



REPORT OF THE EXTREME DESTITUTION NETWORK MEETING:

“User involvement as a pathway to social inclusion

22-23 November 2018, Copenhagen, Denmark

Summary

On 22-23 November, Eurodiaconia held its annual Extreme Destitution Network meeting in Copenhagen, hosted by Kirkens Korshaer. Around 12 participants from Eurodiaconia member organisations, from France, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Sweden and Ukraine came together for two days to exchange and learn more about how the involvement of vulnerable users as actors of projects, and not only beneficiaries, is a key element to foster social inclusion. The meeting aimed particularly at exchanging best practices of members adapting their way of working to better involve their users.

On the first day participants had the opportunity to learn more about the work of Kirkens Korshaer in Denmark and received updates on the work of Eurodiaconia as well as recent policy developments at EU level in relation to extreme destitution. During a roundtable session, participants shared their observations and concerns related to extreme destitution and poverty in their countries.

During the second day, members from France, Iceland and Italy were invited to share their projects with the rest of the participants explaining why and how they involved users in their projects. Based on these presentations and following discussions, participants worked in groups to develop some guidelines on user involvement in social services. They exchanged on the purpose of user involvement, the path and steps linked to user involvement but also on the challenges.

Finally, participants had the chance to visit Byarbejdet Christianshavn, a centre run by Kirkens Korshaer with a second-hand shop, a play room for children and providing social work, shared meals and activities for vulnerable families. During the study visit participants had also the opportunity to exchange with one of the managers of Fodevarebanken the Food Banks organisation in Denmark.

Next steps

- The Eurodiaconia Secretariat will publish its mapping on user involvement in January 2019.
- The Extreme Destitution Network will be continued in 2019 and will likely take place in May 2019 and address among others the question of providing a diaconal definition of “social inclusion”.
- The Eurodiaconia Secretariat will also continue its advocacy work at EU level in the area of poverty together with partner organisations and whenever relevant.





MEETING NOTES

PART I: Introduction and overview of the situation at EU and national level

- **A presentation of Kirkens Korshaer, Helle Christiansen**

Helle Christiansen, Director of Kirkens Korshaer, gave an overview of the work done by Kirkens Korshaer. Founded in 1912, Kirkens Korshaer works with and for the most vulnerable of society “the least, the last and the lost” and based its work on the Christian faith and values. Kirkens Korshaer is a volunteer-based organisation as it gathers 9000 volunteers working together with 450 staff members. Their activities range from day centres to support services for families including second-hand shops.

Throughout Denmark, Kirkens Korshaer runs social cafés which are providing coffee, meals, showers and clean clothes to vulnerable persons and aim at creating social links and breaking the isolation of their users. In addition, the social cafés offer the possibility for people experiencing poverty to go on vacations for a few days. In many cities, Kirkens Korshaer is also running night shelters providing very basic accommodation (emergency accommodation) where people can stay for one night. Next to those night shelters, the organisation has 7 bigger shelters run in collaboration with local authorities providing temporary accommodation for homeless people. Furthermore, **Helle Christiansen** explained that they were witnessing a rise of families living in poverty and therefore increased their support to families (e.g. summer camps, Christmas Eve, shared lunch). Kirkens Korshaer also provides shelters, hostels and “villages” for elderly alcoholics, addicts and former homeless. Those are organised as communities and users have access to counselling and to injection rooms for drug addicts. The possibility of proposing injection rooms was discussed among participants as it is not allowed in every country. Participants agreed that Denmark was ahead on this issue and that it helps to raise the dignity of people using drugs and to create confidence between users and professionals.

