



Policy Paper

**Access to quality employment for people in vulnerable situations:
Overcoming barriers and discrimination through a rights-based and person-centred approach**

Eurodiaconia is a European network of 54 organisations in 32 countries, founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconia. Representing over 30.000 local organisations, our members provide inclusive social and healthcare services and promote social justice.

This publication has been validated by our members and was approved by Eurodiaconia's board on 16 September 2021.

Mission

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

Vision

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

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Introduction



The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the entire world, it has exacerbated existing inequalities, revealed new forms of discrimination, and worsened the living and working conditions of many people. In the EU, the unemployment rate increased in the third quarter of 2020 to 7.4% and 1.8 million people were pushed into inactivity.¹ These figures would have been even larger, had national governments not implemented a wide range of job-retention policy measures, aided by the EU Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE). However, some already disadvantaged social groups have been particularly affected by the crisis, among them are young people, women, the long-term unemployed, migrants and Roma.

For instance, EU-wide youth unemployment jumped from 15.1% in March 2020 to 17.5% in November 2020², and it increased more for young women than for young men.³ Equally, there was a growth in long-term unemployment in the second half of 2020, with a higher increase for women than for men. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis has widened gender inequalities even further and has thrown light to the situation of women with disabilities, young women, and women from racialised and ethnic minorities.

Across the EU, migrants have been overrepresented among the essential workforce during the pandemic, being more exposed to the virus. Despite this, unemployment rates have risen for this group since the virus outbreak.⁴ Likewise, non-EU born workers are more likely to have temporary contracts, they usually work for low wages, and lack job security and social protection, all of which have made them more vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic.⁵

Different EU initiatives have been launched seeking to “*build forward better*” and to create a more inclusive and social Europe. Of central importance is the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and its three headline targets which foresee that at least

¹ European Union, 2021: [Joint Employment Report 2021](#)

² Ibid.

³ European Commission, 2021: [Employment and Social Developments in Europe](#)

⁴ European Website on Integration, 2021: [COVID-19's impact on migrant communities \(2.0\)](#)

⁵ EU Science Hub, 2020: [The coronavirus pandemic highlights the vulnerability of migrant workers in the EU](#)

78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030; that at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year; and that the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030.⁶ Furthermore, the Youth Guarantee has been reinforced and the Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE) Recommendation has been launched. Moreover, the launch of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) aims to help Member States repair the economic and social damage of the crisis through reforms and investments. This paper highlights that, for the headline targets to be achieved and for the strategies to reach those in need, particular attention must be paid to people in vulnerable situations. They cannot be left behind as Europe recovers from the crisis and faces digital and green transformations. Access to quality jobs must be guaranteed for everyone, with adequate social protection schemes, decent working conditions, and living wages for all.

In the subsequent chapters we will first give brief insight into the different aspects of our members' work concerning the provision of work integration. Second, we will identify gaps in ensuring access to employment, such as the lack of active outreach as well as effective anti-discrimination measures. Finally, building on our previous policy papers, this paper presents key policy recommendations to promote access to quality employment as a pathway to social inclusion, empowerment, and full participation in society.⁷

We have gathered our members' insights for this paper throughout the year and especially during a public panel discussion and internal network meeting organised in April 2021, a follow-up meeting in July, and in-depth interviews within the framework of our European Semester-related work with our members from Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, and Italy.⁸

⁶ European Commission, 2021: [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#)

⁷ See Eurodiaconia, 2018: "[Strategies to promote access to employment for all people](#)" and Eurodiaconia, 2019: "[Promoting access to employment for migrants and refugees](#)".

⁸ [Here](#) you can find the recording of the public panel "Assessing the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan: The importance of active outreach measures to support access to quality employment for the most vulnerable", and [here](#) the report of the meeting.

