

## Mapping 20 years of experience in the fight against poverty

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.



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# MAPPING 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

*“Supporting people in different ways for the body and soul. (...) Help people to help themselves. Not only giving food but also seed for the next season.”*  
Iceland

## INTRODUCTION

Eurodiaconia is a federation of organisations, institutions and churches providing social and health services and education on a Christian value base throughout Europe.

Our 33 members, from 21 countries in Europe, are active in the provision of social services. They are rooted in Christian faith within the traditions of the Reformation as well as in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions. As the leading network for diaconal work in Europe, we look to develop dialogue and partnership between members and influence and engage with the wider society. We do this to enable inclusion, care and empowerment of the most vulnerable and excluded and ensure dignity for all.

Our mission is to represent 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.

On the occasion of 2010, the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Eurodiaconia secretariat decided to carry out a mapping of our members' work in the fight against poverty and social exclusion from 1990 to 2010. The initiative was planned to improve the knowledge of the scope and evolution of the services provided by our members, hoping that it will allow us to show decision makers and each other the breadth and impact of Diaconal anti-poverty work across Europe. This report also aims to provide a better understanding of our members' work on the fight against poverty and social exclusion, in order to feed into the EU strategies on social inclusion and cohesion.

The following report, based on a member survey carried out between March to May 2010 and on general background information, starts by presenting briefly our members' activities in terms of awareness raising, advocacy and training on poverty. It then goes on to present an overview of the scope of services provided by our members. Finally, the report looks at a more general outline of our members' experience and perspective on their own work and achievements, as well as on the evolution of poverty and social exclusion in their country, between 1990 and 2010.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report presents the summary findings of a study mapping Eurodiaconia's members' work in the fight against poverty and social exclusion from 1990 to 2010.

This study highlights Eurodiaconia members' diversity of size and history in the provision of social services. It also reveals their common trends of evolution as it seems diaconal organisations have often started as a community based initiative, inspired by Christian ethos, responding to the community's need. Today these organisations continue to develop a high range of services, increasing professionalization and a constant striving for quality

Overall, the study underlines the ability of our members to respond and reshape their services based on society's needs (for instance with the increasing provision of services for migrants) against a backdrop of reduced funding.

### **Adaptability, Quality and Professionalism**

First, this study shows that over the years, Eurodiaconia members have established a very broad scope of activities targeting mainly the most vulnerable. From services of support to people living in extreme poverty, to strategies of long-term structural change, from services for disabled people to employment advice, our members' expertise covers a wide network of competences used to tackle the broad spectrum of social needs.

Moreover, the general evolution of our members' activities shows that they have had to increase the scope and quantity of services they provide, sometimes moving beyond their traditional structures and services to follow social needs and trends, such as running fewer hospitals, but creating employment related services.

The key word appearing to come from this mapping of our members' work over the past 20 years is therefore "change". Changing structures, changing strategies, changing poverty, revealing ultimately the efficient adaptability of our members; Eurodiaconia members sometimes becoming pioneers in many activities and services in their countries.

But very importantly, these changes and adaptability have not been at the cost of the quality of the services provided. On the contrary, over the years, Eurodiaconia members have established themselves as (the) key actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Struggling against the initial image of "amateur Christian do-gooders", but desiring to stick to their Christian-based identity, they had, sometimes more than others, to shine by the quality of their work in order to be recognised as the credible interlocutors they now are. This has led to a high level of professionalism, sometimes fostered by the exchange and ideas received through the Eurodiaconia network.

### **Members' Experience**

Through this mapping, Eurodiaconia members demonstrate the scope and quality of their work, serving the most vulnerable all across Europe for more than 20 years. Today, looking back, they acknowledge the importance of their work in helping individuals and families. But looking at the overall situation, they describe a "downward process" of increasing inequalities, with "traditional" and new forms of exclusion. Consequently, the focus of the services they provide has sometimes changed. In recent years for example, members have had to make available more services dealing with over-indebtedness.

## METHODOLOGY

### Source of information

This report is based on two main sources. The first is a questionnaire answered between March and May 2010 by 19 of our members from 16 countries. For the sake of analysis, we have sometimes made a distinction between: Western European countries (6), Eastern European countries (6) and non EU countries (4) (cf. list of respondents on page 22).

The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts. The first one was a table in which each member could indicate the activities their organisation has organized in terms of awareness raising, advocacy and training on poverty and social exclusion since 1990. The second part was another table where members could indicate the services their organisation have been providing since 1990. Both tables allowed members to specify when the services were established (before 1990, between 1990 and 2000, or after 2000) and to specify if the selected activities were either ongoing, completed or discontinued. The third and last part of the survey included open questions about the organisation's priorities, its biggest achievements since 1990, the evolution of the organisation regarding structure and size and our members' general impression about the evolution of poverty and social exclusion in their countries since 1990.

The second source of information is more informal and originates from the regular contact we keep with our members, our understanding of their work and challenges as well as background information, reports of activities and annual reports. This second source has been used for analyzing and interpreting the data collected through the questionnaire.

### Analysis

This research has been designated to present an overview of Eurodiaconia's members' work and its impact over the past 20 years in combating poverty and social exclusion. This research will allow us to present the breadth and impact of the anti-poverty work carried out by Diaconia across Europe to decision makers from Member States and the European institutions.

This report presents interesting trends such as for instance a striking increase in the establishment of food bank services. Using the analysis we have formulated some suggestions but these suggestions have not been checked against extensive research and must therefore be seen as food for thought rather than definite conclusions.

