



## Key messages for the Italian Presidency of the EU

June 2014

Dear Ambassador,

Eurodiaconia welcomes the Italian Presidency of the European Union and we wish you every success as you take over the leadership of the Council in July. Eurodiaconia would like to draw your attention in particular the issue of youth exclusion which is of significant concern to our members across Europe, and an issue which we know is having a considerable impact on Italy. Our request is that under the auspices of your presidency of the EU, you put youth inclusion at the top of your social agenda. If urgent action is not taken, the EU and its Members States are in a danger of seeing today's youth become the lost generation of tomorrow.

Since 2010 the overall number of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion has increased by 10 million in the EU. However we see that children and youth have particularly suffered from the social impact of the crisis compared to the rest of the population with 29.7% of Europe's young men and women experienced poverty and social exclusion in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, this number has increased over the past years from 25.8 in 2009. The share of young people not in employment and not in any education and training (NEETs) more than doubled in seven countries<sup>2</sup> and youth unemployment alone has increased in most EU member states<sup>3</sup>.

We would however also stress that youth inclusion is **not only about labour market integration** and preparing young people to be productive and competitive economic units. Youth poverty and social exclusion, participation and access to rights are important issues that need to be addressed urgently. It will be vital to approach youth policies in a holistic way, preparing young people to be fully active citizens and empowering them to reach their full potential in life. This can be through community engagement such as youth clubs or through informal and non-formal education. Participation and empowerment of young people is essential if they are to overcome feelings of helplessness and exclusion.

**Access to quality social and health services** is a prerequisite to combating youth poverty and social exclusion. Lack of access to affordable, quality services significantly hinders access to education, to the labour market, but also to social participation, social inclusion, and wellbeing. Inadequate access to services due to reduced social spending and ongoing austerity measures has had a significant impact on access to services for youth. Access to universal social protection and quality services are essential for youth inclusion, however specific, targeted measures can ensure intervention reaches the most vulnerable youth. For this reason we call on the Presidency to continue implementing the **social investment approach**, not only through social protection but through investing in social services.

We are also concerned by a lack of access to **education and training** opportunities which can foster intergenerational poverty. Low educational attainment and early school leaving due to inherent costs (clothes, books, transport etc.), inadequate housing or material deprivation for example are a few examples of some of the obstacles young people face. Investment in education will be essential in preparing young people to enter the labour market, but it will also be essential to ensure sufficient income support in families to ensure lack of financial means does not present an obstacle to educational attainment. We would remind you that reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10% falls under one of the five headline targets of Europe2020.

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<sup>1</sup> EU-28, Eurostat, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Read more at Bruegel <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/blog/detail/article/1290-interactive-map-europes-social-polarisation-and-the-generational-struggle/>

<sup>3</sup> Europe's Social Problem and its implications for economic growth, Bruegelpolicybrief, April 2014





Social enterprises providing social services enable people, including young people, to integrate or reintegrate into society, to access and retain employment and offer a route out of poverty and exclusion, reinforcing the socio-economic independence of service users. Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) in particular can play a key role in integrating young people facing difficulties and discrimination. An example of this is a youth project run by Diaconia Valdese who are tapping into the employment potential in the agricultural sector [www.cascinasocialecarloalberto.it/index.html](http://www.cascinasocialecarloalberto.it/index.html). In the context of increasing interest at EU and national level of involving private finance for the development of social enterprises, it is important that finance should not detract from the state responsibility to financially support organisations providing services, and in terms of regulation to ensure access. Many social enterprises are not able to be financially self-supporting, due to the nature of their work or the life situation of service users, therefore financial support for social enterprises may need to be long-term.

Finally, we are particularly concerned that a sense of hopelessness and despair looms over many young people in Europe today sparked by the crisis which has only demonstrated that the fallibility of the world's economic and financial systems. Decreasing confidence in governments and in democratic processes is also creating a sense of individualistic self-reliance where young people feel they have no control over their lives or voice in the societies in which they live. The result is greater risk of social unrest and declining social cohesion. And whilst a number of EU initiatives, such as the Youth Guarantee are welcome, we are concerned that it will be insufficient to trigger a breakthrough and may even raise expectations that cannot be met, further undermining the trust of citizens in the EU.

## Therefore, Eurodiaconia proposes the following recommendations to the Italian Presidency

- Ensure a **social investment approach**, including the promotion of adequate social protection, is mainstreamed into all EU-level processes, ensuring the sustainability of essential social protection systems and social and health services
- Encourage member states to invest in **youth work and youth services** for the successful social and professional integration of young people
- Discourage member states from continued spending cuts in quality **social, health and education services** that benefit the whole of society in the long term
- Prioritise a **social market economy** and invest in social enterprises, particularly those that aim to engage unemployed and disadvantaged youth
- Recognise the diversity of **social enterprises**; ensure EU-level actions are taken to support social enterprises of all types and that initiatives relating to financial support instruments for social enterprises do not only address private financing mechanisms, but also public
- Ensure the **Third Sector Summit** planned for the Autumn involves representatives from all sectors of the social economy; established social actors and service providers as well as social entrepreneurs
- Ensure **social assistance**, especially adequate minimum income support and housing support for all
- Encourage member states to invest in personalised counselling and comprehensive, pathway approaches to inclusive labour markets for youth as part of an **active inclusion approach**
- Call on the Member States to **work in collaboration with NGOs and not-for-profit service providers** with on-the-ground expertise in the area of social inclusion of youth
- Call on the Member States to allocate additional national funds for the implementation of the **youth guarantee**

We believe that Eurodiaconia, representing institutions and churches that provide social, health and education services in over 30 European countries, has the expertise to offer valuable input into matters being undertaken during the Presidency. We trust that you will give the issues raised in this letter careful consideration and make social justice and solidarity a priority for your Presidency.

Yours sincerely

Heather Roy, Secretary General – Eurodiaconia