



EURODIACONIA'S RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION'S COMMUNICATION ON FREE MOVEMENT OF EU CITIZENS AND THEIR FAMILIES: FIVE ACTIONS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

29 January 2014

Dear Commissioners Malmström, Reding and Andor,

Eurodiaconia welcomes the Commission's recent recognition of a number of issues relating to free movement and in particular the initiative of a new Communication on free movement of EU citizens and their families. This Communication comes at an important time when negative rhetoric about free movement and in particular so called 'social welfare tourism' threatens social cohesion.

As you point out in the Communication, the lack of know-how and administrative capacity often poses a challenge for managing authorities who are dealing with the phenomenon of free movement. For this reason we especially welcome action point 3 on helping authorities, who are often not fully aware of the social rights of EU mobile citizens and the rules of free movement to meet social inclusion challenges. **However we would remind you of the importance of working in collaboration with NGOs and not-for-profit service providers who already have a wealth of experience and on-the-ground expertise in this area.** Many NGOs, such as Eurodiaconia members are already providing information, advice and support to many mobile EU citizens exercising their right to free movement (some good practice examples of our members work in this area are in annex to this letter). We are encouraged therefore that in the Communication the Commission calls on Member States to "*consider entrusting the management and implementation of some parts of their programmes to intermediary bodies with proven experience and knowledge of actors on the ground*".

Action point 4 is also welcomed in addressing the needs of local authorities by promoting the exchange of best practice. Again, we would stress the need to engage with NGOs and civil society in this process of training and mutual learning. Cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies can create better know-how locally to deal with *local* issues and to ensure more effective integration of newcomers and reduce miscommunication between all stakeholders. Eurodiaconia members are already aware of the gaps in the system and have been filling them as their capacity allows, but urgently need support from their national/ regional or local governments as demand for services increase. **It will also be important to monitor how mutual learning has been effective and whether Member States and local authorities improve in their capacity to deal with EU mobile citizens.**

We were also pleased to see that the Communication highlights the responsibility of the Member States and the EU institutions to uphold the right to free movement including by **countering public perceptions** that are not based on facts or economic realities. Correcting misguided assumptions about welfare tourism is extremely important to prevent feelings of hostility and preventing xenophobic discourse. We were pleased to see the recent Commission report confirming that "*EU mobile citizens tend to be net contributors to the public services they use in the host Member State, that they are more likely to be in employment and do not use welfare benefits more intensively than the host country's nationals*". **However it will be essential to ensure such research findings are effectively communicated to the wider public to correct misguided information and to ensure a balanced and evidence-based picture of free movement.**

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We regret however, that the Communication doesn't fully recognise the lack of support for mobile EU citizens that has until today existed, allowing a significant number to fall into homelessness and destitution. According to our members who are European not-for profit service providers, many such situations could have been prevented if people had received the right information and support before moving to another EU member state and when in a new EU member state. They strongly feel that many Member States have turned a blind eye to the situation, and refused to acknowledge their responsibility in upholding the right to free movement. **It will be important to monitor progress made among Member States in reducing complicated administrative hurdles, providing correct and accessible information and increasing efforts to prevent people from falling through the gaps in the welfare system.**

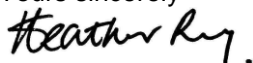
Lack of effective public employment services capable of supporting EU migrants has also meant that our member organisations are increasingly being called on to act as employment agencies, providing support to access the labour market. Furthermore, they are frequently receiving EU migrants who have been caught in the informal labour market or precarious employment and are consequently not able to access any form of social security. We would ask the Commission to better coordinate Member States' efforts in this area in particular working more closely with local and regional authorities and civil society active in this area. The Conference proposed for February 2014 in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions could be a good starting point to initiate such collaboration.

Therefore we would recommend that you:

- Urge the member States to **work in collaboration with NGOs** and not-for-profit service providers to make the most of their experience and on-the-ground expertise in this area.
- **Monitor progress made in local authorities' capacity** to deal with EU mobile citizens and whether the actions proposed in the Communication (such as training tools and the habitual residence guide) have made a positive difference within a reasonable deadline.
- Ensure research findings on free movement are effectively communicated to the wider public to correct misguided information and ensure a balanced and **evidence-based picture of free movement** is communicated by the Member States.
- Remind Member States of their **joint responsibility to uphold free movement** and ensure social rights are respected, in particular guaranteeing that EU citizens who are not self-sufficient have at least access to emergency accommodation and support.
- Work more closely with the Member States to ensure the **public employment services** have the capacity and knowledge to provide quality services to EU job seekers.
- Improve **coordination of social security** between the Member States to ensure no EU citizen exercising their right to free movement is left destitute.