### Focus on Eurodiaconia members

Because Eurodiaconia is first and foremost a network of its members and their activities, this report will regularly "stop" to focus on them: their overall strategy, some of their diaconal projects, or projects as part of a wider network.

## Who are our members?

This report presents an overview of our members' activities and priorities. Before going into the details of their work, it is important to be aware of who they are and what their differences and common points are.

Eurodiaconia's 33 members are platform for diaconal actors in 21 European countries. They can be divided into 3 kinds of groups:

- Diaconal department of churches (e.g. Church of Sweden)
- Church related providers of social and health services (e.g. Sleska Diakonia)
- Christian based providers of social and health services (e.g. Kofoedskole)

Eurodiaconia members are very diverse in terms of size, culture, traditions and their consequent role as national actors. This heterogeneous membership can simplistically be explained by history: with on the one hand well-established strong members, with a long tradition of diaconal work and, on the other hand, smaller diaconal networks established or re-established after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, or simply in minority due to the religious background of their countries (such as in Italy and Spain).



Despite these differences in terms of size, our members have a strong identity in common which is rooted in Christian values. They feel they have a responsibility to care for people who have fallen through the net of traditional social protection, hence the activities for “emergency” social action: soup kitchens, food banks, shelters, and temporary accommodation. Our members also underline their difference in caring for the most vulnerable: through rehabilitation services for substance users, services for families, counseling and of course pastoral counseling, they try to achieve more than providing a service, but aim to contribute to the individuals’ restoration, working toward “help to self help”.

***“Help to self-help” the example of Kofoeds Skole: empowering people through training and education***

Kofoeds Skole works with long-term unemployed people furthest away from the labour market. In addition to unemployment, people in Kofoeds Skole are confronted with multiple social and health problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, homelessness and mental problems. The school has developed a comprehensive social rehabilitation programme that promotes social inclusion as well as labour market integration. The school refers to its users as ‘students’ to emphasise the role of education in developing people’s self-esteem and abilities.



Finally, it is interesting to be aware of the very broad scope of activities provided by our members. These are generally orientated toward two axis of action: 1) direct service to people in need and 2) advocacy for change. Eurodiaconia’s bigger members are often also active in overseas development work.

The needs of the people for which Eurodiaconia members provide services for are numerous and range from illnesses to financial problems. Through these services, our members reach out to those marginalised by society (***a complete summary table of our member activities survey, is available for download on our website.***)

## AWARENESS RAISING, TRAINING ON POVERTY AND ADVOCACY

The following part is divided into three sections. It will look first briefly at Eurodiaconia's members' awareness raising activities, then focus on their policy work and finally concentrate on the type of services they have set up over the past 20 years working against poverty and social exclusion.

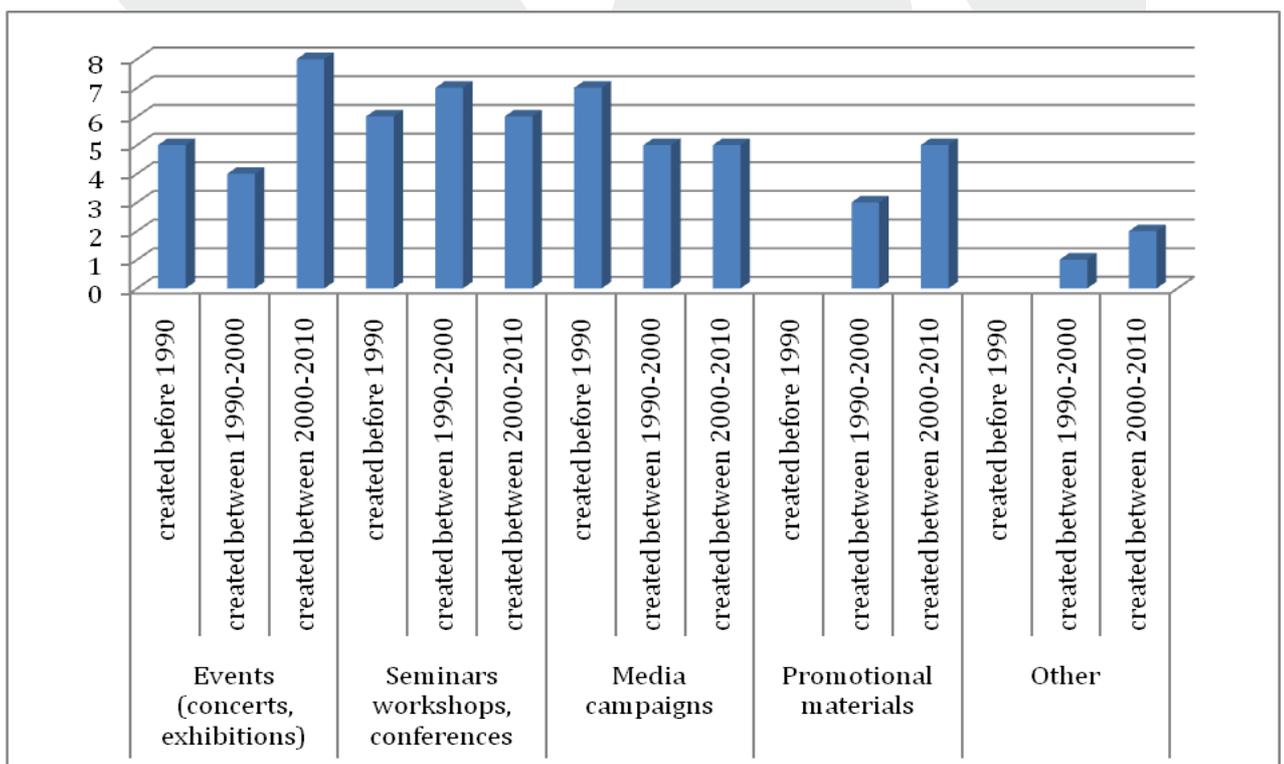
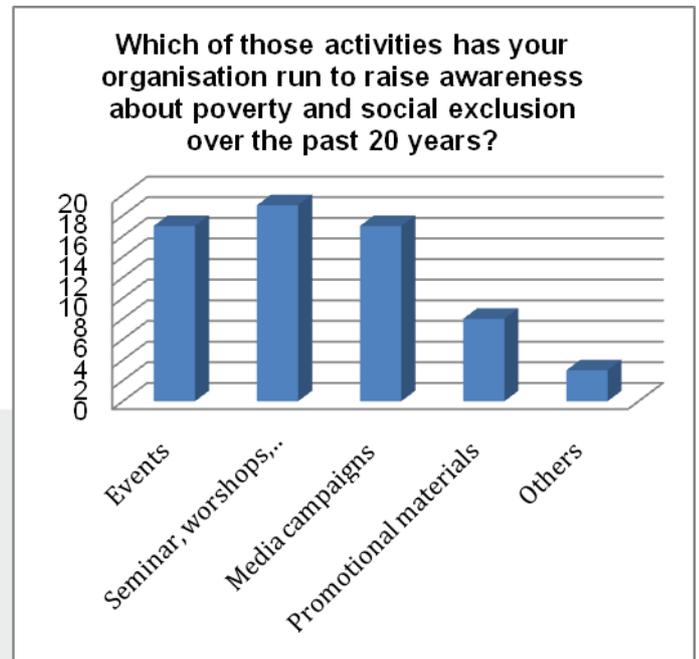
### Awareness raising