Empowering people: Insights into our members work



Eurodiaconia's members work to ensure that our societies provide opportunities for all the people to live in dignity and realise their full potential. They have long-lasting on-the-ground experience working to ease access to quality employment for those who find the labour market farthest away from them, who face multiple barriers to reach employment, and are prone to suffer multiple or intersectional discrimination, such as the long-term unemployed, young people, migrants, persons with disabilities, and the Roma. This commitment is founded on the belief in the innate worthiness of all people, beyond the value that is given to them by job market rules, while at the same time acknowledging work as an important tool of social cohesion, inclusion, and empowerment.

"Beyond generating income, work provides social status and purpose in life."

For instance, many of our members help people in vulnerable situations by operating **person-centred job placement services** with career counselling, **acting as mediators** between jobseekers and companies, by monitoring available job vacancies, and by providing **training opportunities and (basic) skills development**.⁹ They also assist people to build their own businesses and self-employment paths. For instance, Diaconia Spain informs participants about available subsidies to self-employment, provides financial risks and viability analysis of their projects, and with their help people have managed to successfully enter the labour market as freelancers.

When it comes to accessing the labour market, our Finnish, Greek and Italian members emphasise the need for migrants to get familiarised with the rules of European labour markets. In fact, cultural differences are a main challenge for migrants to find and keep an occupation. Thus, our members **raise awareness** about the main rules and expectations of the labour market, for example, the average intensity and speed of work

⁹ To find out more about our members best-practices, please, have a look at our website <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/resources/map-of-best-practices/>

and the importance of respecting working hours. Furthermore, they do **advocacy at the national, regional and local level** to support the structural changes needed to ensure a life in dignity for all.

Many Eurodiaconia members – such as the Church of Sweden – base their work on a **multi-stakeholder approach** that promotes partnerships with private companies and public employment services. For example, the Diocese of Lund runs the ESF project "Collaboration", which will continue until June 2022.¹⁰ Their goal is to develop working methods for people with major health problems in collaboration between churches, municipalities, and the social insurance agency. They offer employment in areas such as gardening/greenery management, catering, carpentry and language training.

Eurodiaconia members also create local jobs, including for people usually excluded from the labour market through the **development of inclusive social enterprises**, active in the largest cities as well as in rural communities. One of our member's best practice comes from Perichoresis NGO in Greece. They run a Social Cooperative Enterprise called 'Peri Ergon' with a **holistic community-based approach**, serving over 60 people thus far in 10 houses.¹¹ They support 2 local families and 8 refugee families who have been granted asylum in Greece, providing suitable and secure housing, access to medical care, psycho-social, legal and educational support, career development, language opportunities, financial planning help and more. In addition, within Peri Ergon they carry out activities that contribute to social and economic equality or promote gender equality.

Finally, our members emphasise the importance of an **intersectional approach** in the work they do, where the concept of empowerment is crucial. Some of them work with intercultural mediators and provide internal training to overcome their own biases. There is no miracle solution to fix labour market discrimination and exclusion thus it remains a constant challenge and everyone's responsibility to fight them, as a sustainable, quality job is a source of inclusion, recognition, and citizenship.

¹⁰ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/villie/esf-projektet-arbetsinriktad-rehabilitering>

¹¹ For further information, please, have a look at their website: www.periergon.gr

What is missing? Eurodiaconia and its members' experience



In this section, we highlight, based on the experiences of our members, various challenges in practice and gaps in legislation that make it difficult for people in precarious situations to access quality employment. Unfortunately, there is still a long way ahead to overcome these barriers and eradicate discrimination on the labour market and there is a need to further strengthen the rights-based and person-centred approach to guarantee that no one is left behind.

Active outreach to people in vulnerable situations

Eurodiaconia welcomed the latest EU social and labour policy advancements, particularly the recently launched European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. However, if active outreach measures are not incorporated into this and other policies - even if the proposed targets are reached - the same people will keep falling behind, namely those who are perceived to have lower employability and who face multiple barriers to reach employment, such as the long-term unemployed, Roma people, and migrants. Thus, the focus should be put on active outreach to people in vulnerable situations to **avoid the so-called 'creaming' of those who are most likely to be employed**, or who most easily get an opportunity to participate in trainings.

