approaches in skill acquisition and development. The sample of services contained in it has been gathered from the responses given by our membership to a consultation carried out by the Eurodiaconia secretariat in the form of a questionnaire, supplemented by additional input.

Within each case study showcased in this publication, we have aimed at highlighting the different perspectives to skilling, all of which share a person-centred approach that is consistent with every person's different needs. We also stress the role of accompanying services, which are key to bring an integrated approach to skilling actions and guarantee their sustainability. Finally, the presentation also emphasises the evaluation of skills provided to users and the main funding sources of each project. With these examples, we wish to affirm the key role of skill development in fostering social inclusion.

Eurodiaconia's activity on work and social inclusion, an ongoing commitment

In the last years, and partly as a result of the crushing effects of the last economic and social crisis, Eurodiaconia has looked with interest at potential solutions for the integration of long-term unemployed people and people with low employability. Many of our actions have followed the latest EU initiatives in this policy field. Our contributions to policy processes have been informed by the challenges encountered by our members in their daily practice. In the same way, we have strived to promote the projects of diaconal organisations

Eurodiaconia first looked at long-term unemployment within the framework of a *Council Recommendation on the Integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market*¹. The Recommendation was proposed by the European Commission in 2015 and adopted by Member States in February of the following year. The Recommendation aims to make stronger efforts towards the reintegration into labour markets of people with higher risk of disengagement from employment. Eurodiaconia published a [response](#) to the Recommendation with the aim to feed into an urgent policy priority. We did so putting at the front our members' experience in the provision of tailored active support based on the integration of work inclusion and related social services as the best pathway to sustainable re-integration into work and community life. Our views on the Recommendation and the role of social services in bringing people back into employment were presented at the 2016 [Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth](#) organized by the European Commission and bringing together policy-makers and civil society. Next, Eurodiaconia held a

[debate](#) with key policy-makers from the European Institutions and social stakeholders in an effort to boost the implementation of the Recommendation and explore its way ahead while stressing some of the challenges faced by integration social services.

In all cases, our policy input towards EU institutions and partners was informed by our members' feedback on the topic. In this regard, Eurodiaconia has been able to share a repository of good practices among our member organisations, [Services for work and social inclusion of long-term unemployed persons: Good practice from Eurodiaconia members](#), showing effective service solutions to address long-term unemployment in different contexts and targeting different users' groups.

Building on this background, Eurodiaconia's work around employment and social inclusion has continued with a focus on the key role played by skills as a lever for social inclusion, in line with the launch of a [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) by the European Commission in June 2016.

After the publication of this initiative, Eurodiaconia issued a response to the Agenda focusing in particular on some key points, such as the establishment of a Skills Guarantee for people with low skill levels² or the proposed EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals to identify the skills, qualifications and experiences of non-EU nationals entering the EU.

Moreover, Eurodiaconia agreed with the Agenda's acknowledgement of the strategic role of skills in the health care sector. As in the case of the social care sector, the strong potential for growth in the health care sector is affected by high geographical mobility of staff, limited career development paths and lack of new entrants. Higher and more relevant skills are, in

¹ European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, COM (2015) 462 final.

² Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, 2016/C 484/01.

this regard, a clever strategy to overcome such issues³.

To communicate our vision on how skills can be promoted as enabler of social inclusion, Eurodiaconia has recently published a policy paper *Building up skills for social inclusion*. This publication aims at stressing how a wider approach to skills is essential in order to create smarter, more cohesive and more resilient societies. Our policy position was launched in October 2017 at the European Parliament, where Eurodiaconia held a debate on *Building up Skills for Social Inclusion* in cooperation with MEPs and EU institutions. The meeting stressed the role of Eurodiaconia members as not-for-profit providers of skills and accompanying services leading to sustainable re-integration into work. Emphasis was made on the potential of social enterprise settings as a bridge between social interventions and integration in mainstream labour markets.

With the present publication, we aim to disseminate a set of effective, quality services provided by Eurodiaconia members and putting skills at the heart of social inclusion for people with low employability. These examples should constitute a tool for cooperation among diaconal organisation but also an instrument to support the advocacy efforts of Eurodiaconia and its member organizations towards decision-makers.

Main findings drawn from the case studies

This action collected information from a sample of diaconal organizations operating in diverse contexts features by different social, economic and cultural environments. For example, some of the projects collected are based in local re-

gions particularly hit by the economic crisis in their main productive sectors; others provide skilling support in big urban areas where difficulties concentrate on absorbing the inflows of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarise some common points shared by effective interventions around skills.