Eurodiaconia's members were asked which type of activities their organisation ran to raise awareness on poverty and social exclusion over the past 20 years.

A first look at the summarized graph shows that over the years Eurodiaconia members have mainly used seminars, workshops and conferences, as well as public events and media campaigns.

However, looking at the detailed evolution (graph 2), one can observe a slight tendency of increasing number of "public events" (such as exhibition and concerts) as well as the use of promotional material and "other" means whereas the use of more classical tools of action such as

conferences and media campaign seems to have been relatively stable over the past 20 years.



***Diaconia Austria (acting in the network of EAPN Austria.) and the Alle Smartmobs campaign.***

Smartmobs are a good example of one of the increasing new awareness raising activities. Smartmobs are short and simple public actions to raise awareness for a specific issue. For the 2010 national awareness raising campaign against poverty, at each meeting, people were invited to come and to bring a spoon. The spoons were used as a symbol for good distribution but also as a tool to make noise and thereby raise attention. The word 'poverty' was written on the ground with chalk and then the spoons were used by laying down in a line to 'cross out poverty'. Small leaflets were distributed and people were asked to call the prime minister to challenge him as to what will be done to effectively fight poverty and guarantee a better distribution of the country's wealth. <http://smartmobsgegenarmut.wordpress.com/>



## Training on poverty and social exclusion

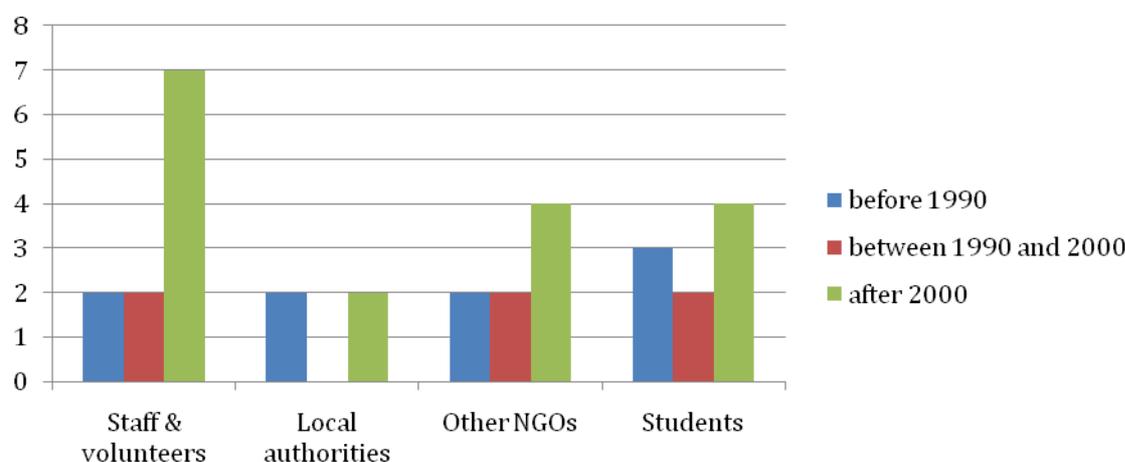
Eurodiaconia members were asked about the training activities they organised on poverty and social exclusion since 1990.

The results of the survey reveal that they have been involved in training different categories of people on the theme of poverty and social exclusion.

These activities have been carried out for the past 20 years, but it seems they have developed more since 2000. Recently, many of our members have focused on training their own staff and volunteers.

Today, some of our members continue to develop their training by promoting staff exchange with other diaconal organisation or cooperating with formal institutes of education. Looking at the future, some members cooperate to work together toward the establishment of regional diaconal centres for diaconal education.

