

22nd & 23rd of April 2021

MEETING REPORT

Online Joint Migration and Employment Network Meeting

This year, for the first time, we organised a joint Employment and Migration Network Meeting on the 22nd & 23rd of April. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it was held online. The goal of the meeting was to share good practices, identify cross-cutting challenges and topics, and discuss potential opportunities and ways forward for all.

This time, the topics discussed were the importance of active outreach as well as anti-discrimination measures to support access to quality employment for migrants, the long-term unemployed, and other vulnerable groups. Further, the (missing) links to the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan were addressed, and information regarding relevant EU funding was provided.

Thursday, 22nd of April

- **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”.**

Our internal meeting was inaugurated by a high-level public panel where we discussed how the recently released European Pillar of Social Rights’ Action Plan can support (diaconal) social services to ease access to quality employment for the most vulnerable.¹ The panel was hosted by our Secretary General, Ms. Heather Roy.

Mr. Mirzha de Manuel, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis at the European Commission opened up the discussion by noting that access to quality employment for the most vulnerable has become more relevant for the Commission amid the COVID-19 crisis, as these workers were the first to be affected by the pandemic. Hence, he explained the concrete measures proposed at the European level to ease access to quality employment for particularly vulnerable groups, such as the Youth Guarantee, the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training, the Roma strategy, the EPSR Action Plan and its employment target, and the Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE) Recommendation. He also mentioned other initiatives under negotiation or soon to be proposed, such as the

¹ The recording of the discussion is now available [here](#).

proposal for a directive on adequate Minimum Wages, the Child Guarantee, and the Minimum Income Council Recommendation for 2022.

He underlined that to achieve the targets of the EPSR Action Plan we must pay particular attention to underrepresented groups such as persons with disabilities, people who live in rural areas, LGBTQ, Roma, migrants and other ethnic or racial minorities at risk of exclusion or discrimination. He remarked that this is not only fair for them, but it is also key to contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable, and lasting recovery.

He further stated that while the Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) instrument has been successful in preserving jobs, as we move into a recovery phase, it is important that we reshape the support to have a lasting and inclusive recovery and more forward-looking measures which allow workers and people to have the skills needed to seize the opportunities of the recovery. Moreover, he explained that EU funds are crucial to support Member States in this regard. In particular, the ESF+ and the Recovery and Resilience Facility can help finance coherent packages of investments in the labour market for more lasting and inclusive growth.

Secondly, **Mr. Marc Angel, MEP (S&D)**, member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, started by stating that the COVID-19 crisis is a reminder that inequalities are growing and that we need to speed up towards a more social Europe. In that sense, the European Parliament has a list of social objectives to be reached by 2030 such as eliminating in-work poverty, eliminating work-related deaths, and having appropriate minimum income schemes to cover anyone in need. Equally, access to decent housing for all and the eradication of homelessness are a priority.

He also highlighted that the EPSR Action Plan is based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals which have three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental sustainability. These three dimensions should be brought together and on an equal level to avoid that the economic dimension keeps overshadowing the others. He stated that citizens do not only want red lights when there are economic deficits, but also when too many people are unemployed, living in the streets, or having indecent wages.

Moreover, he reminded us that the Commission has recently released different strategies, such as the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities, the gender equality strategy, the LGBTQ equality strategy, the anti-racism strategy, and the Roma inclusion strategy, all of which are part of the EPSR Action Plan. But they are just recommendations, so there must be monitoring. In the Action Plan, the Commission proposes to revise the social scoreboard, which is key as it feeds into the European Semester process. The Parliament must ensure that the Commission does good monitoring and a proper revision of the social scoreboard.

Finally, he expressed that on these topics some issues can be addressed at the EU level, but most competences are within the Member States. Therefore, it is very important that Eurodiaconia members push their national governments and Parliaments to endorse and implement the Action Plan at the national, regional, and local level.

Then it was the turn of one of our members' representative, **Mr. Eric Großhaus**, labour market policy and employment expert at Diakonie Deutschland, who mainly discussed the work of Diakonie Deutschland with the long term unemployed (LTU).