- Skilling is part of a wider process of social inclusion which goes beyond the fact of learning a concrete know-how or enabling individuals to adapt to the labour market. Learning new skills means, first of all, boosting people's self-reliance, awakening their motivation and helping them recognise themselves as useful and valuable to society. The contribution of non-formal and informal learning is, in this regard, extremely important in the process of personal growth that knowledge can boost.
- Any action on skills has to take into account the multi-faceted vulnerabilities which accompany people with skill needs. For this reason, skill interventions need to be designed in a holistic approach that considers every person's circumstances and offers, when needed, support services in an integrated manner. Such services range from psychologic support, access to healthcare and specific treatments, rehabilitation projects, debt counselling, care for children or dependent relatives, to housing, among others. As providers of a wide range of services, diaconal organizations are usually in a position of advantage to bring such an integrated approach and make skilling interventions sustainable over time.

³ To this aim, Eurodiaconia will soon publish a collection of practices on Skilling and training actions on health and social care professionals among Eurodiaconia members.

- The recognition of people's background of knowledge and skills developed in their previous life experiences and professional practices –in particular, in the case of third-country nationals–, is key to increase effectiveness of training actions and foster people's self-confidence and expectations.
- Social inclusion efforts through skills do not end with the provision of training or skills. It also encompasses accompaniment during the job search process, regular follow-up through counselling and individual support; also with the involvement of employers. Such accompaniment may take place in the framework of social enterprises, which often represent a first stepping stone towards effective placements in mainstream labour markets. In all cases, paying attention to transition points is essential to ensure a smooth step from skill interventions to full, stable integration into jobs.
- Cooperation with local authorities and employment agencies is also important to guarantee access to the labour market among people who have invested in skills. Access to trainings or supported employment options that help people back into employment are key to enhance or complement the effectiveness of skilling interventions.

Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren⁴ (Czech Republic)

A full accompaniment of people towards inclusion through skills

The Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren (DECCB) is a Christian non-profit organization offering help and support to live dignified and valuable lives through contingencies such as old age, illness, disability or isolation. It constitutes one of the largest providers of social services in the Czech Republic and runs more than 130 facilities, centres and special schools offering social, medical, educational and pastoral care.

Work and social inclusion services

In the last years, the DECCB has provided a wide range of services around skills and training towards work and social inclusion. These include social therapeutic workshops, social rehabilitation activities, sheltered workshops, work integration social enterprises. They also include the offer of a 1-year employment contract to encourage users' sustainable integration into labour markets.

The services provided by the DECCB equip long-term unemployed persons with relevant skills and competences to integrate and adapt to the labour market through an individual assessment of needs, the provision of informal and non-formal learning activities and vocational training. Such services provide different types of skills to users, namely reading and writing skills, numeracy skills, digital skills, job-ready skills and self-reliance. In general, the services are addressed to people with low or very low

⁴ www.diakonie.cz

skills and qualifications, long-term unemployed people, persons with physical and intellectual disabilities and people with addiction problems.

Users aged between 18 and 64 years old, both men and women, are represented in the services. The share of mothers with small children is quite significant among these. Most users possess either primary or lower secondary education levels. In total, the services address approximately 310 persons with mental or health disabilities and 12 persons with addiction problems per year. The number and profile of users has remained stable over the last years in spite of the economic crisis.

Individualised support

All the services provided by the DECCB are based on a tailor-made approach to skilling that pays close attention to individual needs. From the start, relevant information on the skills of service users is collected in a structured and individualised manner. In this way, an individual assessment takes place through a face-to-face interview after which a personal service plan is designed. After a trial period, a mid-term evaluation is carried out to check the suitability of the plan and adapt it as needed.

The validation and evaluation of skills is regularly carried out and the DECCB in fact emphasises the importance of validation as crucial for users' skilling process. Most users also take part in therapy sessions where the development of some skills can be assessed in a more informal way. Moreover, accompaniment on the job is included as part of all skilling actions and social rehabilitation services provided by the DECCB. In this regard, the organisation offers

support for two years after users gain access to their first job contract. Direct, on-the-job accompaniment is also provided to users employed in sheltered workshops and work integration social enterprises set up by the DECCB.

Other services and projects within the organisation offer individual psycho-therapeutic support and counselling on housing and over-indebtedness. In many cases, these specialised services provide additional support to users experiencing multiple sources of vulnerability.

