

Oslo, 9-10 October 2019, hosted by The Church City Mission

MEETING REPORT

Urban Areas Network Meeting

On 9-10 October Eurodiaconia held its first “Urban Areas Network Meeting” in Oslo, hosted by our member The Church City Mission. The network meeting brought together 18 participants from five member organisations and other relevant actors in the region. The event had the participation of delegations from Spain, Finland, Sweden, Romania and Serbia. The two-day event **focused on the challenges of social exclusion in urban areas of young people and the prevention of radicalisation leading to violence**. The issue of violent extremism is still high up on the European political agenda – however it is not always addressed from a holistic perspective. Eurodiaconia members are often tackling the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) from a social inclusion angle and with the establishment of this network, Eurodiaconia aims to build a network where we can show and influence policy makers of the need to invest in diaconal work to address PVE. The meeting featured presentations by leading experts and members of our network, including discussions and visits to projects run by Oslo City Mission that benefit youth and promote social inclusion.



Participants of Eurodiaconia’s first “Urban Areas” Network Meeting held in Oslo, Norway

Wednesday, 9 October

Presentation of “The Church City Mission Oslo” - Johannes Heggland, General Secretary

The [Church City Mission](#) is an inclusive, nonprofit organization, which works in towns and cities across Norway, among people who face challenges in life for various reasons. Their vision is that people in the city shall experience respect, justice and care. In his opening presentation Mr. Heggland acknowledged that Norway is a prosperous country, but that wealth inequalities have increased considerably in the last thirty years. This is particularly true for Oslo, where the distance between the ones that “have” and “have-not” is clear, especially from the urban configuration of the city, where major socio-economic differences exist between Western and Eastern neighborhoods.

Linda Noor, Director MINOTEK: *Dying to belong: what is violent radicalisation and what can we do about it?*



[MINOTEK](#) strives to give minorities more voice, be it in politics, media or academia.

Ms. Noor stressed the importance of early prevention in her presentation. The relationship between what a person thinks and says, and what a person is actually willing to do - the relationship between attitudes and behavior – is very complex. Extreme attitudes must be taken seriously, but the way we choose to approach them is crucial in whether we will be able to change them or not. In regards to the actual intervention, **“Trust” is the key word**. You have to work with all aspects of the person. Young individuals need to be given a voice and space to express their views on geopolitical matters and society, incl. extreme groups. Ultimately, it is about fulfilling the basic human need of belonging to a group and feeling part of society. Many of those who use violence have few perspectives on the future. The here and now is what matters. To reach someone who is far into the radicalization process is much more difficult and not least, time-consuming.

When looking at youth it is crucial to cultivate tools of critical thinking and empathy from early ages. There are so many things to be rightfully angry for in this world, but we need to canalize the anger into positive energies. In the end, it all comes down to encourage an including society. The more we marginalize and stigmatize people who doesn’t look, talk or think like ourselves, most likely these people will form their own communities and subcultures where new lines between right and wrong is drawn up - and we will lose the opportunity to influence them. Violent extremism and terrorism lead to the division and polarization of society. And then it is crucial to remember that in the same way as the extreamists greatest strength is the sense of unity, this is also our strongest card. **In the long run, only more democracy and more humanity will prevent the rise of extremism.**

Robert Örell, former Director of Exit Sweden: *Breaking away from violence and hate*

[Exit Sweden](#) is a part of the youth centre Fryshuset (a non-governmental organisation). Fryshuset promotes empowerment and social inclusion of youth, especially for those at risk or who already face exclusion.

In the first part of his presentation Mr. Örell gave a theoretical overview of the radicalization process and what general traits/mindsets can be seen in radicalised individuals. After exposing some of the popular strategies used by extremist groups to lure people into their ranks, Mr. Örell gave an overview of prevention techniques to use to make a first contact with radicalised individuals and then slowly help them to leave the groups. These include, but are not limited to: **raise doubts within the individual and take advantage of the subsequent cognitive opening** (individual is more open to alternative worldviews); build on trust – do things not related to therapy; focus on the long-term impact. Still, it remains difficult to clearly identify a “moment of vulnerability”.

In the second part Mr. Örell talked about his role as co-chair of **RAN EXIT**, where he is also a member of the Steering Committee RAN. A collection of best practices, practitioner papers, etc. can be found [here](#).



Study visit to Batteriet, incl. presentation by U-Turn

U-turn is an organisation that works to prevent violent extremism. The presentation made it clear that they use a critical and holistic approach in their work, which became evident after the terrorist attacks in Oslo in 2011. After a brief theoretical and historical overview of terrorism and extremism, the presentation moved on to explore new threats for radicalisation leading to violence posed by cyberspace and the advent of the internet. Finally, the presentation focused on religion and its role in the process of radicalisation on individuals. We should **take religion seriously** as, for instance, it works on divine duties and commitments that can be used by terrorists to recruit new adepts. The visit to Batteriet concluded with a group discussion where the various delegations could share insights from their work and reflect together on the newly-acquired insights.