For this, the work of social service providers is key, as they connect the level of social rights with the reality of labour markets. Eurodiaconia members have a unique know-how on reaching out to potential users and on (re-)connecting people with employment and support services. Therefore, to have **good and well-funded social services is of the utmost importance**, as well as to guarantee the continuity of these projects and services.

Public authorities, such as Public Employment Services (PES) are one of the other key actors when it comes to active outreach.¹² However, as our members stress, many times these services are seen as intimidating or untrustworthy by some people. To be accessible and inclusive, **PES need to be provided in a safe space for everyone to feel protected from bias and any form of discrimination.** For this, they would benefit from an improved intersectional perspective in their work.¹³ Likewise, sometimes PES are not even accessible for all job seekers. For instance, our Finnish member report that their PES do not cover non-citizens and non-residents, so the process of assisting these groups in finding a job falls onto NGOs such as our members. Likewise, PES are usually unequally distributed across regions, cities, and the periphery. Public authorities should guarantee equal access to employment services for all people irrespective of where they live or where they come from.

Finally, the evaluation that PES do on the impact of their interventions should not only consider the number of people getting jobs, but also the quality of those jobs and who is getting them. PES must act to guarantee their universal reach and actively avoid the ‘creaming’ of the more employable job seekers.

Inclusive & flexible up- and reskilling programmes

Eurodiaconia’s members are providers of training services and skilling interventions which often target people with lower employability or those who require specific support to access work and reach social inclusion. In these cases, skills are a bridge towards inclusive jobs, either on mainstream labour markets or concerning supported employment.

When it comes to education and vocational training, our members identify the urgent need to further **improve the inclusion of migrants and Roma**, particularly women. Research has shown that migrant women receive less integration and settlement support

¹² You can find a more detailed analysis and recommendations on Public Employment Services’ work in our policy paper “[Strategies to promote access to employment for all people](#)”.

¹³ A positive example would be the work of Actiris Inclusive in the Brussels region. A short video of their work can be found [here](#).

than men, particularly when it comes to the number of hours of language training and active labour market support measures. Mentorship programmes, quality paid internships, and volunteer work can also be a particularly effective entry tool into employment for women who already possess the skills and qualifications but lack the networks and familiarity with the host country's labour market. EU and national funding to assist in the development of these types of programmes is key.

Moreover, our members highlight that there is a **need for positive flexibility to break out of rigid up- and reskilling programmes**, which then should be adapted to the individual situation and allow for different "learning speeds". Positive flexibility, for instance, refers to (working) time arrangements that meet the needs of employees and provide choice in balancing work and family life.¹⁴ Increased flexibility in working hours for both men and women can thus have a positive impact on gender equality. This is in contrast to negative forms of flexibility that result in involuntary learning/working time arrangements that restrict the choices of working parents, particularly women. It makes a huge difference, for example, if someone has not been exposed to a formal learning environment for several years and then has to "function" right away when they participate in a further education activity. If other personal aspects come to play, such as mental health problems or the added responsibility of caring for children, individual learning opportunities (positive flexibility) should be offered that are tailored to the respective life situation. This is crucial to create a learning atmosphere that is inclusive and sustainable. Here again, active outreach measures are key to ensure that everyone can benefit from life-long training.

Eurodiaconia and its members advocate for the right to quality, universal, accessible, affordable, and inclusive public education throughout the life course for all.

¹⁴ See European Institute for Gender Equality, 2014: [Study on good practices on reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU member states](#)

Eurodiaconia welcomed the Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience presented by the European Commission on 1 July 2020 with reservations. Regrettably, it seems that the initiatives at EU level mainly focus on **‘skills’ for the labour market**, whereas **broader objectives beyond employment should also be pursued**, such as intercultural skills or digital skills development for people over 65.