Helle Christiansen raised that one of the limits of their work is the impossibility to work with irregular migrants as it is prohibited by the law when using public money. However, they are working with migrants, mostly EU-citizens who use their right to freedom of movement in the European Union. Kirkens Korshaer developed the Kompasset project providing different services to homeless migrants. Kompasset offers a place to rest and sleep in the daytime, social workers help in applying for jobs and making CV's, provide assistance in getting registered in Denmark, legal advice on their rights and responsibilities, and a supportive and friendly environment. Thanks to the staff and volunteers, users can get advice in many languages, English, Romanian, French, Spanish, German, Polish, Italian and Bulgarian. The Kompasset project has been rewarded in 2018 by the FEANTSA award on ending homelessness.

The 250 second hand shops, which are mostly run by volunteers but supervised and trained by staff members represent a major source of income. Furthermore, big corporations support Kirkens Korshaer through their corporate social responsibility and every year, Kirkens Korshaer organises a national fundraising campaign, which has this year the motto: “*Yes we can! Denmark Against Poverty*”.

- **Roundtable exchange on the state of poverty and social inclusion in the countries represented.**

During this session, participants were asked to share the rising issues and concerns linked to poverty and social inclusion which they observe in their countries.

Marina Lena Brunoff from the Church of Sweden shared that a growing concern was the increasing number of elderly people experiencing poverty. Homecare is expensive and for many elderly people their pensions cannot cover the rent. Elderly people who cannot go in special home care because they don't have health issues and who don't have enough money to pay a rent in a private elderly home, are at high risk of social exclusion. **Saedis Arnardottir** from the Icelandic Church Aid added that in Iceland as well the poverty rate among elderly was increasing, whereas general poverty was decreasing.



For **Mike Stannett** from the Salvation Army EU Office, a rising concern is the situation experienced by undocumented migrants. In many countries, organisations are not allowed to have activities supporting undocumented migrants. Exploitation and poverty are growing among this group and many undocumented migrants stay under the radar and have no access to services. **Mike Stannett** asked how to care for those people who are rejected from everywhere. **Molly Tyler-Childs** from Diaconia Valdese explained that in Italy they try to support undocumented migrants in developing social networks.

Nicole Borisuk from Living Hope explained that in Ukraine most of the elderly people are living under the poverty threshold. Energy poverty is also a growing concern. Furthermore, with the opening of borders many people are leaving to work in other countries and send money home, leaving many older people and children behind. In addition, there is also an increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

Sædís Arnardóttir pointed out that even if Iceland was a small country of 300 000 inhabitants around 4000 people are experiencing poverty and facing multiple challenges. She also explained that since the end of 2017 Roma had been arriving to Iceland, mostly coming from Romania and many of them don't read or write and are very excluded from society.

Vincent Morival from ABEJ SOLIDARITE shared that in France the situation is worsening since M. Macron's election, as the government wants to save money as much as possible. With this approach, he explained that the government was turning good ideas into bad ones, such as the housing first idea. In this case, housing first was experimented in 4 cities during 6 years with good results. However, after the phase of experimentation the housing first programs were continued but without social accompaniment of users, which is a key element to support social inclusion and make the approach a success.

Finally, **Molly Tyler-Childs** stressed that in Italy there is an increasing phenomenon called gentile poverty, people who are extremely socially excluded because of a lack of social connection which is creating frustration among the population and supports among others the rise of right-wing parties.

- **Updates from Eurodiaconia**

In the following session, **Anne-Sophie Wislocki**, Membership and Policy Officer at Eurodiaconia, provided participants with an update on Eurodiaconia's work in the area of extreme destitution in 2018 and the upcoming year. She also informed participants on EU policy developments which are relevant for Eurodiaconia members working on the topics of extreme destitution and social inclusion. She first touched upon the European Pillar of Social Rights with a focus on the third chapter of the pillar related to "Social protection and inclusion" which includes principles on support to children, on minimum income and on assistance for the homeless. It was stressed that the European Pillar of Social Rights was relevant for Eurodiaconia and its members as it raises awareness about social issues at EU level and provides a tool to monitor the state of social rights in European countries. It also gives the possibility to agree on new minimum standards. Finally, Eurodiaconia members are already working on topics of the Pillar and they can therefore easily use it as an advocacy tool towards their governments which politically committed to implement it.