Whether training is organised to raise awareness among the general public and decision makers, or whether it is aiming at the specialisation of their staff members, Eurodiaconia's member organisations use this tool more and more, sharing their expertise and knowledge to equip partners in the fight against poverty and social



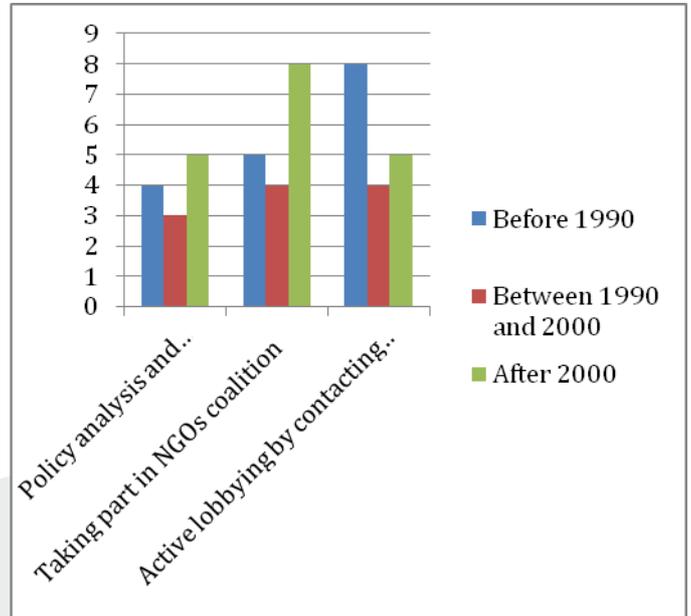
exclusion.

## Policy and Advocacy

Eurodiaconia members have been asked to indicate the activities their organisations have been running in terms of policy and advocacy over the past 20 years.

As it can be seen, members are constantly active in various form of advocacy. Recently, they have been working more in cooperation with other NGOs in coalitions. It does not appear on the graph, but a more detailed analysis of the results show that “Western European members seem to be more active in terms of policy and advocacy, with the exception of our Polish member which is also very involved in this area.

Through advocacy and lobbying, our members use their concrete experience to advise decision makers, meeting with ministries and giving their opinion on specific social policies. They also sometimes encourage their own supporters to contact decision makers through visible advocacy actions, e.g. postcard campaigns.



### Kerk in Actie – advocacy and lobbying

Our Dutch member, Kerk in Actie, offers several ways to “Kom in Actie”, to act against poverty and social exclusion. Amongst others, their website encourages supporters to write to their authorities regularly (e.g. summer and advent periods) or for specific topics (e.g. safeguarding of Roma rights). KIA also organised a postcard campaign to “bridge the gap of poverty”. By equipping their supporters and raising awareness among churches, KIA brings political change for social justice in the Netherlands.

**Kerk in Actie**

Particulieren | Kerk en gemeenten

Home | Actueel | Acties in mijn kerk | Interactief | ZWO | Diaconaat | Uw zoekterm...

U bent hier: kerk en gemeenten » acties in mijn kerk » doe mee met schrijfacties » Zomerschrijfactie 2010

**Acties in mijn kerk**

- Mogelijkheden voor mijn kerk
- Projecten zoeken
- Collectes
- Campagnes
- Voorbeden
- Schrijfacties
  - Paasgroetenactie
  - Zomerschrijfactie
  - Adventschrijfactie
  - Inzamelingsacties

**Zomerschrijfactie 2010**

Kerk in Actie organiseert iedere zomer in samenwerking met Amnesty International een schrijfactie voor de mensenrechtensituatie in een bepaald land. U kunt hier als individu aan meedoen of hier aandacht voor vragen binnen uw kerk. De actie van Amnesty duurt langer dan 1 juni van dit jaar. Gemeenteleden kunnen zelf brieven schrijven of handtekeningen zetten naar autoriteiten in Italië en Roemenië. De Roemeense brief is vertaald, maar de Engelse brieven is dat niet het geval, maar wij gaan ervan uit dat er in uw plaatselijke kerkelijke gemeente leden zijn die dit kunnen doen.

**Menswaardige behandeling van Roma-families**

In talloze delen van Europa worden Roma-families (zigeuners) op brute wijze uit hun huizen gezet. Zo ook in Rome in Italië en in Miercurea Ciuc in Centraal-Roemenië. Door mee te doen aan de Zomerschrijfactie 2010 kunt u de autoriteiten van deze steden aanschrijven en aandringen op een menswaardige behandeling van de Roma-families in hun regio. U kunt ook de burgemeester in uw gemeente vragen een brief te sturen aan de burgemeester in Roemenië.

In brieven aan het Roemeense Orthodoxe Patriarchaat en aan de Synode van de Waldenzenkerk

**STEUN ONS! DONEER ONLINE**

**KERK IN ACTIE EXPRESS**  
Altijd op de hoogte blijven?  
Meld u nu aan!

## MAPPING OF SERVICES PROVIDED

In this second part, the report will present the survey results as to what type of services Eurodiaconia members have indicated they provide, as well as the period in which it was established. Overall, it is very interesting to compare the evolution of the provision of services, for instance to see the rise of employment related and counselling services since 2000 and a parallel decrease in the provision of what could be seen as the "traditional" services of diaconia, such as hospitals or drug and alcohol abusers rehabilitation services.

