



## PRESS RELEASE

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# EURODIACONIA AND PICUM HIGHLIGHT THE VITAL ROLE OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR THE INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS IN THE EU

**Migrants are currently one of the groups in society most vulnerable to social exclusion through lack of access to employment, education and other essential social and health services. Today, at an event held in the European Parliament hosted by MEP Nadja Hirsch, Eurodiaconia and PICUM asked the EU and Member States to support the integration of migrants in Europe by removing barriers that prevent migrants from accessing services.**

Access to social and health care services is vital for the social inclusion and integration of migrants and for social and public policies to function well. However, due to lack of political will, legal and practical barriers, as well as recent austerity measures and consequent cuts in public spending, many migrants still find themselves excluded and denied their human rights. Whilst organisations at national and local level testify to the increasing need for social services, they face decreasing support from public authorities and growing pressures to act as immigration watchdogs – checking people's administrative papers before providing them with essential assistance. In some countries, this trend is going even further – to criminalise solidarity and assistance to migrants. Today Eurodiaconia and PICUM highlighted the hugely important role that not-for-profit service providers play in enabling the inclusion of migrants in European society and upholding human rights, dignity and social cohesion on local level in Europe, and thus the need for political and public financial support for those services.

Heather Roy, Secretary General of Eurodiaconia said; *"While diversity is one of Europe's greatest strengths, migrants are often excluded from the services they desperately need in order to become active members of society. This event is an excellent opportunity to remind policy makers of the barriers migrants face and why it is so important to remove them."*

Nadja Hirsch (ALDE), Vice Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee said: *"In light of the challenges posed by Europe's demographic change, including low birth rates and an ageing population as well as other pressing challenges such as rising unemployment and increasing social exclusion, Europe cannot afford to not integrate migrants into the labour market."*

Despite the challenges, the event presented positive initiatives at local and national level as well as testimonies from migrants themselves. Good practices illustrated how service providers continue to find innovative ways to serve their communities.

PICUM Director, Michele LeVoy concluded; *"Service providers are under enormous strain at the moment, politically and financially – the realities at local level are not reflected in political debates and policies at national and European level. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency has made clear that the provision of services should be de-linked from immigration control, and neither migrants nor the people that assist them should be criminalised. Progress towards this is an urgent priority"*.

Eurodiaconia's publication featuring personal testimonies and showcasing the work of diaconal organisations to support and empower migrants was launched at the end of the event. The publication can be found here: <http://issuu.com/eurodiaconia/docs/ed-publication>

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**Eurodiaconia** is a dynamic, Europe wide community of organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of Diaconia, who are committed to a Europe of solidarity, equality and justice. Eurodiaconia is based in Brussels and currently has 39 members in 22 countries.

**PICUM** - the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, is a non-governmental international organisation (NGO) that promotes respect for the human rights of undocumented migrants within Europe. PICUM provides a direct link between the grassroots level, where undocumented migrants' experience is most visible, and the European level, where policies relating to them are deliberated. PICUM provides regular recommendations and expertise to policy makers and institutions of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and at EU level. In 2009, PICUM was awarded participatory status with the Council of Europe.

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