Integrated services and holistic approach

The DECCB work inclusion services have established partnerships with employers and employer organisations. By law, large companies in the Czech Republic are formally required to employ a percentage of people with disabilities or to buy services from companies employing people with disabilities. In this regard, the DECCB has signed agreements with companies to provide specific services produced by people with disabilities, such as gardening, cleaning, car washing and laundry. In addition, the organisation cooperates with employment services and/or job centres to equip users with the right skills to meet the main challenges faced at the workplace (e.g. ability to handle the workload, follow a work schedule, meet deadlines, etc.).

Partnerships also involve public authorities, as the DECCB recently obtained regional financial support to create so-called "supported workplaces". On the other hand, no specific requirements are associated to such partnership agreements because people with disabilities are not registered as unemployed persons in the Czech Republic. This is one reason why

there is an important information gap regarding the actual number of people seeking to enter the labour market.

Inclusion assessment

Every year the DECCB carries out a structured evaluation of the skills and qualifications acquired by the users and of satisfaction levels among employees/users at the social enterprises. The DECCB stresses the evidence of the positive impact of its services in integrating users into labour markets among current users. This helps them foster their motivation and supports their social and job integration.

Financial support and challenges

The services provided by the DECCB are funded by different sources including EU, national, regional and local funds, as well as private grants. In that regard, EU funding is mostly

aimed to finance the creation of new workplaces and to support investment projects. Social enterprises and sheltered workshops are a source of revenue themselves because their services are contracted by municipalities (cleaning of the public space) and business companies. Similarly, restaurants, shops, as well as textile and ceramic workshops sell their products and services on the market and provide additional income to the organisation. The DECCB has developed new business models, such as a network of “Second Help” shops employing people with disabilities, located in different cities across the country and connected to various centres established by the DECCB. The lack of state support, however, jeopardises the sustainability of these projects over the long term. In this regard, the national government devotes very limited resources to supported employment; for this reason, the DECCB’s work inclusion programmes are generally implemented as part of the organization’s social rehabilitation services.





Kofoeds Skole⁵ (Denmark)

A school for inclusion

Kofoeds Skole (Kofoed's School) is an independent Christian humanitarian organisation which applies the pedagogical model of help through self-help. It supports a wide range of people suffering from long term unemployment, social isolation and homelessness by providing education opportunities.

Through its efforts, the School aims to help its students to strengthen their resources and competencies, and fully develop their potential as integrated and fulfilled citizens in the society.

Founded in 1928 by Hans Christian Kofoed and his wife Astrid to cope with rampant unemployment in Copenhagen, the institution developed

rapidly through the years, from a small workshop room with 11 students to a large school providing vocational education to the most deprived people in the city. Today, Kofoeds Skole welcomes every year about 4000 students in its schools in Copenhagen, around the Jutland and in Greenland. The success of Kofoeds Skole's approach has brought it to export its method and expand abroad to Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Armenia during the last 20 years.

Work and social inclusion services

Kofoeds Skole provides a large variety of training opportunities in vocational training, including both formal and non-formal learning activities. As many other institutions of its kind, it

⁵ <http://menneskermedmere.dk/>

provides second chances to people who have lost their job and struggle to find a new opportunity because of different vulnerabilities. In this regard, Kofoeds Skole's "students" often have very low skills and qualifications and may have been unemployed for long periods of time. Other users are young people who are drop-outs, third country nationals, people with addictions and people with disabilities. Homeless people also make an important part of Kofoeds Skole's students. The number of students is quite balanced between men and women. Many of them are older than 45 and hence find severe difficulties to re-start their professional careers. Since the financial crisis in 2008, the number of students who have been unemployed for more than one year has reached about 60 per cent.

Individualised support

Individualised support is offered to Kofoeds Skole students through a wide range of courses; e.g. 120 teaching options available across 11 different workshops. Each student is involved in the organisation of his or her own training programme through a preliminary personal interview. The student's potential is put at the centre of the planning, which takes into consideration the ensemble of previous experiences in addition to the student's expectations about his or her future.

Integrated services and holistic approach

As the aim of Kofoeds Skole is to give an opportunity for inclusion through skills to people in a vulnerable position, the services offered respond to the different needs of each student.

Consultants are employed by the school to provide a dedicated support to students exposed to different sorts of hardships. This includes consultants for family issues, for students experiencing childcare needs, cohabitation or family issues, medical advice to monitor health issues, legal advice and expertise on unpaid rent and indebtedness issues. In addition, a service of psychological support for people experiencing isolation, depression or hardship in daily life provides confidential assistance on a weekly basis.