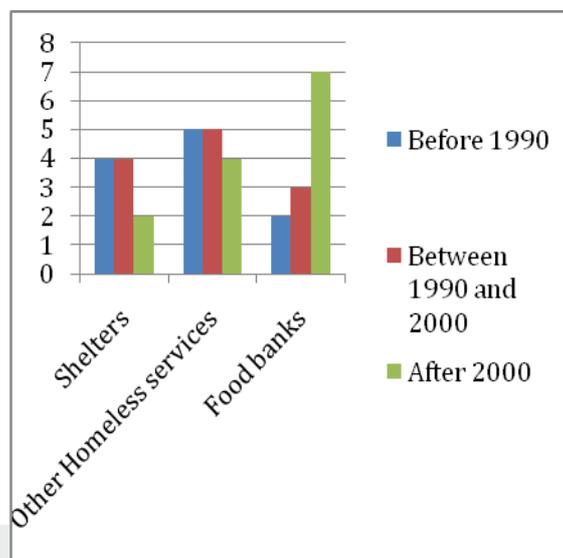
If this report can present our members experience, it is however not possible to give a precise explanation for the observed evolution. It is important to note that the following graphs reflect the establishment of services and not the overall provision of services. Therefore, a graph indicating a decrease in homeless services for example, will mean a decrease in the number of such services that have been set up. The service itself might further develop its activities or enlarge its scope of action.

### Tackling directly (extreme) poverty

#### Shelters, other homeless services and food banks

This first graph is especially striking as for the dramatic rise in the number of food banks that have been set up since 2000. There could be many reasons for this: rising inequalities and increasing new needs or stronger engagement of private organisations as social actors, taking an active part in society by being willing to voluntarily contribute by direct cash transfer or in kind donation, following on the development of the concept of corporate social responsibility.

The graph also reveals a constant commitment of Eurodiaconia's members to provide services for the most vulnerable with a continual creation of shelters and other homeless services, with only a recent decrease in the creation of such services.



#### ABEJ France – Member of the FEP

The ABEJ is a member of the French diaconal network: the "Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante" (FEP) consisting of 360 organisations and foundations representing about one thousand health and social services providers and about 28 000 employees and volunteers.

ABEJ aims to "Welcome, heal and support" homeless people. It reaches out to the most excluded through several centers and programmes. For instance:

- A day center for young people and a day center for adults, both offering a safe space to chat and rest but also housing, employment and health support.
- Several night shelters with different degrees of independence and support, depending on the users' needs and abilities.
- A medical center for homeless people. This center offers a safe environment to be healed and recover for a short-term, but also offers long-term e.g. care for patients affected by cancer .

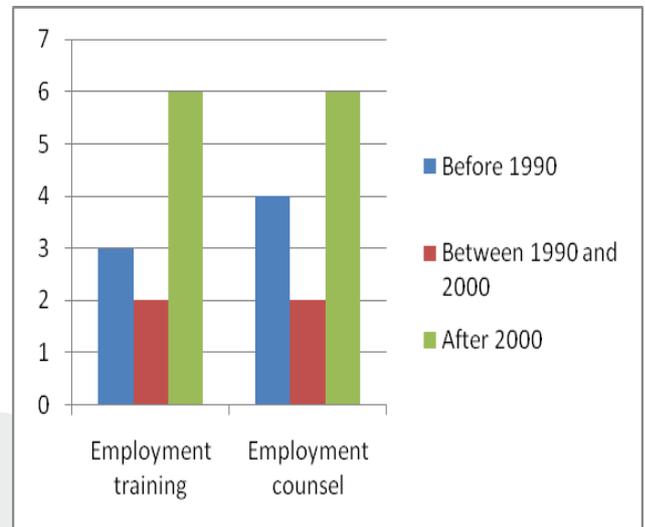
## Working towards social inclusion

### Employment support

This second graph is similarly striking in that it shows a tripling in the number of employment related services that have been established between the 1990's and the period after 2000. One of the reasons for such an increase is likely to be the recognition of the good work and of the role of non-state providers in the provision of such support services.

It is interesting to compare this data with the Eurodiaconia March 2010 report on the impact of the crisis on its members<sup>1</sup>.

This study reported that a majority of Eurodiaconia Members could attest to an increase in demand for services, especially employment services. Moreover, Eurodiaconia members expected this demand to keep increasing in 2010.<sup>2</sup>



Extract from: *The Social cost of the Crisis: Even More in Need and More Needed – Report on the social repercussions of the economic and financial crisis, March 2010, page 13.*

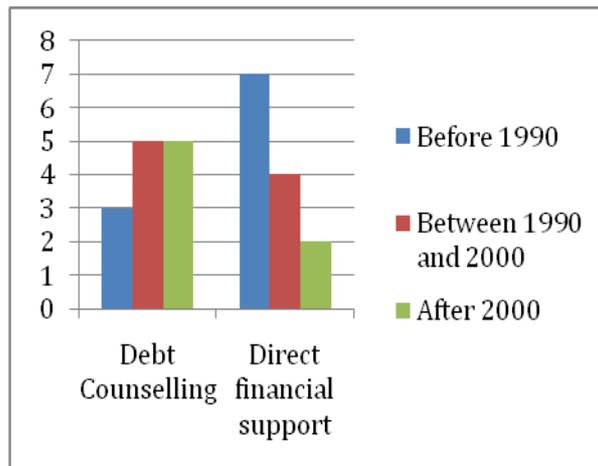
<sup>1</sup> The Social cost of the Crisis: Eurodiaconia, March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P13