He explained that the COVID-19 crisis has provoked a substantial rise in LTU in Germany. Long term unemployment is associated with several risk factors, such as mental or physical health issues, age, and education level, and it often leads to even more problems such as poverty, loss of daily structure, social exclusion, and less chances to participate in societal life. The biggest challenge is that the longer the time of unemployment, the lower are the chances of reintegration into the labour market.

He also shared that since 2019 there is a federal law/ labour market program in Germany especially designed for LTU people which aims to create a social labour market. 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 a holistic coaching, which helps beneficiaries to stabilize their lives and employment. There has been a very positive evaluation of the program and a lot of Diaconal companies use this instrument now.

He continued by stating that a bigger effort is needed through social investment programs to guarantee everyone's participation in the labour market, especially of those who are so far away that they cannot be reached with usual skilling programs. Looking at the EPSR Action Plan, he stated that there is a focus on the transformation processes of the EU economy and the need of skills. However, the plan does not elaborate on the particular challenges for the LTU. Simply up- and reskilling might not work for them. Thus, more targeted support is needed in multiple ways both from the European and the national level.

Later, **Ms. Marina Monaco**, Advisor for the **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)** took the floor to assess the EPSR Action Plan from their perspective. While the ETUC welcomes the Action Plan, as it proposes a forward-looking vision of social Europe and concrete actions to trigger upward convergence, she also recognizes that it has shortcomings.

For instance, comprehensive action to fight all forms of precarious work is missing. Particularly in the aftermath of the crisis, in her views, it is alarming that the Action Plan

does not stipulate the importance of supporting people in the medium term to offset the consequences of the pandemic. In that sense, the ETUC welcomes the highly ambitious employment target but believes that targets considering the quality of job should have been included.

Finally, she referred to workers with a migrant background as one of the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market and society. While they are considered as a relevant group to target with skills and qualifications, there is a previous step missing: guaranteeing them the principle of equal treatment, the right not to be exploited, to access the formal labour market, and in general, human rights, equality, and non-discrimination. Labour migration has been recently addressed from the angle of attracting talents, but this narrative does not include the need to provide quality opportunities for labour migrants and to allow regularisation, so they enjoy full social rights.

Then, it was the turn of **Ms. Cathy Van Remoortere**, Strategic Director of **Actiris Inclusive**, the Belgian Public Employment Service. She shared with the panel the work that they have been doing to foster the inclusion in the formal labour market of those that are farthest from it in the Brussels area.

She explained that people more confronted with discrimination in the Brussels' labour market are mainly people of foreign origin -in particular migrant women-, persons with disabilities, those having a certain religion, and people with health issues. Transversally, also among these groups, women and youth are the most discriminated. According to their research, there is structural discrimination and inequality on labour markets. Considering this reality, Actiris has developed a strong effort to address discriminations in the workplace, both internally and externally.

Firstly, Actiris Inclusive offers help to job seekers that are discriminated. For instance, they have a project that seeks to provide holistic support to newcomers to access the labour market, in partnership with employers. Secondly, they provide consultancy services for employers who want to invest in more inclusive workplaces. And thirdly, they have a Brussels observatory for employment and training. Also, they have diversity managers and a multidisciplinary team to have an inclusive culture within Actiris, as well as a department working with persons with disabilities.

She further emphasised the importance of a holistic and intersectional approach in the work they do, where the concept of empowerment is crucial. Then she finalised by stating that there is no miracle solution for labour market discrimination and exclusion but that it is a constant work and everyone's responsibility as a sustainable, quality job is a source of inclusion, recognition, and citizenship.

Finally, our second member's representative **Ms. Cinzia Fenu**, Programme Officer for **Diaconia Spain**, briefed the panel on their work regarding migrants' employability and perceived discriminations. She explained that in Spain migrants have many difficulties to access the job market: they cannot aspire to have the same jobs that they had in their home country due to problems with recognition of studies, the current labour market crisis, but also because of intersectional discrimination, such as racism, xenophobia, aporophobia, discrimination on religious grounds, disability, etc. All these different forms of discrimination take place at the local community level, in public administration, in access to housing, and of course, in the access to the labour market.

She explained the different programs Diaconia Spain has in place with the aim of training people to actively enter the labour market, achieving a sustainable and quality job, and being able to improve their general living conditions. They aim to fight labour discrimination and social exclusion by working with local communities and the public administration to raise awareness and build a more inclusive and cohesive society. They also work in partnership with private companies to raise awareness and improve equal opportunities in access to labour market for migrants and other vulnerable people, acting as intermediaries.