For the future, a key challenge will be how to ensure that **young people**, in particular those about to enter the labour market, will have the right skills to thrive in a digital and green economy. These people will need the most up-to-date technical skills to take up emerging opportunities in a changing landscape. In addition, it will be important for them to have transversal skills necessary to continue learning, adapt to change and deal with uncertainty during labour market transitions. Particularly, dedicated funding should be used to improve the levels of **support to disadvantaged young people (NEET)**. The corona pandemic along with the digital and ecological transformation highlight the important role of continuing vocational education as a key response to structural changes in the labour market.

Finally, further education and training in labour market policy, especially for the **long-term unemployed**, urgently needs to be developed further. At present, the long-term unemployed are seldom taken into account in the further education and training provided by employment agencies and job centres.

A strong anti-discrimination approach

One big barrier to accessing a quality job that our members transversally report is discrimination. Structural discrimination¹⁵ on different (and often intersecting) grounds is manifested in discriminatory laws, policies, and attitudes, and is present in labour

¹⁵ According to the [Council of Europe](#), structural discrimination “is woven into the ways our societies function, and operates through norms, routines, patterns of attitudes and behaviour that create obstacles in achieving equal opportunities and real equality.”

markets all over the EU, making it very hard for some people to secure and retain a decent job.

A group especially mentioned by our members as prone to suffer discrimination in the job market are people with a migrant background. As they report, migrant job seekers usually experience stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination based on racial, national, and/or religious grounds when trying to secure a job, and when they obtain it, they often have worse working conditions than native-born workers, are overqualified for their jobs, and are more likely to be exploited¹⁶. They are also frequently impacted by unfair regulations that negatively affect their employability and working conditions.

For instance, our Finnish member highlighted that migrants struggle to find jobs even though there is a need for skilled workers as the population ages. Likewise, our member from Austria reported that migrants have many troubles obtaining recognition of their qualifications obtained abroad due to arbitrary legal criteria and processes. Moreover, members from Spain, Austria, and Italy informed us that asylum-seekers are legally entitled to work but as they only hold a temporary document and not a permanent residence status, many employers refuse to hire them. Our members find it deeply saddening that, in case their asylum application is rejected, the asylum-seekers have to leave the country, despite their willingness to learn a profession and engage in it in the respective country, and despite, for instance, the severe lack of sufficient number of carers in Austria. All these discriminatory regulations and attitudes push many migrants and asylum-seekers to the informal job market where they can be easily exploited.

The situation of **migrant women** deserves particular attention, as they are **commonly subject to both direct and structural intersectional discrimination**¹⁷ in the job market. As our Italian member explained, migrant women's career choice is often limited to care and cleaning jobs, which are usually underpaid sectors. This is not only true for Italy, but it is widespread, as the labour markets are generally gendered and racially divided. Our Austrian member pointed out that women with a migrant background have

¹⁶ More information on this topic can be found in our policy paper [“Promoting access to employment for migrants and refugees”](#)

¹⁷ According to the [Council of Europe](#), intersectional discrimination happens when two or multiple grounds operate simultaneously and interact in an inseparable manner, producing distinct and specific forms of discrimination.

very high rates of unemployment, as they face multiple obstacles such as the non-recognition of their qualifications, or discrimination for wearing a hijab.

Job discrimination is also very common against **Roma** people. Our Finnish member explain that the Finnish Roma are often not even invited for job interviews because of their revealing names.¹⁸ This was seconded by our members from the Czech Republic, who expressed that Roma people are the most discriminated in the Czech job market.

Another group flagged as prone to suffer job discrimination are **persons with disabilities**. Our Austrian and Finnish members mentioned ongoing discriminatory practices, such as the so-called “sheltered workshops”, where very often the work of persons with disabilities is barely or not remunerated and it does not guarantee any form of social insurance. They highlighted how the evaluation of one’s capacity to work defines people’s access to the job market and often leads to major discrimination.

Women are transversally present in the abovementioned groups, being particularly subject to multiple and intersectional discrimination. However, even for women not pertaining to those groups, access to good quality jobs is not granted due to persistent gender stereotypes and discrimination. For instance, they can encounter prejudice as they might have children and be considered “less productive” due to childcare duties. Our Austrian member reported that the number of part-time employed women is significantly higher than the number of part-time employed men, primarily caused by childcare obligations.