### Financial support and counselling

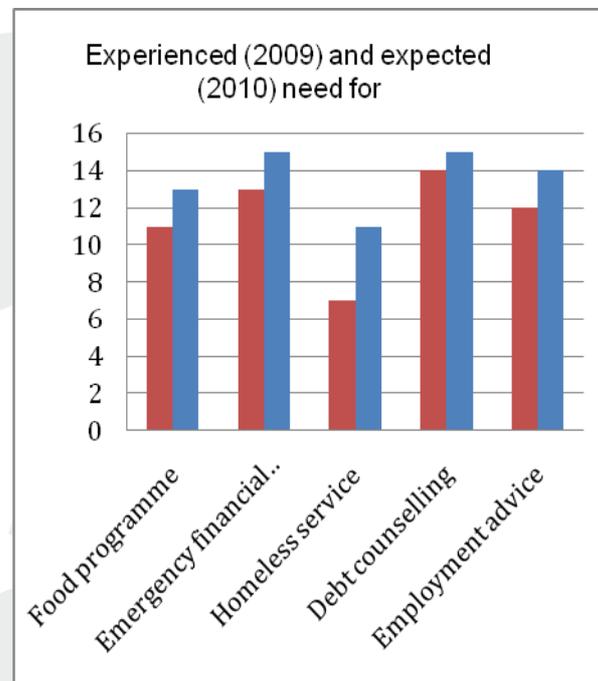
The third graph describes the creation of services related to financial support, either directly or through debt counselling.

Looking at this graph, it is particularly interesting to note that the collapse of direct financial support is paralleled by an increase in the number of debt counselling services that have been set up. The above mentioned Eurodiaconia 2010 report on the impact of the crisis showed that Eurodiaconia members expect the demand for services of debt counselling to keep on increasing.



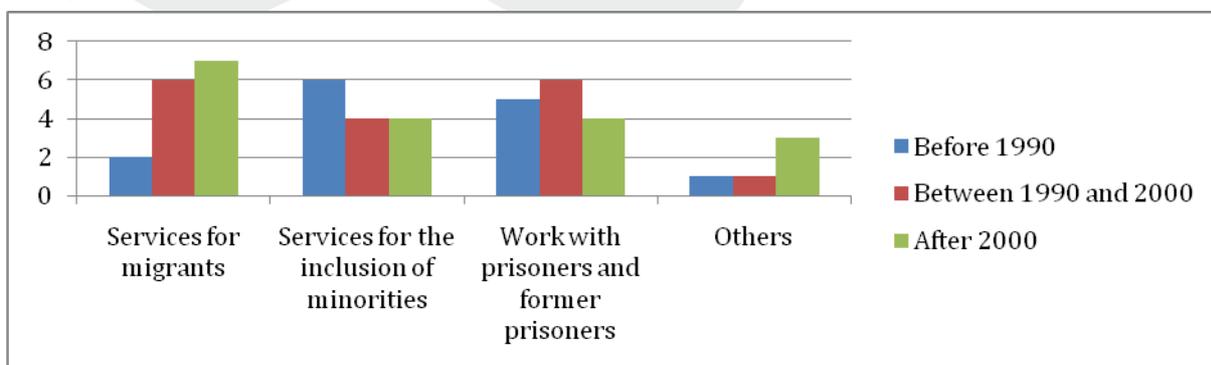
*“The Majority of our members attest to an increase in demand for a broad scope of services in 2009, especially for debt counseling, emergency financial support and employment advice, and are expecting these demands to continue to increase, as well as an increasing demand for other services, especially food programmes (eleven of the respondents - out of twenty – are also expecting the demand for homeless services to increase.)”<sup>3</sup>*

Indebtedness appears to be a new key challenge for our members as this seems to become an increasing challenge for European society’s households.



### Integration of marginalised people

This graph demonstrates Eurodiaconia members’ initiatives to integrate marginalised people coming from different backgrounds. It shows in particular a net increase in the number of services established for migrants and other support services (especially for Roma and refugees).



<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P13

Mapping 20 years of experience in the fight against poverty

### Services for mentally and physically disabled people

The graph at the bottom of the page shows the evolution of the number of services for people with mental or physical disabilities that have been established between 1990 and 2010.

### Rehabilitation services for substance users

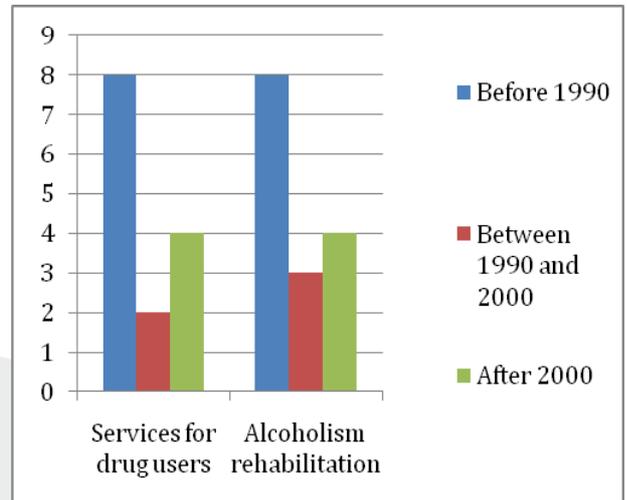
The graph depicts the creation of services for substance users. It could be explained by the historical evolution of the structures of diaconia as a whole.

**Kavarna Empatie (Coffee-bar Empathy)**



The coffee-bar Empatie in Frydek-Mistek (the Czech Republic) is a part of Slezská Diakonie's activities in the field of social enterprise. It offers work training places for people with disabilities (especially focused on people with mental and psychological disabilities).

Within this particular work training programmes, people with disabilities can develop their skills which can further be put into effect both in the labour market and in daily life. The aim of the project is to support independence and self-sufficiency and thus to contribute to social inclusion, at the same time combating public prejudices.

