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Minutes: Online Access to Employment Network Meeting 1.10.2020

During his opening remarks Stefan Kitmann, Policy and Membership Development Officer at Eurodiaconia, pointed out the need for inclusive labour policies especially for young people, women, older workers, the low-skilled, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, Roma and other minorities. In 2020 the network meeting focused on initiatives and effective strategies in order to ease transitions for young(er) and old(er) people (back) into employment and to promote an intergenerational approach among people with low employability. Can we build new bridges between generations and foster solidarity on the labour market – given the increased challenges in terms of the COVID-19 crisis and its broader social and economic implications?

The contribution of Diaconia for a just and transformative social change across Europe manifests, for example, in our efforts to support the effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Therefore, Eurodiaconia will also contribute in the coming weeks to the EC public consultation on the action plan for the implementation for the Pillar that is supposed to be published at the beginning of next year. Together, Eurodiaconia and its members will continue to be a strong actor in the European social economy and advocate for the improvement of the quality of life of disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

Philippe Seidel, AGE Platform Europe

Phillipe Seidel, Policy and EP Liaison Officer, noted that this has been a remarkable year for older people due to COVID-19. He complimented Eurodiaconia for combining the employment difficulties of youths and older people as related, because “how you live as a youth determines how you will live as an older person”. Phillippe followed up with a presentation of his organisation and a brief background on the issue of agism. He said it was the most common form of discrimination which happens to everyone; also, the most widely accepted form of discrimination. A large number of older people aged 55-64 (that could be in work) are out of employment and the challenge is to make them visible to the labour market and re-active them and their hidden reserves again. For this age group work life balance is important too, because e.g. they care for grandchildren and other relatives. This age group was relatively unscathed by the 2008 financial crisis but that is true only of people who were already in employment prior to it. Statistics show that age-diverse teams are more productive. He noted that programmes such as Erasmus+ and ESF+ support

active aging and lifelong learning but more needs to be done to address access to employment for older people.

At EU-level the current crisis is seen as an opportunity to increase the skills, but EU policies and funding programmes could do more to target aged people. Very often employers do not see a point in investing in training or re-skilling for old(er) people. Another aspect that proves problematic is that trainings may not be adapted to students who are not young. Digitalisation will increase the entry barrier to the labour market and the lack of access to skills for older people aggravates the situation. In 2017 EU employers and trade unions approved a framework agreement on active ageing and an intergenerational approach¹, which would be worth following up as it was supposed to be revised/evaluated in 2020. Besides challenges, an age-diverse workforce also brings many benefits to the workplace, for instance, diversity fosters creativity and innovation, facilitates problem solving and provides greater opportunities for knowledge-sharing between generations.²

Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament S&D

The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic is once again creating huge obstacles for young people to find (quality) jobs. Brando Benifei noted that the danger of exploitation is very real and therefore highlighted the need for introducing binding quality criteria for job and traineeship offers in the reinforced Youth Guarantee, but also called for a review of the Quality Framework for Traineeships. He focused his intervention also on the importance to increase outreach to the most vulnerable youngsters and thanked Eurodiaconia and its members for their continues support in that regard.

Stelios Kypouropoulos, Member of the European Parliament EPP

Mr Kypouropoulos highlighted the need to promote better access to employment for youth with disabilities and disadvantaged youth. It is important to increase access to employment for people with disabilities in the general labour market and mainstream inclusive policies. Further, the EU Green Deal as the new growth strategy will create new and sustainable jobs and it's important to guarantee a just transition. Social Service providers, such as members of Eurodiaconia, are also asked to work in the frame of the European Green deal and to support its implementation.

¹ <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/eu-social-partners-sign-agreement-active-ageing>

² https://equides.osha.europa.eu/all-ages/UK_en/why-ageing-workforce-relevant-employers

Anastasia Sarigiannidou & Ioannis Lazaridis, Perichoresis NGO

Ioannis Lazaridis, Board Member of Perichoresis NGO, followed up with a presentation of their organisation. It was officially established in 2016 and runs a number of projects related to distribution of food and clothing, organising cooking initiatives for migrant women, hosting events and collaborating with other organisations and institutions to support vulnerable groups.

Anastasia Sarigiannidou shared more details on their Social Cooperative Enterprise 'Embracing the Spirit of Inclusion'³. The Social Cooperative Enterprise Peri Ergon, was founded in Katerini on January 2019 with the purpose of collective and social benefit. Involved in this effort are people who live their lives based on the commandment to love their neighbour, as it is expressed in the Bible, and who also believe in solidarity and the struggle for sustainable development. To achieve this goal they carry out activities that: contribute to social and economic equality, promote gender equality, create and protect common goods or promote multicultural reconciliation by emphasizing the particularities of the local communities. She also introduced the "Peace Pastries" project, where migrant women can self-organise events (e.g. cooking traditional food) and thereby to foster self-empowerment and intercultural understanding. They also produced masks for their local community during the COVID-19 initial outbreak, where masks were especially scarce. Further, education plays a key role in their activities, as they offer language courses for Greek and English, but also introduced a new subject "Life Coach" to offer even more personalised support for the people they serve in Perichoris.

Iva Zelic, Policy Officer, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

Iva Zelic gave a presentation on the reinforced Youth Guarantee (YG) and the EU's youth policy in the area of employment. There is a political agreement on the reinforced YG Council Recommendation in the European Council. The EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit has been clear that institutions have to act fast (the COVID-19 crisis has shortened the reaction time) and to come forward with ambitious proposals. The YG is part of EU's recovery strategy YES – "Youth Employment Support". The scope, for example, was widened to cover people up to 30 years, aims to be more inclusive by catering better for hardest-to-reach or focuses on stronger partnerships and better post-placement support – to mention but a few new measures. She noted that it is important to create quality jobs not just any jobs. In future schemes the upskilling dimension has been strengthened. Green skills, entrepreneurial skills, digital skills have been prioritised and programmes have been put in place.

³ For further information, please have a look at their website: www.periergon.gr