Inclusion assessment

Kofoeds Skole does not assess formally the learning of students. Instead, it monitors their progress in order to facilitate their employability and foster, in a parallel way, their motivation and trust. Cooperation agreements with employment services and job centres are also in place to enable the professional integration of students. Some students in fact are referred to the School by municipalities as part of framework contracts with Copenhagen and other cities to host long-term unemployed persons who are registered at the cities' job centres.

Financial support and challenges

Kofoeds Skole is mainly financed through national funds provided by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs, which provides approximately 50 per cent of the school's budget thanks to its grants. The rest of the budget comes from private grants provided by a number of private foundations and the revenue of selling the production Kofoeds Skole's workshops in the open market.

Helsinki Deaconess Institute⁶ (Finland)

Tackling youth exclusion

Founded in 1867 upon the initiative and financial support of the Finnish-Swede philanthropist Aurora Karamzin, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute was originally a small sisterhood organizing a 8-bed hospital for infectious diseases in Helsinki. At the time, the city was ravaged by soaring mortality due to a huge famine and the consequences of the industrial revolution. Today the Helsinki Deaconess Institute has grown into an organization with an annual turnover of around 150 million euros and 1,600 employees active towards the social inclusion of the most marginalised groups in many fields.

Work and Social Inclusion Services

The Helsinki Deaconess Institute runs different projects aimed at providing skills for work inclusion. The main inclusion service is the VAMOS project, which addresses about 1500 young people every year who are not in employment nor in education. The recruitment of Vamos users, aged between 16 to 29 years, does not require any pre-condition as most of them have fallen outside the radar of public services. The users of Vamos are accompanied in the use of public services and are equipped with the resources that enable them to get back to education or look for a job.

Some work inclusion services at the HDI target migrants in particular. For instance, **Trail of Involvement for Immigrant Youth** (financed through the ESF), **The Nice Work Project** (ESF) or a specific **Vamos** for young asylum seekers (AMIF). These three initiatives aim to

foster the social inclusion and capacities of migrants and asylum seekers in Finnish society, guiding them towards employment, education and other relevant activities (e.g. acquisition of Finnish language). In addition, HDI also out-reaches to migrants at risk of further exclusion, such as stay-at-home immigrant mothers.

The profile of the users is very diverse and changes across the different programmes run by the HDI. In general, the Institute welcomes people who have been outside the labour market for long time, including women returning to work after performing informal caring duties, young school dropouts, third country nationals who do not speak Finnish and with very limited resources to find employment in Finland, persons with disabilities, homeless people or people with addictions. In the last years, the profile of users has shifted from the more traditional group of young people with low skills and qualifications to people with higher education levels who have failed to transition to employment due to an insufficient demand for their skills or qualifications.

Individualised support

VAMOS is tailor-made to every person's capacities. Students, who often come upon their own initiative or through the recommendation of parents or friends, are guided by Vamos educators and social workers towards self-efficacy based on their abilities, dreams, hopes and life projects.

When approaching the service, a short, preliminary interview helps trainers to get a first grasp of each student's background, including their education and employment history. Other skills and competences are later mapped throughout

⁶ <https://www.hdl.fi/fi/>

the coaching process, which includes questionnaires on motivation and general interests. The aim of this coaching process is to validate qualifications and skills already held by users and acquired through previous education and informal experiences.

Another key aspect of the support provided by Vamos regards the transition into employment. Job matching is conducted in close cooperation with relevant partners; e.g. Vamos coordinators work directly with companies and employment services taking part in job fairs, organising study visits at companies for students or inviting experts in human resources to speak to Vamos' users.

Integrated services and holistic approach

Whilst learning activities and skill enhancement are at the heart of Vamos, the ultimate goal of the project is to boost the full social integration of vulnerable young people in Finnish society. Besides peer-support, mentoring, academic counselling and workshops dedicated to skills and employment, Vamos also organises many recreational events, such as workshops on hobbies, board games, a weekly gym, trips and music activities.

In addition, counselling in many different areas is offered by expert coaching. This rang-



es from psychological support to debt and housing counselling, among others.

In addition, to better tackle with the vulnerabilities of its users, Vamos is integrated with several public services, including integration services for migrants, social work services, mental health services, support services for people with substance abuse and addiction issues, child protection and youth services.

Financial support and challenges

Vamos is financed through different funding sources which reflect its comprehensive approach and the overarching objectives covered. Funding comes from national public institutions (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations, Ministry of Education and Culture), local and regional entities (Regional State Administrative Agency of Southern Finland, City of Helsinki). EU funding also plays a significant role, as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) provided about 0.9 and 0.2 EUR million each to Vamos activities in 2016.