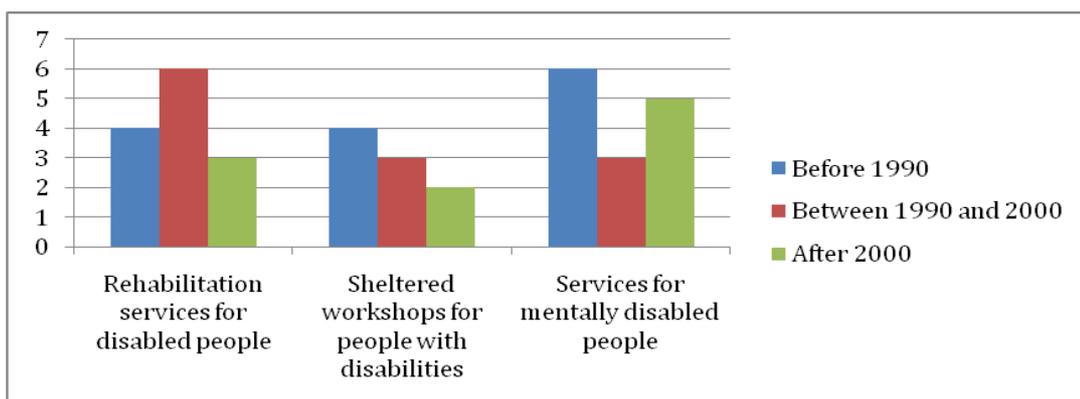


The wide downturn in the number of services that have been established between before the 1990s and 1990 to 2000 could be explained by the traditional establishment of diaconal services: it seems from our members' background documents and reports that diaconia has very often started on a small scale. Services such as those for substance users, often started at parish level, when the parish began to provide support to people in need.

Once again, the general overview is one of a permanent commitment to the service of the most excluded from society with overall a constant growth of these types of services. However, we can see that the number of sheltered workshop has slowly decreased since 1990.

The creation of such services has perhaps decreased following the extension of the scope of activities of diaconia. It could be that the slow increase in the creation of these services after 2000 originates from a response to social change and a renewed perception of the need to support substance users.

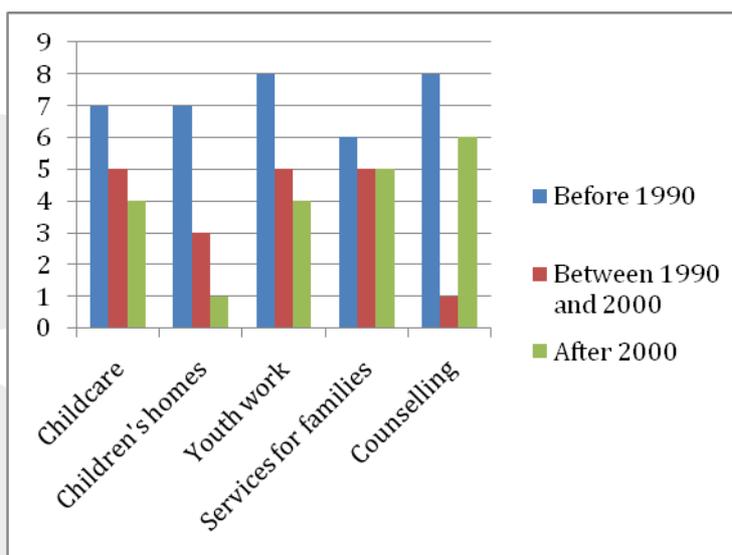
The provision of services for the inclusion of persons with disabilities is another example of an answer to a social challenge. At a time of uncertainties regarding the negotiations of the new anti-discrimination directive, Eurodiaconia members work ahead of policy making, to help people who are excluded because of their disability, to reintegrate into society.



## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SOCIAL INCLUSION: PROVISION OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND COUNSELLING

Graph 7 pictures the creation of services such as childcare, children's homes, youth work, services for families and counselling services.

These services also appear to have been established massively before 1990, their creation has then slowed down, apart from counselling services which have increased since 2000.



### The evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia – Diaconia Center



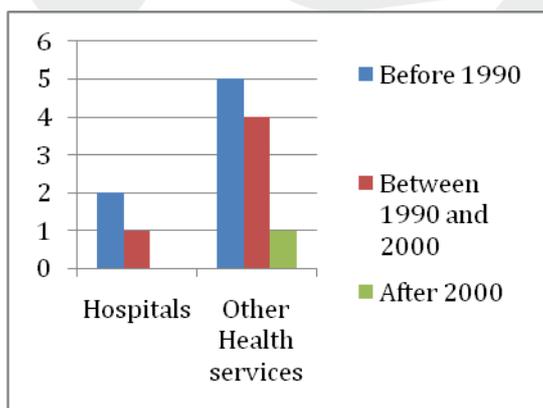
The official diaconia in the ELCL began in April 1993. Today, it provides services to people in need across Latvia, as Latvia is experiencing an increase in the number of families in need. The ELCL provides Children and Family Support Centers particularly aimed at supporting families at risk and their children between the age of 5 and 15 years old.

The ELCL activities also provide “Support groups for single mothers” and “Day center for street children”. After school programmes, Christmas campaigns and project for the “rehabilitation of socially disadvantaged families”, contribute to help children in vulnerable circumstances to access school necessities, attend school regularly or even help them to stop taking addictive substances.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIALISED HEALTH SERVICES

### Hospitals and other health services

The next graph describes the evolution in the creation of hospitals and other health services by Eurodiaconia members since 1990. Looking at the graph we observe a decrease in the number of what could be seen as a “traditional” service of diaconia.