Therefore, more needs to be done at the policy level to overcome discrimination on the European labour markets. Policies that address only the offer side, such as training people are useful but not sufficient to allow access to quality jobs for everyone, as they will not solve systemic problems. Thus, **labour and social legal instruments cannot be discrimination-blind or (seemingly) neutral anymore**. They must be anti-discriminatory, meaning that they need to be underpinned by anti-discriminatory measures and affirmative actions (e.g. quotas for racial minorities); if not, the same

¹⁸ This was evidenced by a Finnish [campaign](#), where four well-known experts applied for many jobs with their own CV’s but with ‘typical’ Roma names and they did not get any interviews.

people will keep falling behind, as formal equality alone will not address the specific needs of certain groups of people.

Moreover, our members know and understand that the barriers and needs that a migrant woman of colour may face when looking for a job are different from those faced by a Roma young man with a disability, for instance. Thus, the **intersectional approach** they utilise to work with and adapt to people's needs is key, as it is at this level where policies are implemented and reach, or fail to reach, people in need. This approach should thus be taken on board and mainstreamed in policy making. Consequently, policy measures need to **focus not only on individual discrimination but on the structural level**, addressing the roots of discrimination through an intersectional perspective, going beyond rigid categories. Discrimination in the job market cannot be treated as a phenomenon solely rooted in individual behaviour but in systemic patterns shaped by structural, and often historical factors that perpetuate inequalities.

At the same time, **a lot can be improved by working with the employers and the local communities to tackle labour market discrimination**, as the individual and the structural angles are interlinked. Many of our members are working through a community-based approach to social and labour inclusion, particularly for migrants and Roma. For instance, our member from the Czech Republic is running a project in partnership with a private enterprise, where they work directly with local workers to improve their attitudes toward workers with a migrant background. By doing so, they aim to tackle prejudice and discriminatory behaviour from both the employers and the local employees side. This shows that participation of the local communities and civil society actors (such as our members) is key to fight discriminatory behaviours. Inclusive labour market policies need to incorporate a bottom-up approach by building from what happens on the ground, thus strengthening and supporting social services that contribute to building more inclusive communities and labour markets at the local level.

Publicly funded employment & Social labour markets

The social labour market is an opportunity especially for many long-term unemployed (LTU) people and has proven its worth. For instance, since 2019 there has been a federal law/ labour market programme in Germany especially designed for LTU people which aims to **create a social labour market (publicly funded employment)**. The state finances the labour costs up to five years for those who were unemployed or supported by social services for more than six of the last seven years. This is **accompanied by holistic coaching**, which helps beneficiaries to stabilise their lives. There has been a positive evaluation of the programme and a lot of Diaconal organisations use this instrument now. According to Diakonie Deutschland, the programme is a success because work is financed instead of unemployment.¹⁹ It offers the LTU a new perspective: they receive wages and recognition and can thus participate in social and cultural life again.²⁰ It is therefore particularly important that the long-term unemployed are given a permanent chance to regain a foothold in the labour market with quality publicly funded employment.

Our Swedish member (the Church of Sweden) reports that in the last years there has been a **major shift in the labour market policy from public employment actors to private actors, where the role of civil society is marginalized and where civil society actors lack adequate funding**. This affects the long-term unemployed the most, since they are not seen as “*profitable*” for the private sector. In this new scenario, civil society is not prepared to compete. Thus, churches, to a large extent, use their own resources in the work with the long-term unemployed. For instance, the Church of Sweden runs a project called “More than jobs”²¹, which is a national initiative to promote work for the LTU. The project has a holistic approach as it offers more than getting a job: they help people regain their human dignity. Through it, they offer places for work training

¹⁹ <https://www.diakonie.de/pressemeldungen/endlich-raus-aus-der-langzeitarbeitslosigkeit-teilhabechancengesetz-schafft-perspektiven>

²⁰ Some of the success stories of people leaving long-term unemployment through the support of Diakonie Deutschland can be found here: <https://www.diakonie.de/langzeitarbeitslosigkeit>

²¹ <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/agenda2030/mer-an-jobb--insatser-for-personer-som-star-utanfor-arbetsmarknaden-i-sverige>

at the parish, as it is a safe environment where the LTU can regain self esteem, good health, and skills, and be empowered.