Next, **Anne-Sophie Wislocki** gave a state of play of the negotiation around the new European Social Fund, called ESF+. The European Commission released its proposals on the ESF+ and other funds in May 2018. In June 2018, the draft report on the proposal from the Rapporteur in the European Parliament was released and the Members of Parliament (MEPs) had until September to hand in amendments. **Anne-Sophie Wislocki** highlighted that several amendments proposed to MEPs by Eurodiaconia had been taken on board. The European Parliament is now expected to vote on the final text in December 2018. Negotiations also take place in the European Council, but no progress has been made so far. Eurodiaconia will keep following the negotiations and advocating for a European Social Fund in line with its members priorities.



PART II: Members project presentations on user involvement

The next session was dedicated to member project presentation on different approaches of involving users in projects. The session was rich in knowledge and experience sharing and gave fruitful discussions.



- **The Youth Programme and the Sharing House, ABEJ SOLIDARITE, France**

Vincent Morival first gave a quick presentation of ABEJ SOLIDARITE, a Baptist organisation created in 1985. ABEJ SOLIDARITE is composed of 200 members, 285 employees, 116 volunteers and provides services to around 6000 people. Their activities are organised around 5 sectors: emergency, health, employment, housing and transversal issues. Therefore, ABEJ SOLIDARITE runs a lot of services such as day centres, a night emergency centre, home services and housing first programs. **Vincent Morival** presented two projects involving users as active actors of the projects.

The Youth Programme, which was launched in 2016, is based on a housing first approach. This means that beneficiaries, 15 to 20 young people aged 18 to 25, are provided with a room or flat in an ABEJ SOLIDARITE shelter or in the ABEJ SOLIDARITE transitional housing centre. **Vincent Morival** explained that at the origin of the programme there is the wish to adapt the social work in the ABEJ SOLIDARITE homeless residential centre to the specific needs of youths, as they observed that young homeless people didn't want to join in the services that were offered. In the youth programme, the week of the young people, who are joining on a voluntary basis, is organised around three kinds of activities. They have the possibility to take part in a leisure, culture and sport activity (e.g. going to the cinema etc), but in exchange they also have to participate in one activity related to professional and social reintegration, as well as in a socially useful activity (such as volunteering in another NGO) through which they are giving something back to society. It was stressed that being involved in volunteering activity is important as it allows youth to meet new people, to learn new rules and it increases their self-esteem and social inclusion.

When a young person joins, an assessment of his/her capacities is done with a social worker and a new assessment is made every 6 months to see which progress has been made. Every week, all participants meet together to decide what they are going to do that week. This group dynamic provides a positive peer pressure. However, **Vincent Morival** stressed that the presence of the social worker remains necessary to help them organize their week. Another challenge raised is the difficulty to find places where they can volunteer as some NGOs are reluctant to have young homeless people volunteering with them. This requires a lot of advocacy work from the manager of the Youth programme.

Then **Vincent Morival** presented The Sharing House project. The project is based on the idea to provide activities for former users of ABEJ services (mostly former homeless people) who are now living in social housing. Those people have suffered from social exclusion which doesn't necessarily end with the access to a home. Therefore, in the Sharing House many activities are proposed to break social exclusion, and everyone



is welcomed. There is no difference between ex users of ABEJ services and other volunteers, everyone is considered as a member of the team. The motto of the Sharing House is “the person who receives becomes the person who gives”. **Vincent Morival** explained that being included as a member of the team and as someone who gives is a way to break social isolation, to create a social network and to make them believe in their abilities. The Sharing House gathers many activities which are developed based on people’s skills and will. Every Sunday there is a common meal, which is prepared together (they go to the market, cook and spend all the afternoon together). Members can also participate in sport activities (such as yoga, tennis for people with disabilities etc), and have access to a Zen attitude area, where they can have help with their hair and nails.