To conclude, our Secretary General **Ms. Heather Roy** remarked that there is multiple and intersectional discrimination in the labour markets that must be addressed and that we cannot longer accept to be politically avoided. Here, multiple (social) services and multiple approaches are needed. She highlighted the crucial role that Eurodiaconia's members play in enabling people to get (back) to work and in supporting people that face structural barriers to accessing the job market. She added the importance of the principle of equal treatment so all people can achieve security, empowerment, and opportunities they need.

She also emphasized the importance of working in partnership with both the private and the public sector to create an inclusive labour market. In that sense, Eurodiaconia's members experience acting as mediators is crucial to raise awareness and advocating at all levels to achieve the needed systemic and structural change.

Finally, she stated that while we have seen some speeding up in the aim to having a more social Europe with the EPSR Action Plan, there is still some work to do to translate the proposal into something that is tangible and accessible to our members. Likewise, more effort is needed to really address the people that our members are working with every day, ensuring that those in vulnerable position are not left behind, and that everyone has access to quality, dignified, and barrier free jobs.

- **Members only: Breakout Rooms discussions.**

After the public panel, we moved to the second part of our meeting, where we had three breakout rooms discussions with our members.

- **First group: barriers to accessing employment for migrants and third-country nationals.**

In this group, our members listed that the main barriers that migrants face when trying to access the labour market in Europe are: not meeting the legal requirements, not having their skills recognised, language barriers, and not having enough knowledge. Discriminatory barriers were also recognised as a big challenge for migrant job seekers, as they usually experience structural racism, stereotypes, and discrimination on religious grounds when trying to secure a job, and when they achieve it, they usually have very bad working conditions, significantly worse than native-born workers.

For instance, our French member, Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante, highlighted the difficulties in place for undocumented migrants, as they have no access to the legal job market. Estimations say that there are between 400.000-600.000 people in this situation in France. They are currently running a project with the aim to ease access to the legal job market through measures which would facilitate the fulfilment of visa requirements, as the current criteria are very restrictive.

- **Second group: The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.**

During the session, Eurodiaconia's Head of Advocacy Ms. Rita Fober presented the main aspects of the EPSR Action Plan, and there was a discussion with the participants on the related EU and Member States' level advocacy goals, methods, and the available timeframe.

Ms. Fober shared with the participants her presentation and an advocacy toolkit concerning the Pillar Action Plan, and the EU headline targets and sub-targets.

The discussion following the presentation focused on the everyday activities of the members (on poverty, integration of migrants and refugees, integration through education) and the relevant EPSR Action Plan elements; there were questions relating to the measurement of poverty (what indicators EUROSTAT uses and whether they rather measure relative or absolute poverty), and what tools the European Commission has to monitor the implementation of EU legislation and to enforce it.

- **Third group: Intersectionality and Multiple Discrimination.**

In this breakout group, we mainly discussed (multiple) discrimination that people our members work with experience when trying to access the labour market. The most common discrimination appeared to be those against Roma people and migrants, who face racism and xenophobia and who usually would not even get a job interview

because of their names or looks. Roma women were mentioned as being particularly prone to suffering from discrimination.

To tackle these situations, our members have developed different projects, such as working in partnership with private companies to raise awareness and building bridges to help job seekers secure a job. Likewise, some of our participants try to implement a holistic and intersectional approach in their work to deal with external discriminatory practices but also with potential internal biases. It was agreed that the fight against discrimination and for a more inclusive workplace should start from within Diaconal organisations and that there is some room for improvement on this aspect.

Friday, 23rd of April

- **Promoting best-practices: Labour market integration of migrants and the long-term unemployed – A multi-stakeholder approach.**

We started the second day of our meeting with a best-practices sharing session from three of our members. **Mr. Anders Hagman** from the **Church of Sweden** opened up the discussion by presenting the general situation regarding access to employment in Sweden and then focused on the functioning and outcomes of a project called "[More than jobs](#)".

