

13 May 2022

DIACONIA AT THE HEART OF EUROPE

On the occasion of its Annual General Meeting 2022 in Brussels, Eurodiaconia members wish to express their strong belief in common European action and joint efforts to respond to the increasing societal divisions, as well as the deprivation and isolation faced by many in our societies. Through our services and advocacy we want to provide opportunities for inclusion, dignity, community and well being. We believe diaconal work should and can be at the heart of Europe. We want to see a Europe where everyone is valued for their inherent God-given worth and believe that expressing solidarity, care, love and mutuality through diaconal action can be truly transformative for our European societies.

The context

Europe is a continent with diverse cultures, languages and political views. But we also have a rich shared history and shared values that connect us as Europeans. Over the last two years, however, Europe has been deeply affected by crisis and divisions have appeared across the continent and our societies.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic has put high pressure on our welfare and healthcare systems, exacerbating existing structural and social challenges and revealing major gaps in protecting people from social exclusion. The pandemic and its economic and social consequences have increased isolation and loneliness throughout all parts of society, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. We have seen that the systems that are meant to reduce deprivation, promote inclusion and guarantee equal opportunities, often fail to reach the most vulnerable and those facing multiple barriers and social risk.

The pandemic has highlighted the crucial role social services play in providing social protection and ensuring that every person can live in dignity. For more than two years, together with key workers, diaconal organisations all over Europe have been at the forefront of the pandemic and constantly learning to adapt their services and ways of working to continue supporting vulnerable people.

While we were slowly recovering from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine has deeply hit our whole continent. It has caused massive suffering for people in Ukraine, many of whom have decided to flee and are looking for protection in neighbouring countries and across Europe. In addition, the economic and social consequences of the war are having a much wider impact with increased energy and food prices, once again affecting most people who are less well-off.



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Again, our members together with other social services providers are on the forefront in supporting refugees from Ukraine, stepping in where governments are lacking the capacity. While their role is increasingly recognised on a political and institutional level, organisations like our members are still facing significant obstacles in accessing sustainable funding to ensure the functioning and quality of their services.

COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have affected the way people view their future and increased a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity, which is not only economic, but also related to health and general security concerns. Partly as a result of this feeling of uncertainty and insecurity, we see increasing division and polarisation in society. We also see a lack of attention for people facing discrimination and social injustice, pointing to a need to redefine how our common values should be put into action.

Our values

As diaconal organisations and social service providers, we believe that caring for our neighbour is at the core of our God-given mission. Putting our faith into action means extending care to everyone, regardless of their background, race, faith or political views. Christ teaches us what this truly means when he says “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37) He illustrated that loving others is accomplished by serving actively, humbly, and sacrificially. He spent time with those who are seen as broken, listened to the ones unheard by society and showed us that true transformation can take place only when everyone feels included.

Furthermore, we believe that putting care into action has a transformative power that extends beyond our own contexts. We want to see reconciliation in our societies and are confident that as we advocate for the rights of each individual and seek to empower the most vulnerable to experience full participation, we are following Christ’s example. God has anointed us to “proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1). Making sure everyone in need of care and justice are seen, heard and valued is essential to this mission.

We believe that as diaconal organisations we have an important role to play in promoting unity and mutual understanding across our continent. In a time where division is affecting society, we trust that expressions of solidarity and care through action will challenge the shallowness of selfish gain and bring about change in our societies. We believe that where disunity and conflict are present, we can find an opportunity as Diaconia to bring everyone together and create conviviality and respect for each other.

Our commitment

We are committed to working for a society where everyone is valued for their inherent God-given worth and believe that as diaconal organisations we can bring a message of hope and transformation in our societies. People who are at risk of inequalities, poverty, exclusion and isolation should not only receive the services and support they need, but also be empowered to be key voices in communities and in decision-making across Europe.

We therefore declare that:

- As diaconal health and social care providers and actors for social justice we will continue to advocate for and amplify voices of those who face exclusion and who are often pushed to the margins of our societies, unheard by the majority yet with experience and contributions that should be seen and heard.
- We will work to ensure every person on our continent is regarded with dignity and respect and that our work as providers of services and advocates for social justice shall be based on love for our neighbour.
- We will not shy away from advocating for our values and will be courageous in standing up for social justice, always from a place of love and respect, valuing diversity.
- We will work to empower those in the margins to engage and participate in society even when it means giving up our places of power and influence.
- We are committed to creating unity where division reigns and bringing people together across borders and differences, by setting an example of community that people can trust.
- We will seek to always care for the ones in need without regard to their social background, race, faith or political views.
- We will aim to act as an example for true unity in our European societies by promoting inclusion of each individual, promote social investment, showing solidarity with those whose voices are not often heard and putting care and love for our neighbour into action.

Eurodiaconia is a network of 57 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.

'Diakonia' is Greek for service and in the biblical sense, this means service for and with people in need.