Diakonie Neuendettelsau⁷ (Germany)

Tapping the full potential of social enterprise towards inclusion

Founded in 1854 as an institute for deaconesses, Diakonie Neuendettelsau is one of the largest independent Christian institutions for social welfare work in Germany and the biggest social enterprise in Bavaria. It currently employs more

than 6.500 people in Neuendettelsau and other parts of Southern Germany, as well as in other European countries (through international projects). “Shaping lives” is the motto of Diakonie Neuendettelsau, which translates into action throughout the organization’s many fields of work.

Work and social inclusion services

The services provided by Diakonie Neuendettelsau equip long-term unemployed persons with relevant skills and competences to integrate them into the labour market. The services provide users with different types of skills towards work and social inclusion, namely reading and writing skills, numeracy skills, digital skills, job-ready skills and self-reliance. In general, the services address people with low or very low skills or qualifications, young people including dropouts, third-country nationals, persons with disabilities and women returning to work after a period of caring duties.

Service users are people aged between 16 and 45, mostly women, and with primary education and lower or upper secondary education levels. According to data collected by Diakonie Neuendettelsau in 2016, 1.206 pupils enrolled in diaconal secondary and high schools, 829 pupils in preschool assessments and school for special needs, 1.353 students attended vocational training schools and academies for social work, and 584 students were enrolled in vocational schools for nursing and elderly care services. The latter train professionals in services for older people, qualified dietitians and social workers, as well as professionals in housekeeping and educators.

⁷ www.diakonieneuendettelsau.de/diakonie-neuendettelsau/info-center/impressum and <http://www.behindertenhilfe-neuendettelsau.de/angebote/arbeiten-und-qualifizieren/werkstaetten/unsere-angebote/>

Individualised support

Diakonie Neuendettelsau stresses the use of an individualised approach to work and social inclusion services based not only on regular individual assessment, but also on lifelong learning plans designed for each of the users according to his/her needs and interests. Indeed, a comprehensive and personalised assessment lies at the base of an effective matching between skills and labour market needs. The validation of skills and qualifications previously held by users plays a key role to this aim. Accompaniment on the job is also included as part of the skilling interventions and a specialized educator supports both employers and service users during this key stage.

Integrated services and holistic approach

The work integration services offered by Diakonie Neuendettelsau cooperate closely with employers and employer organisations to provide specialised support to users with special needs and promote equal access to the labour market. The services also link with public employment services and job centres, social enterprises and public authorities with the same purpose. In addition, Diakonie Neuendettelsau acts as an employer itself through placement opportunities in businesses run by the organization (e.g. bakeries, butcher's, electrical workshops, housekeeping or administration).

Inclusion assessment

The assessment of work and social inclusion outcomes is carried out through a combination

of individual monitoring, life-long learning planning, personalized interviews, and case-based multifunctional team discussions. Diakonie Neuendettelsau acknowledges the positive impact of its services on integrating the long-term unemployed into the labour market in many respects. The services help foster users' social integration, support access to quality jobs, provide skills for short-term and continued employability, provide transferable skills and competencies, find solutions to early school leaving, and support innovation and competitiveness. In this regard, approximately 40 service users gained access to the labour market after one year since they used the work and social inclusion services provided by Diakonie Neuendettelsau.

Financial support and challenges

The work and social inclusion services provided by Diakonie Neuendettelsau are fully funded by regional and local funds.

Diaconia Valdese⁸ (Italy)

An actor for inclusion with a strong regional focus

The Commissione Sinodale per la Diaconia (CSD) - Diaconia Valdese is a non-profit organisation that gathers the different activities of the Waldensian Organisation. Diaconia Valdese is committed to providing services to all people, both women and men, without discrimination of gender, religious affiliation or cultural background.

⁸ www.diaconiavaldese.org

Work and social inclusion services

The main initiatives around skills and training for work and social inclusion implemented by Diaconia Valdese include: a) a programme to assist young job seekers gain skills financed by two bank foundations; b) a programme called Buona Scuola (Good School) to offer high school students relevant work experience; c) Servizio Accompagnamento al Lavoro (SAL; Service for Accompaniment into Work), a new service in which specially trained staff offers targeted preparation to job seekers and assistance in finding potential employers; and d) the Borsa di Lavoro (Labour Exchange) programme, which funds an internship experience of 3 to 6 months for job seekers in a local small or medium sized business that in many cases resulted in a full time job.