Thursday, 10 October

Birte Nordahl, Church City Mission Oslo

The second day of the network meeting started with a presentation by Ms. Nordahl - street minister, head of Tøyen Church and PhD candidate with the University of Oslo - focusing on the **youth response to the July 22 terrorist attacks in Oslo**, which is her PhD research topic. Participants

learnt how the youth and children movement framed their response to such heinous acts around **love and forgiveness** – something never really seen before in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, where usually revenge and punishment for the aggressor are invoked (as was the case after 9/11).

However, Ms. Nordahl argued how after the attack Muslim communities around Oslo were scared to pray, as it was immediately assumed that the terrorist was linked to Islamic terrorism. This led to a general increased sense of insecurity, and indeed it was acknowledged that the public response would have been a lot different had the attacker been Muslim. The participants were truly moved by Ms. Nordahl's presentation and her personal accounts around the July 22 terrorist attacks, which ended with a discussion and follow-up questions on the presented material.

Project presentations by Eurodiaconia members

Katri Angeria, The Deaconess Foundation, Finland

Ms. Angeria's presentation focused on an EU-funded project benefitting immigrant youth. The project 'Trail of Involvement for Immigrant Youth' was established in three cities in Finland: Helsinki, Kuopio and Turku. The project aimed at 12 to 29-year-olds with migrant backgrounds who are not in employment, education or training. This target group includes newly arrived immigrants, second generation immigrants and unaccompanied migrants. The project activities support the social



involvement of migrant youth in Finnish society and guides them towards employment, education and other relevant trainings through individual coaching and group activities. The individual and group coaching consist of different issues such as familiarising with Finnish society in terms of work and study life, housing, public services and availability of language courses. In addition, the project set up a joint platform of the public sector and NGOs to reach young immigrants who are at high risk of social exclusion to better guide them to the services they need.

Cristina Rivera and Borja Revuelta, Nueva Vida, Spain

Eurodiaconia's Spanish member Nueva Vida presented on their work in the Cantabrian and Basque region of Spain focusing on **radicalisation and social conflict prevention in penitentiary environment**. Specifically, it covered the organisation's work with inmates and their focus on rehabilitation through access to the labour market. Mr. Borja shared his experience and knowledge, and how the organization also works in conflict mediation and religious assistance to inmates, accepting individuals from all faiths who need support and help in their distressing situation. They also provide sheltering and social support as well as legal support, if it is required.

Petter Karlsson, Church of Sweden

Mr. Karlsson, Diocese chaplain & contact person towards the National Coordinator to safeguard democracy against violent extremism in Sweden, talked in his presentation about “*Trust & Democracy*”, a national program within the Church of Sweden and inside the framework of social inclusion. The program aims to: 1. **Increase understanding around human rights - connected to Christian Faith and Diaconal praxis**; 2. Create co-operative platforms for open dialogue around democracy, values and human dignity; 3. Support local initiative around this themes; 4. Strengthen advocacy and resilience against Populism, Xenophobia and Racism.

Mr. Karlsson also touched upon some of the challenges in regard to the practice of preventing violent extremism, for instance, the confusion around words like: PVE, VERLT, populism and radicalization and their different interpretations. Or the problem of using “new labels” for the same work, to mention but a few examples. As mentioned before, one key to PVE can be found through democracy and trust building, where new alliances of intercultural/interreligious groups work together in partnership and where the perspective of children and youth are included.

Foundation of Urban Areas Network & Policy Development Workshop

The Urban Areas Network was formally founded, its purpose and way of working discussed and there was time to discuss some policy pointers. For instance, what can we do to better show and influence policy makers of the need to invest in diaconal work to address PVE? What transnational challenges are we having in common? And which policy recommendations should be developed in regards to social work in urban areas? Its beyond the scope of this meeting report to go into detail, but the outcomes of the workshop will feed into the future work of Eurodiaconia. Minutes were taken during the policy development workshop aimed at discussing future priorities areas for policy developments, as well as reflecting in general on the material discussed in these two days. If you would like to receive the complete minutes, please get in touch with Stefan Kitzmann, *Policy and Membership Development Officer*: stefan.kitzmann@eurodiaconia.org

Study vist to Stovner Volunteer Center, Church City Mission

Two youth related projects were presented (not focusing on radicalisation or extremism). First, we learned about the inspiring work of “Stovner Leaders”, a one year volunteer program for youths between the age of 17 and 22. Second, they offered us an insight into their holiday activities (winter, summer and fall) for families organized by young adults between the age of 18 and 30.

Eurodiaconia is grateful to have had such a fantastic host with The Church City Mission and we are already looking forward to coming back to Norway soon again.