Additionally, the support and development of **social innovation** must be strengthened (in addition to ensuring long-term financing), and those projects identified as best practices should be further mainstreamed. For instance, the Diakonisches Werk der evangelischen Kirche in Württemberg e.V. is part of an very interesting and innovative Interreg Central Europe pilot project called “Social Impact Vouchers”.²² The free and uncomplicated employment vouchers enable companies and applicants to get to know each other and test each other over a period of three months with the aim of creating permanent employment.

A holistic, rights-based, person-centred approach

What our members are doing on the ground to improve access to quality employment for people in vulnerable situations is crucial. However, while Europe recovers from the COVID-19 crisis, we believe that **to have an inclusive recovery it is key that labour market policies take a holistic, human rights-based, and person-centred approach.**

It must not be forgotten that work is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 15 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. It should be a channel for social inclusion, empowerment, and for a dignified life. The focus of labour market policies should be on helping all people to obtain a good job that allows for a better quality of life, not on making them work ‘to the maximum of their capacity’ so they serve the economy. Thus, a change of perspective is needed in the EU policies, from the wording to the substance: **people and their well-being need to be at the centre of all policymaking**, in line with the fundamental values of the European Union.

In the same vein, it is necessary to go beyond the binary thinking of choosing between economic or social progress: they are two sides of the same coin. A strong focus on people’s well-being is good for the economy. We support the call to move “Beyond GDP”

²² More information can be found here: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/SIV-.html>

when assessing a country's health, and complement GDP with a broader dashboard of indicators that would reflect the distribution of well-being in society and its sustainability across its social, economic and environmental dimensions.²³ Consequently, to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring a social market economy that promotes inclusive growth and the well-being of people is essential. For this, we need policies that promote the provision of quality, well-paid, and inclusive jobs, and adequate social protection for all the people living in the EU, paying particular attention to those experiencing vulnerabilities, discrimination, and social exclusion. This will increase legitimacy and the feeling of trust in the EU, thus bringing the EU closer to its inhabitants.

²³ OECD, 2018: Beyond GDP: Measuring what counts for economic and social performance

Policy Recommendations

Eurodiaconia urges the EU and Member States to utilise the available money from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to take immediate action to **boost job quality and fight inequalities and discrimination in labour markets to build a sustainable path of economic growth and social development in the EU**. Against this background, the role of social services is key. Eurodiaconia members have a unique know-how on reaching out to potential users and on (re-)connecting people with employment and support services. Therefore, **to have good and well-funded social services is of the utmost importance, as well as to guarantee the continuity of their projects and services**.

The EU must ensure to reach the quantitative headline targets 1 and 2 in the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** in a way that creates and fosters **quality employment**. This means adopting bold strategies and measures as part of a just green transition and recovery, including adequate wages, job security, health and safety, life-long learning, collective bargaining, and work-life balance for all. A holistic interpretation of just transition is necessary to ensure social and labour market inclusion for those who are traditionally “left behind” and most negatively affected by the green and digital transition. The EU and Member States must strengthen the integration of environmental and social policies and strategies and considerably increase the Just Transition Fund to underpin them.

Active outreach measures must be included in social and labour policies to reach out to people in vulnerable situations and **avoid the so-called ‘creaming’ of those who are most likely to be employed**, or who most easily get an opportunity to participate in trainings. Public employment services play a key role, and they need to be inclusive and accessible services, where equal and universal access is guaranteed for all people irrespective of where they live or where they come from. They must also be a safe space free from bias and any form of discrimination. For this, they would benefit from an improved intersectional perspective in their work.