The services provided by Diaconia Valdese are aimed at equipping long-term unemployed persons with relevant skills and competencies through a comprehensive process encompassing an individual assessment, formal, informal and non-formal learning activities, and mentoring during job experience projects. They provide skills such as job-ready skills, self-reliance and Italian language skills for asylum seekers aiming to join the workforce in Italy. The main target groups of the services are unemployed and long-term unemployed persons, young people including dropouts, third-country nationals, older workers and ex-prisoners. However, there are specific groups of users who face increased challenges in gaining access to relevant skills and competencies, namely early school leavers, particularly those in rural or mountain areas, young people aged 18-29 with few useful skills who are unable to get a first job, people with addictions and people aged 50+

who have lost their job after a crisis.

About 110 persons aged between 18-29 years of age in 2016, and residents in the Waldensian Valleys around the Turin area, benefitted from the first year of activity of the project Borsa di Lavoro. In Florence and its surrounding areas, participation to the programme was much lower because of restrictive legislation in that region. However, the categories of users are interesting: so far in 2017, there have been 5 beneficiaries of such internships, 3 for people coming out of prison and two for asylum seekers.

The profile of service users has changed from the pre-crisis period, as today an increasing number of migrants are taking part in Diaconia Valdese work experience programmes along with Italian youngsters. Migrants often face difficulties in language acquisition, although Italian lessons are part of the organisation's earlier efforts to aid their integration into Italian society. For instance, among migrants benefitting from the service there are certain people in the over 50 age group who used to have a good job but are now finding it very difficult to find an employment in their hosting country.

Individualised support

Diaconia Valdese collects relevant information on the skills of service users mainly through face-to-face interviews. All candidates for participation in the *Borsa di Lavoro* project are given one on one initial interviews and, if they are accepted into the programme, a personal project is created for each individual on an ad hoc basis with an initial survey of his/her skills and competences, a training plan, and measurable objectives. Information gathering and assess-



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ment in the new *Casa di Lavoro* project are also based on individual interviews.

The organisation stresses the use of a tailor-made approach to skilling, considering the skills and knowledge he/she already has and those that still need to be acquired. Therefore, validation and recognition of skills and qualifications previously held by users play a key role in the whole process of service provision. At the same time, Diaconia Valdese pays attention to validation and recognition of skills and qualifications after the service provision. For instance, as regards the *Borsa di Lavoro* projects, progress in skills and motivation is assessed by trainers during informal interviews with users that take part before and after the traineeship. This allows the service to prepare a detailed evaluation assessing the objectives accomplished by the user. Accompaniment on the job is also included in the skilling initiatives of Diaconia Valdese: the participant has regular meetings with a mentor who regularly keeps in touch with the employer.

Integrated services and holistic approach

Work integration services regularly link with employers and employer organisations. In the Waldensian Valleys in the Piedmont region and in Florence, two areas of major activity for Diaconia Valdese, good contacts already existed with local small businesses owners and this has made cooperation in work experience projects much easier. In terms of cooperation with employment services and job centres, a great step forward was receiving accreditation for a satellite job centre at Villa Olanda, a multi-purpose structure of the Diaconia Valdese where Diaconia's operators continue to cooperate ac-

tively with the local job centre in trying to meet the needs of job seekers in the area.

In addition, Diaconia Valdese also links with social enterprises, as it actively works on the insertion of job seekers in some cooperatives in the social sector. Finally, cooperation with public authorities is also fruitful, as the Diaconia Valdese's "Coordinamento Opere Valli" initiative frequently cooperates with authorities of the Region of Piedmont and the Province of Turin, as well as with local health authorities. In that regard, Diaconia Valdese is increasingly sought out as a service provider in different areas, of which assistance to people in entering or re-entering the labour market is just one. The work inclusion services are also partnered with public employment services. In this regard, the job seekers involved in some of the projects must be registered with the local employment office; also, public authorities provide a number of complementary services (e.g. family visitors and social workers among others) that add to Diaconia Valdese's interventions.

Inclusion assessment

During final interviews upon the conclusion of each work experience project, users and staff members evaluate together the skills and knowledge acquired during the course of the intervention. After this, each participant is given a certificate listing the competencies and skills he or she has acquired. In general, Diaconia Valdese recognised the benefits of its services in fostering users' motivation, helping their social integration, providing skills for employability in the short-term, providing transferable skills and competencies, and seeking solutions to early school leaving, while promoting innovation and competitiveness.

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Financial support and challenges

The work and social inclusion services provided by Diaconia Valdese are mainly funded by regional and local funds, a private grant from Bank Foundations, and Otto Per Mille funding, the Italian system for financing churches and

religious institutions.