We hope that the Commission will continue to take this issue seriously and that you will continue to monitor the situation for EU mobile citizens regularly, and when necessary that you will reprimand Member States when they are not ensuring the social rights of EU citizens. Free movement is one of the foundations of the EU as acknowledged by the Treaty, and it therefore requires a European response to make it a reality accessible to all European citizens.

Yours sincerely



Heather Roy,
Secretary General of Eurodiaconia



ANNEX 1

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS ALREADY EXISTING IN THIS FIELD

1. Project: “Crossroads” City Mission Stockholm and Gothenburg Sweden
2. Project: “Kompasset”, Kirkens Korshær (Dan Church Social), Copenhagen, Denmark
3. Projects: “Plata” and “Herz as”, City Mission Hamburg, (Diakonie Deutschland), Germany
4. Project: Drop-in Centre “Hirundo”, Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Helsinki, Finland

1. Project: “Crossroads”

Organisation: City Missions in Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden

Stockholm: Crossroads is an advice and support centre for people from other EU countries that live in poverty or homelessness in Stockholm. Crossroads works on behalf of the participants to counteract all kinds of subjection. Crossroads offers advocacy services, various courses and Swedish civic information as well as food, showers and opportunities to do laundry, find warmth and rest. At Crossroads, both personnel and volunteers work to give advice and support, facilitate and assist in contacts with public authorities and organizations, employers, landlords and caregivers.

Crossroads in Stockholm is run and financed by Stockholm’s Stadsmission in collaboration with the Public Employment Service [Arbetsförmedlingen], the **European Social Fund** (Europeiska Socialfonden), the Salvation Army [Frälsningsarmén] and the City of Stockholm [Stockholms stad]. The City Church [Citykyrkan], Doctors of the World [Läkare i världen], New Community [Ny Gemenskap], the Red Cross [Röda Korset] and St. Clara Church [St:a Clara kyrka] collaborate also with the project

For more information: <http://stockholmcrossroads.se/en/article/welcome-to-crossroads/>

Gothenburg: One of the purposes of Crossroads is to provide EU migrants and third-country nationals with information about their rights, obligations and opportunities in Sweden. It is an initiative to enhance integration of EU citizens and third country nationals into the Swedish labour market by advising and guiding them in their job seeking process. Therefore one of the objectives of the information centre is to advocate for the rights of EU citizens living in Gothenburg by raising the concerns at all levels and involving local politicians. The project contributes to the gathering of information about the migrants, their situation and their needs. *Crossroads Göteborg* provides support and assistance in regards to job seeking process (example: making CV’s, as well as contacting relevant authorities both in Sweden and in other EU countries. By doing this Crossroads increases social and economic inclusion of the group concerned.

Crossroad Göteborg has created a network with the Public Employment Office, Migration Board, Emergency Social Services, other NGOs and labour unions in order to raise awareness about intra-EU migration issues. A report about EU migrants, which was released by the City Mission of Gothenburg based on the experiences of *Crossroads Göteborg*, has boosted the discussions in that regard in the news reports and for



the first time has led to the open debate in the Swedish Parliament. The annual budget is 2,5 million SEK (~275 000 €), 0,5 million SEK (~58 000 €) is from the City of Gothenburg.

For more information: <http://www.stadsmissionen.org>

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2. Project: “Kompasset”

Organisation: Kirkens Korshær (Dan Church Social), Copenhagen, Denmark

“Initially we had no intention of facilitating actual job hunting due to limited resources but this is precisely what the clients request the most” Manager of Kompasset

Kompasset's main goal is to guide and support homeless, job-seeking migrants in Copenhagen in navigating through the Danish system and thereby averting their social defeat. Counselling is based on the target group's needs, e.g. legal and social questions. They wish to strengthen the coherency among Copenhagen's few existing service providers who already deal with the homeless migrants. Kompasset's target group is homeless migrants without registration in Denmark (personal registration number or foreign national number) and therefore without access to any governmental help.