Some challenges of the project consist in the difficulty of making users believe in their abilities and it is hard for the volunteers to understand that they are not the person “who knows” but put on the same level as everyone else. Another challenge is the constant search for funding.

In the following discussion several questions came up. Responding to a question on the selection of the young people, **Vincent Morival** explained that the programme is well known in Lille and that they also have a partnership with a prison and some specific placements for young offenders. For instance, for their last year of jail, young offenders can instead go in an ABEJ shelter with more obligations than other users and must participate in the Youth programme. Another question was related to the ABEJ outreach team and Vincent Morival explained that ABEJ outreach staff was paid by the railway company during 6 months for a trial to go in the stations to talk to homeless people and offer them to use ABEJ services such as the day centre. With time, the outreach team managed to build trust and the number of homeless people in the subways and stations reduced. Therefore, the railway company decided to finance the project for 6 years. He stressed that ABEJ accepts people as they are: they first provide them with a room and then do social work as far as the person accepts to receive that support.

Finally, a question concerning faith was raised and **Vincent Morival** underlined that everyone, regardless of faith, is welcome in their services. However, ABEJ has four pastors in the team that users can meet to have spiritual discussions, to pray together but also just to talk.

- **Participation in society, Icelandic Church Aid, Iceland.**

Sædís Arnardóttir, a social worker from the Icelandic Church Aid presented the work done by her organisation on social inclusion and how they involve the most vulnerable. The Icelandic Church Aid is an NGO independent from the Church but based on Christian values, which is running both domestic projects for people living in Iceland and oversea projects (mainly with Uganda and Ethiopia). The Icelandic Church Aid is a small organisation with 3 social workers and 20 volunteers.

Sædís Arnardóttir presented three different projects. The first project, called in English “A way to prosperity” started in January 2017 and targets a group of 17 women who are single mothers with disability pensions. Those women have been living in poverty for a long time. The group meets once a week every Thursday and does activities together. The aim is to help the women to be active, to get them to do something they like and to expand their social network. For many of them it is the only moment where they are in contact with other adults. The meeting also gives the opportunity to women to talk about different subject such as happiness and self-assertion.

This project is connected with another one: Bridging Breiðholt which is a house open once a week in a suburb of the capital Reykjavik with a higher number of social problems. The house welcomes everyone and provides a place to meet, to cook and eat together and develop many other activities for example around Christmas time. One of the aims of the house is to create social links. The project is funded by the municipality.

Finally, the third project is called “Bags with purpose”, a sowing project for immigrant women. It started in September 2017 and became very popular. The group meets every week to make bags using old fabrics. The purpose of the project is twofold: it gives a role and a place to socialize to a mixed group of women at risk of social exclusion (migrant women, asylum seekers, refugees); and it has an environmental impact by replacing



plastic bags and reusing old fabric. In addition, the project financially supports the users, as every fourth time a woman comes, she gets 40 euros on a card that she can use in a supermarket. **Sædís Arnardóttir** explained that because of the voucher it was an expensive project and therefore finding funds is a challenge. For the moment, the funding comes from the ministry, the municipality, the selling of the bags and fundraising.

- **Out and about with dementia, Diaconia Valdese, Italy**

Molly Tyler-Childs, project manager and social worker at Diaconia Valdese, first stressed that her project doesn't target the same group of people but that their work is similar. "Out and About with dementia" is a project developed with and for people living with dementia and experiencing social exclusion due to their situation. The aim of the project is to develop dementia-friendly communities.

The Re Carlo Alberto Refuge is a centre run by Diaconia Valdese in the Val Pellice and specialized in the reception of people living with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. Since 2000 it is a residential and semi-residential centre for 104 people, with 70% living with dementia but also other persons with severe health issues that no other services will take. The refuge is composed of a day centre, home care and an Alzheimer Café and many activities are developed. The refuge is run by 70 staff members and 100 volunteers mostly coming from local communities.