One particular challenge was represented by the fact that one of the two Bank Foundations who provided funding for training for job seekers offered a part of the sum to be awarded “up front”. Then, the remaining tranche was dependent upon whether participants who completed the training were offered a work experience opportunity in a firm.



Stockholm City Mission (Sweden)

Social enterprises as bridges to empower people

The City Missions in Sweden are independent organizations that cooperate under the Swedish National Council of Sweden's City Missions. The Association of Swedish City Missions aims to promote dialogue and common work among the different local organisations. Today, the National Association of City Missions in Sweden consists of nine City Missions: Stockholm, Gothenburg, Skåne, Uppsala, Linköping, Västerås, Kalmar, Eskilstuna and Örebro.

Stockholm City Mission was founded in 1853 to help the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Sweden, and to provide schooling and services to the poorest children in the city. Aiming at a more human and inclusive society which empowers everybody to shape his or her own life, the Stockholm City Mission is today a big organisation, employing 351 permanent workers supported by 421 volunteers, and active in services for elderly people, homeless people, migrants and youth, as well as running its own school for social workers. In addition, it is active in work integration through a comprehensive programme aiming at empowering with skills people at risk of social exclusion.

Work and social inclusion services

The Stockholm City Mission has been active in work integration since the late XIX century, when in 1888 it opened a work project for people getting out of prison, and developed in 1927 through its first second hand shop Små smulor. Today, the Stockholm City Mission offers many opportunities for inclusion in the labour market to vulnerable people through its social enterprises, which produce and sell goods and ser-

vices made by employees, volunteers and people participating job integration programmes. People in vulnerable situations that keep them away from the labour market are empowered through coaching sessions and continued guidance. They are helped to recognise their own qualities, acquire "job-ready skills" and bridge the gap towards mainstream labour markets.

Participants are referred to the services of the Stockholm City Mission once registered in a national employment office. At the Mission, they receive an individual assessment and vocational training, prior to being engaged in the Mission's network of social enterprises.

Users have a diverse composition: the service is open to active population aged from 18 to 65, including people with low or very low skills and qualifications and people with addictions. Other groups face additional challenges to gain access to relevant skills and competences. It is the case of third country nationals and people with disabilities, who tend to receive less support and opportunities to become integrated in labour markets.

The activities are organised in 5 different social enterprises:

- **A chain of second hand shops** operating across the municipalities of Stockholm and Eskilstuna, which together with books, furniture and household items give a new life to about 25 tonnes of clothes every year;
- the **Remake** enterprise, which transforms worn textiles, furniture and gadgets into new, environmentally-friendly and unique products;
- **Mat och möten/ food and meeting**, a social café, bakery, catering provider and conference venue, hosted in a historical building of the hearth of Stockholm;

- **Matcentralen/ foodcentral**, a social enterprise which deals with donated food waste, selling it in social supermarkets at low prices;
- **Blixtjobb/Flash Jobs**, a service which provides jobs on a daily basis to homeless people or people who experience substance abuse.

Individualised support

Thanks to a personal interview, the users of Stockholm City Mission social enterprises are able to take over professional tasks adjusted to their capacities and interests. Additional trainings are offered to those requiring particular skills adjustments. The increase of third country nationals among participants, for instance, is producing a shift as well in the kind of skills demanded, as an increased number of requests for language trainings have been recorded. Permanent shadowing by tutors and instructors allows users to receive an individual, tailor-made approach to skilling, with an implementation of training plans according to users' needs. A process of skills validation is now on trial at the Stockholm City Mission: it provides users with a diploma stating the new competences acquired that are transferable to labour markets. Also, cooperation established with public employment services results in a wider range of placements available after skilling interventions and time spent at the social enterprise are completed.

Inclusion assessment

About 30 per cent of the people with an experience at Stockholm City Mission's social enterprises become integrated in the labour market after one year. Other users shift to formal education, to complement and step up the skills acquired through the social enterprises.

The success of interventions and the quality of skills is jointly assessed by the coach and social workers in charge of designing the individual programme for each student, and the user herself/himself. Skills are not the only criterion taken into account in the assessment; instead, higher motivation and social integration, the ability to build up a stronger network of social relations and to manage successfully his or her own finances, among others, are equally evaluated.