He explained that in the last years there has been a major shift in the labour market policy in Sweden, from public employment actors to private actors where the role of civil society is marginalized and almost totally lacks public financing. This affects the long-term unemployed (LTU) the most, since they are not seen as profitable for the private sector. In this new scenary, 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. Along with this, marginalization of vulnerable groups is increasing. Individuals far from the labour market are more permanently stuck in unemployment. They are also worse off due to fewer low-skilled jobs, a growing number of temporary employments, and because of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, age, disability, etc.

This is where the project "More than jobs" comes in, which is a national initiative to promote work for the LTU - with a focus on the most vulnerable - within the parishes of the Church of Sweden. Mr. Hagman explained that, as the name suggests, the project has a holistic approach as there is more in it than getting a job: they help people regain human dignity. Through it, they offer places for work training at the parish, as it is a safe surrounding where the LTU can regain self esteem, good health, and skills, and be empowered.

He finalised by naming some of the concrete outcomes of the project: the creation of six short professionally produced films that documented examples of best practices;

the creation of a network of dioceses and parishes engaged in support of the unemployed; and a national level cooperation agreement signed between the Swedish Public Employment Agency and the Church of Sweden. The final objective is to create a common arena for the support of the LTU within the parishes of Church of Sweden as a part of their diaconal work.

Then, it was the turn of **Ms. Tsovinar Ghazaryan** from the **WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation** and **Ms. Karine Gyadukyan** from the **Diocese of Shirak** who shared the results of their project "[Vocational training for vulnerable groups](#)".

They explained that they run a social educational centre addressed to vulnerable people where they give vocational training courses for them to learn a trade and to get out of their difficult environment. The beneficiaries of these courses are mainly unemployed women and men aged from 18 to 56.

They further recounted that the main challenge to carry out the project was the highly unstable political and socio-economic situation in Armenia, with high rates of unemployment, poverty, and migration. It is also difficult for them to attract men to their project, as the courses they offer are usually seen as "feminine". Moreover, they explain that job seekers usually face some practical barriers to enter the job market, such as lack of skills, of experience, and lack of awareness about labour market law regulations. But also, they face structural barriers and discrimination. For instance, it is very difficult for people after 40 to find a job.

To conclude, they remarked the importance of working in partnership with educational, social and other related NGOs and foundations, governmental services, and local and international associations to reach out to their beneficiaries and carry out their project in a better way.

Finally, **Mr. Petr Sobalík** from **Diakonie Czech Republic** took the floor to present the outcomes of the project "[At home in Ústecka](#)", aimed to help migrants and asylum seekers integrate into the community, and to reduce prejudice, xenophobia, and islamophobia. It was run in the poorest region of the Czech Republic and its main target was the Muslim migrant community. It included a holistic approach with many activities such as social events where native people and migrants met, social assistance, and job counselling.

Then, he presented a new project that they are currently implementing called "Skills for Employment". For this project, they are working in partnership with IKEA, and its aim is to help migrants, and particularly refugees to gain skills to access the job market. Besides providing Czech lessons, holistic support, and training for job seekers with a migrant background, within this project Diakonie trains IKEA workers and raises awareness in their company to create a more inclusive workplace where migrants can feel comfortable. This program is financed almost entirely by IKEA.

Finally, Petr briefed us on the important work Diakonie Czech Republic does with victims of work exploitation, usually migrants and asylum seekers.

- **EU funding and programmes under the new MFF.**

Finally, it was the turn of Ms. Vera Nygard, our Policy, Projects and Research Officer, and Ms. Giorgia Signoretto, our Projects Assistant, who provided our members with precious information regarding relevant EU funding under the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 period.

Particularly, their focus was on the new and more flexible European Social Fund + (ESF+), composed of previously existing and now merged funds, whose rules and processes have been simplified. This fund aims to help implement the EPSR by supporting Member States to ensure equal opportunities, access to labour market, fair and quality working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.

Also, information regarding the new and strengthened Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) was provided. According to the political agreement reached last December, this fund should contribute to strengthening the common asylum policy, develop legal migration, support third-country nationals to effectively integrate, and to fight against irregular migration.

Towards the end of the meeting, some comments were raised regarding the importance of building partnerships and creating synergies among Eurodiaconia members to get timely funding information, jointly apply to funding opportunities, and to learn from each other's experiences.