

A close-up photograph of a person's hand wearing a black watch and several gold bangles, typing on a laptop keyboard. The background is a warm, textured wooden surface.

Access to Quality Employment for People in Vulnerable Situations: **Overcoming barriers & discrimination through a rights-based & person-centred approach**

An Executive Summary

November 2021

Introduction

Eurodiaconia is a European network of organisations 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.

Our members 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. For instance, they operate person-centred job placement services, act as mediators between jobseekers and companies, and provide training opportunities and skills development.

They also assist people to build their own self-employment paths, create jobs through inclusive social enterprises, raise awareness about the rules and expectations of the labour market, and do advocacy to support the structural changes needed to ensure a life in dignity for all.

Why this paper?

Based on their experience, [this paper](#) sheds light on some of the remaining key challenges 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 all barriers and eradicate discrimination on the labour market.

Particular attention must be paid to people in vulnerable situations, so they are not left behind as Europe recovers from the COVID-19 crisis and faces digital and green transformations.



Key Messages

-  **Active outreach:** The 'creaming of those who are most likely to be employed is a persisting problem. Thus, to avoid the same people persistently falling behind - those who are perceived to have a lower employability and who face multiple barriers to reaching employment - active outreach measures must be incorporated into labour market policies, social services must be well-funded, and public employment services need to be inclusive and non-discriminatory.
-  **Inclusive and flexible skilling:** Our members identify the need for more inclusive education and vocational training, to further include migrants and Roma, particularly women. Moreover, there is a need for positive flexibility to break out of rigid up- and reskilling programmes, which then should be adapted to the individual life situation and allow for different "learning speeds". Likewise, the pandemic and the digital and green transitions show the need for increasing support for and training of disadvantaged young people (NEET) and the long-term unemployed.
-  **Anti-discrimination:** Structural discrimination on different (and intersecting) grounds is manifested in discriminatory laws, policies, and attitudes, and is present in labour markets all over Europe - making it very hard for some people to secure and retain a decent job. Some groups particularly affected by it are migrants, Roma, persons with disabilities, and women. Thus, legal instruments cannot be discrimination-blind or (seemingly) neutral; they must be underpinned by anti-discriminatory measures and affirmative actions, as formal equality alone will not address the specific needs of certain groups of people.
-  **Publicly funded employment and social labour markets:** It is particularly important that the long-term unemployed are given a holistic support and a permanent chance to regain a foothold in the labour market with quality publicly funded employment, as they are sometimes seen as not "profitable" by the private sector. 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.
-  **Holistic, rights-based, person centred approach:** Work should be a channel for social inclusion, empowerment, and a dignified life. Thus, the focus of the labour market policies should not be on making people work 'to the maximum of their capacity' so they serve the economy. There is a need to further strengthen the rights-based and person-centred approach to guarantee that no one is left behind. A change of perspective is needed in the EU policies; people and their well-being need to be at the centre of all policymaking, in line with the fundamental values of the European Union.

Main Policy Recommendations

-  We call on EU and Member States to **utilise the available money from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to boost job quality and fight inequalities and discrimination in labour markets** to build a sustainable path of economic growth and social development. Against this background, the role of social services is key. 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.
-  EU and Member States 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.
-  **Active outreach measures must be included in social and labour policies** to reach out to people in vulnerable situations. Public employment services need to be inclusive and accessible, 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.
-  **Investment on skills 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, with programs that are adapted to individual situations. Moreover, the initiatives on EU level mainly focus on 'skills' for the labour market, whereas broader objectives beyond employment should also be pursued, such as digital skills development for people over 65.
-  Bigger efforts must be taken to **tackle structural discrimination against members of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, Roma, migrants, persons with disabilities, and women, with special focus on education and employment.** Particular attention must be paid to social groups facing multiple and intersectional discrimination. Legal instruments and policies must incorporate a strong intersectional perspective and be underpinned by anti-discriminatory measures. Policymakers should increase efforts to collect disaggregated data based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, health, and immigration status.

[Read our full policy paper!](#) You can also contact our Policy Officers, Stefan and Magdalena at Stefan.Kitzmann@eurodiaconia.org and Magdalena.Bordagorry@eurodiaconia.org.