



JOINT STATEMENT - HELSINKI 5 November 2019

THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE AND ADDED VALUE OF CHURCHES AND FAITH-BASED ACTORS IN DEVELOPING THE ECONOMY OF WELLBEING

Eurodiaconia and its Finnish members, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Deaconess Foundation, warmly welcome the strong commitment to the economy of wellbeing by the Finnish EU Presidency, including the EPSCO Council Conclusions of 24 October 2019.

Putting the wellbeing of people and the planet at the centre of all policy and decision-making is vitally important in many aspects. First, it is in line with the *raison d'être* and the fundamental values of the European Union. The EU must ensure the wellbeing of its citizens. Secondly, a more coherent approach to linking social policies with economic policies and sustainable development is likely to lead to better competitiveness and economic developments within the EU; a strong focus on social policy is good for the economy and vice versa. And thirdly, the economy of wellbeing is likely to increase legitimacy and the feeling of trust in the EU, thus bringing the EU closer to its citizens.

We especially welcome the cross-sectoral, horizontal approach, which is truly needed in order to include an economy of wellbeing perspective into all EU policies. We also appreciate the focus on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights as a compass for renewed upward convergence towards better working and living conditions for European citizens.

The thematic policy areas mentioned in the Council Conclusions – such as combating poverty and social exclusion, adapting to the changing world of work, promoting gender equality and developing adequate and sustainable social protection systems and access to health services for all, are indeed vital for enhancing the wellbeing of people. In all these policy areas, particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable in our societies.

As Churches and faith-based actors, we have plenty of experience, especially through our diaconal work, of working with people experiencing poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, homelessness and discrimination. We know, from our diaconal work at the grass-root level, the importance of promoting accessible social and health care services for all and of enhancing participation and equality. Our mission is to coherently defend and protect our common European values, such as respect for human rights and human dignity,

equality, justice, solidarity and rule of law. Our faith also calls us to care for creation and work for a sustainable, climate neutral Europe. We also have vast networks at all levels – from local and regional to national, European and global. One best practice example - amongst many others in Eurodiaconia’s membership - is the project “VAMOS for Young Asylum Seekers” run by the Deaconess Foundation.¹

The VAMOS project develops a new rehabilitative service for activation of young asylum seekers and is targeted for 16 to 29-year-olds who are waiting for their residence permit decision in Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo. The activities are addressed to young asylum seekers, who have passed the age of compulsory education and are at risk of becoming idle. Therefore, beneficiaries take part in psycho-educative group activities, are encouraged to start new hobbies and have opportunities to make friends with people of Finnish background. This project also represents one of the best examples of integrated funding approach among Eurodiaconia membership, being successfully funded by both the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Asylum, Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF).

However, the revolutionary and ambitious aims of developing the economy of wellbeing and the specific targets of the Council Conclusions need to be implemented into practice within all policy areas of both the EU and its Member States. Here, we totally agree with all the detailed proposals of the Council Conclusions re. further actions to be taken by the European Commission and the Member States. Here, developing a new long-term, post-2020 strategy in line with the spirit of the economy of wellbeing, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the UN Agenda 2030 is of specific importance.

In developing the economy of wellbeing and reaching the aims mentioned in the Council Conclusions, there is an important role to play also for the civil society. As Churches and faith-based actors, we are committed to working together with both the EU institutions, our ecumenical partners and other organizations at all levels, in order to enhance the wellbeing of both people, our societies and the planet.

Our aim is to bring forward the message of hope – especially to young people, to promote human rights and human dignity, participation and inclusion. We welcome the economy of wellbeing approach as an important and comprehensive tool in enhancing social, economic and ecological justice for all, and are committed to collaborating and dialoguing at all levels in order to put the wellbeing of people and the planet at the heart of European policies in the years to come.

¹ This particular Vamos project ended in 2018.