Gothenburg City Mission (Sweden)

A sustainable model of work inclusion

The Gothenburg City Mission was founded in 1952 as an organisation of volunteers tackling social exclusion and destitution caused by alcohol abuse. Today, with more than 250 employees, the Gothenburg City Mission offers services dealing with the integration of migrants, assistance for homeless people, counselling for young people, support to young parents, and elderly care. It also runs inclusive art workshops, a hotspot for psychological help, and a wide number of open market shops such as social cafés and a catering enterprises that contribute to financing the social services provided by the City Mission.

Work and Inclusion Services

The Gothenburg City Mission has about 30 years of activity in job trainings through its Er-

gon project. These trainings aim at enhancing skills and providing new skills for employability in the short term.

Ergon provides workplaces adapted to people in vulnerable situations. Ergon has a fully-fledged approach to sustainability in employment; it helps people develop their professional potential whilst contributing to sustainable environment through increased re-use and recycling applied in its social enterprises. Ergon welcomes about 200 to 300 people per year.

The on-the-training offer consists of a carpentry workshop that produces furniture, supplies big Swedish retailers and prepares “interns” for carpentry work. A textile department sews clothes for sale at City Mission’s shops; a data unit provides interns with digital literacy ranging from basic computer knowledge to bookkeeping, database updating, image processing and computer-aided manufacturing. Other unemployed people are integrated in services such as cooking, gardening or selling at the Mission’s second-hand shops.



Integrated services and holistic approach

The users of professional workshops at the Gothenburg City Mission experience additional service needs on top of unemployment that call for an integrated approach to interventions.

Such needs may range from physical and mental health problems, to drug addiction, over-indebtedness or homelessness (or housing poverty). The Gothenburg City Mission offers different services towards such an individualised support. In many cases, needs are related to lack of access to childcare or the need to perform caring duties at home. In these cases, in addition to making care services available, the Mission also ensures flexibility in training services, allowing users to adapt their schedules to care duties.

Individualised support

Workshops at the Gothenburg City Mission focus on small and simple tasks where all users can take part in the production process at the same time, helping to build personal relationships. Users of the Ergon service present a very diverse range of skills background, ranging from people lacking any sort of primary education to people with secondary and vocational education experiencing long-term unemployment for some reason. Motivational interviewing and counselling is provided by experts in different stages of the training. Trainers monitor users, together with the team of instructors and supervisors who coach users in a more direct way. Language support is provided to third country nationals in need of such additional support.

After the training is completed, Ergon facilitates internship opportunities at external organisations.

Financial support and challenges

Ergon is a project funded through national funds provided by the Swedish national employment service. The funding is linked to the number of users served (250 Swedish Crowns are paid per person per day -about EUR 26.5-) but does not depend on the success of job integration after skilling interventions. The creaming of the 'best' profiles is, therefore, avoided.

In addition to the public administration, the Gothenburg City Mission is partnered with a large number of organisations and institutions that offer work contracts and traineeships to service users.

Conclusions

The effects of the latest economic and social crisis have disrupted Europe's social fabric, raising inequalities, increasing precariousness -at work and many other areas- and creating social exclusion.

The projects presented in this publication aim to prove that investing in skills for people constitutes a priority to overcome the exclusion faced by people who remain outside the labour market and prevent future needs.

Whilst employment is a central space to put skills into practice and develop new ones, skills are also enablers for broader social inclusion and participation in communities. The work of Eurodiaconia members work around skills take this fully into account and sees skilling actions as a way to promote people's personal development and knowledge and make them aware of their intrinsic utility for society.

In many cases, skill deficits are the result of inequalities that our members' interventions aim to address. Differences in access to education, high rates of school drop-outs, complex transitions between education and employment, the effects of technological change, digital illiteracy, etc. create different forms of inequality that could be exacerbated if the current economic recovery does not invest adequately in skills and services which can reverse such trends.

As the projects presented have shown, an individual approach to skills from the outset is key. At that moment, it is essential to identify the needs, expectations and potential of each person through a personal case management approach which results in a tai-

lor-made strategy of skilling interventions and accompanying social services as needed.

Such a plan should also be coherent with previous professional and learning pathways of each individual, as well with future opportunities available at labour markets. To this aim, it is key to recognise pre-existing skills, including those acquired in non-formal learning settings.

Also, the sample of services presented in these pages emphasizes the importance of on-the-job experience in order to ensure the relevance of skills acquired. This is brought into practice through social enterprise settings -where diaconal organizations can act as employers themselves-, partnerships with employers, employment services and local authorities, and a close accompaniment into new jobs. Such transition stages between interventions and integration at the workplace are key to guarantee the sustainability of work placements.

Eurodiaconia welcomes any feedback on this publication, other projects and proposals on how to further boost skills as levers for inclusion.

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