The project "Out and About with dementia" started as a pilot project in 2014 in the municipalities of Torre Pellice and Luserna San Giovanni. At the origin of the project there is a reflection on the factors limiting the inclusion of people with dementia in society. Questions, such as 'Why are they not heard and don't go on holidays?' and 'Why are they not valued in our contemporary society?' were asked and the project aims at changing this situation. The reasons for the stigmatisation of people with dementia are complex and mixed, there is a fear and a misunderstanding of dementia. **Molly Tyler-Childs** explained that they realised that the problem was how the community was receiving and perceiving people with dementia. Furthermore, there are visible and invisible barriers such as logistical barriers (access to services) and difficulties in communication.

To achieve dementia friendly communities, people with dementia first shared what they would like to do: go shopping, go to a restaurant, participate in community events and activities, visit museums, go on holidays and other wishes. Then, people with dementia, accompanied by social workers, visit services (such as banks, restaurants or supermarkets) and express the changes they would like to see. These are often very simple changes, that make orientation easier for a person with dementia, such as making signs more visible or the automatic opening of doors. Then, a collaboration with local communities' services is established and an action plan is drawn together. This also helps to raise awareness about dementia among the employees. The evaluation of the improvement of the services is done through the experience sharing of people with dementia. Throughout the project phases different forms of communication are used, including non-verbal communication.

Molly Tyler-Childs concluded by saying that the project "Out and about with dementia" gives a voice to people with dementia and that inclusion in the community and in decision-making is possible. Since 2017, 200 people with dementia participated in the project and 113 businesses and services collaborated. However, they also face some challenges. Going at a pace which is adapted to people with dementia takes time, and it is also hard to maintain the enthusiasm and commitment of the collaborators.



PART III: Group work, developing guidelines on user involvement.

After a fruitful exchange on how Eurodiaconia members involve users in their projects, participants were asked to reflect in small groups on the purpose of user involvement, on the path and steps for implementation and on the obstacles. Outcomes of the reflection have been used as inputs for the Eurodiaconia mapping on user involvement which will be published in January 2019 and in which different projects from members are showcased.



Both groups identified being part of and active in a community, empowerment of users, helping users to gain control over their life, and realization of rights as the main goals of involving users in projects. Participants agreed that there was not one single way of involving user in projects, as it depends on the context and the public. However, some key elements were found. Participants shared that establishing a real partnership based on trust is necessary for successful user involvement. They explained that users who have experienced poverty and social exclusion need a stable and secure environment in

the first place be able to then actively engage in the project and they also need to feel part of the team. Furthermore, social workers and volunteers must understand that user involvement is not about keeping users busy and involving them in some activities, but it is rather about recognizing the user as a person, which needs to be accompanied and empowered to take responsibility for his or her life and perceiving users as peers. Communication should also be inclusive for example with easy to read documents. Another important point stressed was the recognition of informal and life skills of users. Finally, participants agreed that user involvement takes time as the inclusion process does not take place from one day to the other and can differ from person to person. The timeframe was seen as a challenge by participants as funding schemes are usually not adapted to long-term projects with hardly measurable success. They all wished for more flexibility in funding timeframes.

Human resources and funding were identified as challenges to the involvement of users in a project. There is also little understanding of partnership and what participation means among communities and social workers. In the same vein, there is a lack of a multidisciplinary training for social workers. Finally, administrative burden and the little consideration for social work were also raised as concerns by participants.

Participants concluded that user involvement is a continuous learning process needing time, flexibility and adaptation.