Currently this group consists primarily of EU citizens; in particular Central-Eastern Europeans who are entitled to seek employment after EU open mobility came into effect. The other group consists of people from West Africa who have obtained temporary or permanent residency in one of the Southern European EU-countries and are able to travel freely within EU for a designated time period. The influx of migrants has caused a growing strain on private charity organizations (day centres and night shelters). Basic needs are somewhat met (food, clothing, rest, care and some health issues) but the employees stress the migrants' need for actual counselling and guidance. Many have difficulties navigating in the Danish society, especially regarding accessing employment and health services and this frustration accelerates their social downfall. Kirkens Korshær's main objective is to create better lives for people in need with guidance and comfort which is why they have established a counselling service (*Kompasset*) for homeless migrants in Copenhagen.

The annual budget estimate is DKK 1500000 (app. EUR 200,000). The project's trial period is two years (Oct. 2012-2014). From January-July 2013 they have had 250 different users/clients, 40 different volunteers, 3 paid staff members, a large number of enthusiastic collaborators.

In Kompasset they inform especially the EU citizens of their rights to reside here. EU's open borders and free movement is not actively enforced in Denmark and the unawareness of e.g. hiring EU workers is incredible. They aim to include this marginalized outcast group of people in a wealthy society. Kompasset's services are flexible and transitional according to the target group's needs. They alter the services to accommodate the existing demands and approach each individual's challenge holistically.

More information: <http://www.kirkenskorshaer.dk/sider/kompasset>

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3. Projects: “Plata” and “Herz as”

Organisation; City Mission Hamburg, (Diakonie Deutschland), Germany

“Plata”

“Plata” aims to assist homeless people from Eastern Europe to prevent the social, psychological and physical misery or at least mitigate their effects. It aims to:

- assist integration into the local welfare system in Hamburg
- consult homeless people who want to return to their home countries; including the preparation and implementation of return, mediation in the support systems of the countries of origin.

They also offer outreach and transnational social work, translations, support with authorities, public relations, informative lectures. The target group are people from southeast Europe who "live on the street." The situation of many non-German homeless people is characterized by uncertain income, none existent health insurance, no or only little knowledge of the German language, a bad state of health and serious drug problems. Their countries of origin tend to be Poland, Bulgaria or Romania. “Plata” employees speak: Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian, Czech, Slovak, English and Italian.

For more information: <http://stadtmission-hamburg.de/plata-EU-Wohnungslosenhilfe.73.0.html>

“Herz as”

The day shelter “Herz as” offers emergency care to meet physical, mental and basic social needs, food and drink, hygiene, clothes, a mailing address, a locker for money and documents of people experiencing homelessness. They also accompany people to visit doctors or local authorities and provide people with the use of computers with internet access.

For more information: <http://www.herzashamburg.de/wir.htm>

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4. Project: Drop-in Centre “Hirundo”, Finland, Helsinki metropolitan area

Organisation: Helsinki Deaconess Institute

Helsinki Deaconess Institute runs the drop-in centre *Hirundo* to support EU migrants in danger of facing marginalization in Helsinki. The Centre was established in 2011. The work in Hirundo is rooted in community work practices, based on principles of social justice, equality and anti-discrimination. The central mission of



the Hirundo is to meet emergency basic needs, to prevent the marginalization in the Finnish society, to promote and enable the participation of people in making changes in their lives and to prevent discrimination and racism against among the most vulnerable EU migrants, including Roma.

The services of Hirundo focus on counseling and support processes that are meant to help the service users to build an understanding of the problems faced and the possible solution. This process facilitates also information and network with other organizations, public authorities, foundations or NGO's. The work aims as well to maintain and enhance the communication between the home community, the migrant and the migration community, in this case Finland. The work revolves around understanding the long term poverty and exclusion and discrimination faced by EU migrants in the home countries and in the countries where they migrate, understanding that should lead to good practices and long term solutions. The drop-in centre provides a welcoming and confidential atmosphere. The users can take shower, do their laundry, and access the computers, TV and newspapers and have light meals. The centre provides as well a space for social interaction and discussion group in between the users. According to the needs, the centre is visited by experts on different fields: maternity nurses, lawyers, and others.

Hirundo has 60-70 service users in a day which turns to 6000 service users in a year.

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