

Eurodiaconia input to Commission consultation on a Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income

01 April, 2022

Eurodiaconia members have a unique view of the challenges on the ground and the emerging needs and trends. Thus, we urge the Commission to incorporate the following considerations in the upcoming Minimum Income Council Recommendation:

- 1. Integrated Approach:** Coordination and integration with well-funded essential and enabling social services are crucial to address barriers that hinder service users' labour and social inclusion, such as health issues, insecure housing or over-indebtedness. Integrated minimum income and social services provision should be approached from the perspective of social inclusion, reinforcing the call included in the Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion for the implementation of strategies combining adequate income support, inclusive labour markets, and access to quality services.
- 2. Active inclusion:** Member States should collaborate with service providers to identify the specific needs of users and develop person-centred pathways toward active inclusion into society. Active outreach measures should be prioritised to prevent the same people to keep falling behind, such as the long-term unemployed, Roma, and migrants, and avoid the 'creaming' of those who are most likely to be employed. Social services are best placed to ensure these functions, but they need sufficient funding to fulfil such role.
- 3. Life-Cycle approach:** Minimum Income schemes should be geared at supporting individuals throughout the life-cycle and should be fairly applied to everyone. Then additional benefits such as for children, housing or other needs would come on top of that, taking into account the specific needs of different groups.
- 4. Empowerment:** Minimum Income schemes should support and empower individuals to participate fully in society on an equal basis, strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European project. Participation in society should be considered on par with labour market activation.
- 5. Adequacy:** A common definition of adequacy is needed. Adequate minimum income should not fall below 60% of the equivalised median income. Moreover, additional factors such as reference budgets and statistical analyses should be considered. Since reference budgets are constructed on the basis of hypothetical models, they should be complemented by representative statistical data about the actual expenses of the poorest segment of the population, involving persons experiencing poverty.

Particular attention should be paid to price increases in energy and food, with mechanisms allowing for a quick adaptation.

- 6. No conditionality:** The EU should promote a rights-based approach to minimum income that avoids conditionality and considers individual circumstances. Punitive conditionalities are a direct contradiction to a rights-based approach and must be avoided. Non-compliance with the obligation of job searching can result in suspension of the benefit or exclusion from the scheme, while the lack of comprehensive tailor-made labour market activation measures makes it difficult for the beneficiaries to (re)integrate into the labour market and fulfil such conditions.
- 7. Accessibility.** Discriminatory and biased approaches to groups such as Roma, refugees or people living in poverty is a structural challenge acting as a deterrent to take-up and should be further addressed through the recommendation. Transparent and non-discriminatory eligible criteria are key to improving accessibility and coverage. Also, better outreach and information for some vulnerable groups is needed.
- 8. Impact Assessment:** The Recommendation should incorporate an impact assessment, to which civil society and people experiencing poverty could contribute. A national framework for data collection, monitoring and evaluation is also recommended, with periodical reporting from Member States to assess the implementation of this Recommendation.

Finally, we welcome this initiative and recognise that policy guidance can be useful. However, to assure effective contribution towards the implementation of Principle 14 of the EPSR, we recommend the Council Recommendation to **include a call on the European Commission to present a proposal for Framework Directive** setting quality standards for minimum income systems.