Access to reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning lies at the base of more inclusive labour markets where all people have a chance to participate in employment, strengthening their position in the labour market and preventing the creation of inequalities. Such investments on skills should combine two complementary but essential approaches. On the one hand, they should primarily **target people with the lowest skill levels and actively reach out to them**. On the other hand, they should also ensure continued skills relevance and upskilling throughout the lifecycle, which then should be adapted to the individual situation and allow for different “learning speeds”. Regrettably, the initiatives on EU level mainly focus on ‘skills’ for the labour market, whereas **broader objectives beyond employment should also be pursued**.

Tackle structural discrimination against members of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, Roma, and migrants, with special focus on education and employment. Particular attention must be paid to social groups facing multiple and intersectional discrimination. For this, legal instruments and policy responses must incorporate a strong **intersectional perspective** to ensure that they adequately address the situation of different groups of people in vulnerable situations. Policymakers should increase efforts to **collect disaggregated data on the basis of factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, health and immigration status**. There is particular room for improvement in relation to the regularity and comparability of the data, where coordinated approach at EU level remains essential.

It is key to ensure a smooth transition between interventions and job placements, for instance through social enterprise settings or accompaniment into jobs. We highlight the importance of work integration efforts across a continuum, stressing transition points and avoiding a strict two-stepped approach - from interventions into jobs - which seldom works, in particular for low employability profiles.

Women are particularly affected by labour market exclusion and discrimination due to the gendered division of labour and persisting stereotypes. Efforts must be stepped up, including **investing in the provision of quality, accessible and affordable social services** (e.g. childcare or long-term care) to enable more women to take up paid jobs. Eurodiaconia calls on the EU to **promote a gender-sensitive recovery from the COVID-19 crisis with a special focus on women in vulnerable situations.**

Too often the **long-term unemployed** and the persons who find the labour market farthest from them cannot benefit from the usual up- and reskilling programmes but need **tailor-made and comprehensive assistance.**

Specific services, such as social labour market programmes, holistic coaching, and flexible skills programmes need to be in place and adequately funded.

The labour market integration of migrants and refugees needs to be fostered. This would require, among others, a better recognition of the value of informal and non-formal learning, inclusive public employment services, affirmative actions, active outreach measures, and a strong anti-discriminatory approach. This should be particularly considered in the upcoming revision of the shortcomings of the Racial Equality Directive, the Employment Equality Directive, and the role of equality bodies.

It is key to create an enabling framework that maximises the opportunities and spaces for the labour market inclusion of people with intersecting vulnerabilities. The EU should continue to **promote an enabling ecosystem for the social economy and social enterprises** and keep raising awareness to tackle barriers and discriminatory behaviors. The support and development of social innovation must be strengthened, and those projects identified as best-practices should be further promoted and mainstreamed. **Socially responsible public procurement** should also be used to promote decent work, fair employment, social inclusion, and equality.

In several cases **employment incentives have not led to long-term employment**. After receiving incentives to hire an unemployed person, some companies rather employ new personnel to further profit from state funds than to continue employing the persons they had previously hired. This practice must be stopped. Additionally, efforts must be stepped up to offer new perspectives so that people receive adequate wages and recognition and can thus participate in social and cultural life again. For instance, through the development of **social labour markets**.

The European Commission must provide guidance to Member States on adequacy of income and ensure that social protection schemes are accessible and delivered with the minimum of delay. Work on enhancing **adequate minimum income schemes** should be accelerated and the development of an EU-wide Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme must be put back on the highest political level.

Implement a **holistic approach to mental health aspects** by recognising the link between socio-economic factors, such as unemployment, housing insecurity, and overall wellbeing. (In-work) poverty and social exclusion must be addressed across the life cycle and across life situations. It is crucial that labour market policies take a **holistic, human rights-based, and person-centred approach**.

The Commission and national governments should promote and **fund projects and transnational mutual learning exchanges** that facilitate the reintegration of persons in vulnerable situations into the regular labour market (including through the ESF+). National governments should support evidence-based innovative approaches in this regard.



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Eurodiaconia is a federation of social and health care organisations founded in the Christian faith and promoting social justice.

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