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Breakfast Roundtable Report

Tackling Youth Unemployment in Europe – placing young people at the centre

European Parliament, September 29, 2022

On September 29, 2022, Eurodiaconia organised a breakfast roundtable at the European Parliament hosted by MEP Leila Chaibi, Vice Chair EMPL Committee of the European Parliament. During the event, we discussed the challenges youth face when accessing the labour market and reflected on the perspectives of young people across Europe.

Against the background of the European Year of the Youth 2022, the participants listened to testimonies from young experts by experience and Eurodiaconia members, discussed some of the proposals the EU has put forward, such as the Reinforced Youth Guarantee or the ALMA initiative, and shared ideas on how to ensure that young people from disadvantaged and marginalised groups reach these initiatives and get better access to quality jobs.

Welcome and Introduction

MEP Leïla Chaibi, the event host, addressed some opening words to the participants, highlighting that young people are currently particularly affected by precarity, being it on the housing market, the job market and replicated elsewhere. As housing is the first step to access all other rights, she emphasized the importance of the synergies between housing and other policy areas, such as access to the labour market and mental health. Finally, she expressed her gratitude for everyone contributing to this event.



Anne-Sophie Wislocki, Head of Advocacy at Eurodiaconia, introduced Eurodiaconia's and its members' work and the network engagement on supporting youth and easing access to employment of young people. She highlighted the timely choice of 2022 as the European Year of Youth as youngsters have been exceptionally affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Youth unemployment figures are particularly bad compared to the general unemployment situation within the EU. Moreover, she welcomed the participants and introduced the Roundtable speakers: Olli Holmström, Director of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Manon Deshayes, Policy Officer at the European Youth Forum, Pablo Cornide, Policy Officer at the Future of Work, Youth Employment Unit, DG EMPL at the European Commission, and MEP Chaibi. She also welcomed some young experts by experience from Finland and Austria, who joined the event to share their thoughts and testimonies.

Story from the ground

Denise Goriupp, Expert by Experience

Denise, a young woman from Austria, shared her story with the Roundtable, explaining how she moved to a shared apartment of Diakonie Austria when she was 11, receiving support on various issues. The team of caregivers supported her throughout the years in various areas of her life and helped her to settle down and eventually access the job market. Having started her first job, Denise criticised low apprenticeship salaries that too often do not even cover the minimum living expenses and push young people into precarious living conditions.

Today, Denise wants to share her experience and knowledge and obtain a university degree in social studies to help other young people in the same situation, facing challenges in various aspects of life.



Roundtable Discussion: How can youth unemployment in Europe be tackled and young people be placed at the centre?

Olli Holmström opened the discussion by giving some insights about how the Reinforced Youth Guarantee is implemented in Finland and the barriers young people face in accessing the labour market. He explained that the Reinforced Youth Guarantee is generally working relatively well. Still, while the time period for getting a job, education or traineeship offer should be of 4 months, this takes up to 12 in some cases. He also recognised a growing social polarisation, with an increasing number of young people who fall outside training and education. He emphasised that the European Commission has to ensure the implementation of youth policies at the Member State level.

Furthermore, Mr Holmström stressed the importance of peaceful and unhurried encounters as young people need to build up trust before acting, which is the approach used by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute. He presented the successful project 'Vamos', which started as a small outreach program in 2008 and has developed into a comprehensive service for youth that has already reached over 1400 young people across Finland. Vamos offers holistic support to young people from 16 to 29 years old to get into (or back to) education or employment.

Finally, he emphasised the need to include young people in the national and European decision-making processes. He presented how the Helsinki Deaconess Institute Foundation started hiring some young experts by experience to help organisations learn from experts on the ground. In addition, Mr Holmström explained how Finland is successfully working closely with pension insurance companies to foster youth employment.

Manon Deshayes gave some insights on her work at the European Youth Forum and emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach to meet young people's needs. She explained that difficulties in access to employment and housing have a huge mental health impact and lead to a hard-to-escape circle. The pandemic has surely left a

scar on young people and intensified their pre-existing difficulties on accessing employment, income and on the transition from education to employment.

In her opinion, the lack of quality employment in many countries forces young people to accept unfair working conditions, such as unpaid internships. She asserted that young people need quality, well-paid jobs that match their education and interests.

Furthermore, Manon Deshayes introduced the Roundtable to the EU Youth Test, an impact assessment tool that, if adopted, would ensure that young people are considered during all stages of policy-making processes within the EU.

Lastly, Ms Deshayes identified the importance of actively reaching out to young people as one main shortcoming regarding the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee. She welcomed the recently announced proposal for a Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income. Still, She called for a binding Directive, as many young people are unaware of or excluded from social protection initiatives at the Member State level.

MEP Leïla Chaïbi introduced the Roundtable to her colleague, MEP Marc Angel, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. She reminded the participants of the difficult situation for young people during the pandemic and the challenges they were facing at that time. This has been aggravated by the war in Ukraine, skyrocketing inflation and the cost of living crisis. In this context, she stressed the importance of 2022 being dedicated to the Youth. She made it clear that the former dogma about social equality developing on its own is long outdated. Policies cannot be made anymore, putting the market at the centre, but the needs of young people. Policies then need to be translated into real action to allow youngsters to have access to well-paid, quality jobs with real job contracts, housing, and social protection. She highlighted the importance of minimum income schemes and urgently called for solutions to guarantee that young people have access to them.

Finally, **Pablo Corñide** gave some insights on the current state of play of youth employment policies and initiatives at the European Commission. He explained that many initiatives, such as the Conference on Youth of Europe or the Reinforced Youth Guarantee,

were implemented in the last years at both the EU and Member State's levels. He furthermore stressed that employment policies are closely linked to other policies (particularly education), and their success depends on coordinating with one another and collaborating with all stakeholders.

Currently, the European Commission is discussing with delegates from every Member State challenges and solutions to Youth unemployment. One major challenge on the national level is data protection which prevents local authorities from working together more closely. He also highlighted the importance of targeting support and resources to reach every young person in need, no matter how far away from the labour market a person might be.

Lastly, Pablo Cornide explained the Alma project, an initiative launched by the European Commission in 2021, which aims at supporting young NEETs (not in employment, education, or training) to gain work experience abroad. About half of the Member States have already expressed interest in implementing the initiative at the national level. Mr Cornide emphasised the need for counselling and support in the home country before and after the experience abroad. He admitted that outreach remains one main challenge to be tackled to make sure the initiative reaches the target group.

Questions & Answers

The event finished with a Q&A session in which the participants had the chance to address their questions and comment to the speakers. Participants were concerned about the barriers and high qualification requirements for youth access to jobs in the political sphere (also at the EU level) which doesn't allow for diversity and proper representation of young people from all groups of society in policy making.

Overall, the participants highlighted the importance of integrating everyone into the labour market, particularly people from vulnerable groups, and the need to create flexible conditions in companies and organisations that allow everyone to work according to one's own possibilities and needs.

Lastly, MEP Marc Angel took the floor to express his appreciation of the presence and interventions of the experts by experience. He expressed his commitment to



encouraging young people without university degrees to apply for traineeships at the EU parliament and raising awareness of mental health issues in the context of access to employment.

Conclusion

MEP Leïla Chaïbi closed the event by reminding the Roundtable participants of the importance of listening to youth and tailoring all actions and decisions taken to young people's needs. Ms Chaïbi emphasized that she will continue herself fighting for good working conditions and the end of unpaid internships to ensure quality employment and equal opportunities for young people across Europe.