PART IV: Study visit

During the last session of the Extreme Destitution Network meeting, participants had the opportunity to discover more in depth the work done by Kirkens Korshaer through a study visit at Byarbejdet Christianshavn, a centre with a second hand, a play room for children and providing social work for vulnerable families. Participants were welcomed by two employees of the centre who explained the project and gave a tour of the centre. Byarbejdet Christianshavn offers meals, warm clothes and a community to families and children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. At Byarbejdet Christianshavn everyone is welcomed, and they do not ask people to change but rather try to empower them. Employees stressed that most of the users are single mothers with many difficulties (e.g. living in poverty, facing unemployment and social exclusion). The centre is



opened from 10 am to 5 pm and a wide range of activities are organised. Children can come after school to do their home works and to play in the children café. They can also participate in cultural activities such as going to museums or theatre. Furthermore, the centre provides lunch boxes with healthy food for families who cannot afford it. Another important activity taking place every week is the common dinner on Thursdays for particularly vulnerable families. The selection of families is based on transparent criteria such as the economic situation or the lack of social network. Every Thursday at 5 pm families and workers sit together to eat and discuss. This activity aims at giving families a social network and to give a break to mothers as they don't have to cook or to take care of the children.

Older children and teenagers are also involved in deciding on and organising activities. For instance, if one of them wants to go to a sushi restaurant and this is then agreed as activity, he/she will have to find the place, to call and make the reservation and to guide the rest of the group to the restaurant. The centre also tries to provide summer holidays to some families and if possible, autumn vacations as well. For many families, it is the first time they have the chance to go on holidays.

The social workers stressed that they adapt their activities according to children and families' needs and that as the context changes, activities change as well. There are between 20 and 30 families and depending on their needs they are in the centre at different time of the day. Some families come through other Kirkens Korshaer services, and the centre also collaborates with external services such as kindergartens. Most of the children come from the Christiana community which is community in Copenhagen promoting an alternative way of living and where there are less rules. Therefore, many children are coming from houses where there are few rules and structures and employees need to adapt to that. However, they recalled that the aim was not to change their way of living but rather to provide them with a place where they can express and be empowered.

During the study visit, participants also had the opportunity to meet with one of the managers of Fodervarebanken (Food Banks), one of Kirkens Korshaer's partner organisations. Fodervarebanken is established in three different places in Denmark covering all the country, is mainly run by volunteers and is only distributing surplus food. They deliver food to many different places in Denmark such as Kirkens Korshaer shelters and centres. Byarbejdet Christianshavn also receives food through this partnership. As it is surplus food, the receiving places never know what they are going to receive and therefore need to be inventive as the cook of Byarbejdet Christianshavn explained.

Fodervarebanken's manager concluded by saying that thanks to the food delivered by the food bank, around 700 000 meals were distributed every day.





AGENDA

22 November 2018

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| 13.00 – 14.00 | Registration and lunch |
| 14.00 – 14.45 | Introduction |
| 14.45 – 15.30 | Presentation of Kirkens Korsaher “Poverty and social exclusion in Denmark” Helle Christiansen |
| 15.30 – 16.00 | Coffee Break |
| 16.00 – 16.45 | Updates from members Poverty and social inclusion in my country |
| 16.45 – 17.30 | Update from Eurodiaconia Introduction to the European Pillar of Social Rights State of play of ESF+ negotiations |
| 19.30 | Dinner |

23 November 2018

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| 8.45 – 9.00 | Arrival and coffee |
| 9.00 – 11.00 | Member project presentations “Different approaches to user involvement when working with vulnerable persons” France, ABEJ Solidarite “Youth Programme” and “Sharing House” Social and professional reintegration of homeless people Iceland, Icelandic Church Aid “Active, a way to prosperity” Empower women with disabilities Italy, Diaconia Valdese “Out and about with dementia” Inclusion of people with dementia |
| 11.00 – 11.30 | Coffee Break |
| 11.30 – 13.00 | Group work Developing “guidelines” on user involvement in social services |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Lunch |
| 14.00 – 16.00 | Study visit to Byarbejdet Christianshavn Centre with a recycling shop, heating rooms and providing social work for vulnerable families. <i>During the study visit one of Kirkens Korshær’s partner organisations Fodevarebanken (Food Banks) will also present its work</i> |
| 16.00 – 17.00 | Evaluation and closing |