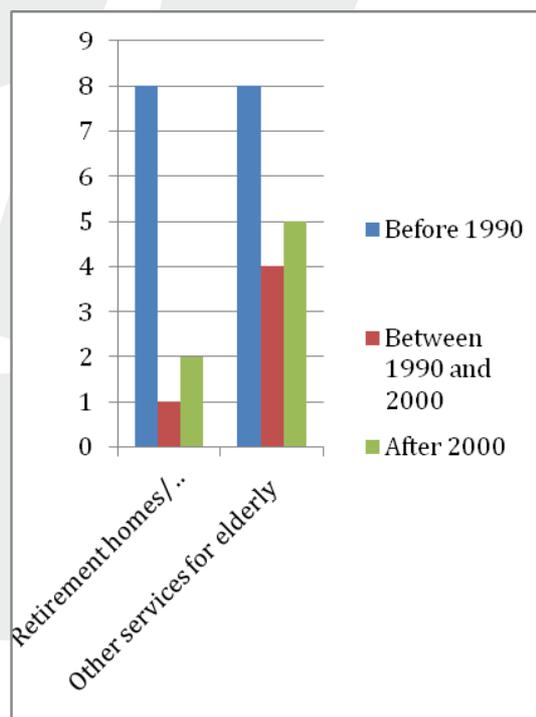


One of the explanations could be the increasing specialisation of such services, or the increasing involvement of for-profit organisations in the sector. Another explanation could be the high financial investment such a project requires or the changing nature of the relationship between the state and the church. For instance, in Finland, the Church used to contribute to Finnish health care. Deaconesses were going from house to house as nurses. In 1972, a new Primary Health Care Act was established, and municipalities became responsible for providing health care. Consequently, the role of health care gradually diminished in diaconia while the social aspect gained more importance.

Nevertheless, hospitals and other health services remain one of the major activities of some of our members.

### Services for elderly people

Graph 5 also shows a clear fall in the number of services created for elderly people such as retirement homes and non-residential services. However, we can notice a real decrease between the pre-1990's and the 1990's, whereas since 2000 the establishment of these services has gone through a revival. A likely explanation is the growing awareness of the demographic shift and its associated challenges for the care sector and society as a whole. We know from our members that services for elderly people remain key activities and are likely to continue to be developed due to the social necessity of an ageing population all over Europe.



## MEMBERS' EXPERIENCE

The last part of the questionnaire sent to Eurodiaconia members was designed to invite members to give information about their experiences and the evolution of poverty and social exclusion in their country since 1990.

The section below presents the questions asked to our members and synthesises their answers, whilst also giving space for direct quotations reflecting members' work in their diversity and complementarities.

### A very broad scope of activities, targeting the most vulnerable

We have asked our members **what have been their organisation's top five activities (that reflect their organisation's priorities) during the past 20 years to fight poverty and social inclusion.**

As a **number one priority** four activities were particularly highlighted:

- 1- Emergency/humanitarian support in Europe (provision of food and shelters)
- 2- Services for elderly
- 3- Services for people with disabilities
- 4- Training and education services

Overall, among **the top five activities** (excluding the number one priority) reflecting our members' priorities, the ones most mentioned (from priorities mentioned the most) were:

- 1- Work with children and youth, services for families
- 2- Emergency aid – food distribution, temporary shelters for people in need.
- 3- Services for elderly
- 4- Services for persons with disabilities
- 5- Awareness raising and lobbying
- 6- Counselling and pastoral counselling services

- 7- Services for drug addicts and alcoholics
- 8- Work with minorities, refugees, Roma people
- 9- Debt related services
- 10- Unemployment services
- 11- Work with volunteers
- 12- Education and training
- 13- Health services

Other activities such as work with prisoners and general information for people in need were also mentioned.

### Biggest achievements since 1990

Eurodiaconia members have been questioned on **what they considered as their organisation's biggest achievements since 1990 in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.**

Our members' answers as to what they considered to be the main achievements of their organisation over the past 20 years can be organised according to the following five categories:

- **Bringing direct change to people in need:** establishing and offering different and new services to various target groups, providing quality social services to an ever increasing number of people.

*"It is difficult to pin point the biggest achievements – but we would consider having achieved an important position as one of the third sector's largest providers of social services to a number of marginalized groups as a very important achievement. We often aim our work at reaching out to groups/persons that fell "between chairs" where the public sector often fails" Norway*

*"We cannot speak about big achievements, but we are glad to work nonstop after the revolutionary changes beginning in 1990, in spite of all kind of difficulties." Romania*

- **Professionalisation** of the organisation through the provision of quality services, specialisation and at the same time an increase in the number of services offered and information to people in need.

*"Opening of 18 diaconal centres, acceptance of [our organisation] as an important player (2<sup>nd</sup> largest non-public*

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*provider in Slovakia), provision of good quality social services to an ever increasing number of people.” Slovakia*

- **Developing diaconia and sticking to values:** networking, developing diaconia in itself, and being recognised as key actors, as Christian service providers of high quality services.

*“We have started from zero after the political changes and we have found new ways to build credibility of the organisation and high quality services (...) We have become one of the biggest organisations in the country (...) We had to overcome the image of Christian organisations as something that is only voluntary help, to the image of a professional organisation that can provide high quality services whilst using Christian values.” Czech Republic (Slezska Diakonie)*

*“The most important achievement is that diaconal services of churches collaborate with social work carried out by the state much better now than 20 years ago”. Switzerland*

*“Revival of the diaconal work and possibility for further development for diaconal work.” Poland*

- **Bringing change through advocacy and experience:** working for structural change by raising awareness on poverty issues and influencing legislation, but also by showing experience of best practices.

*“The implementation of a pilot program focused on the fight against poverty and social exclusion and keeping families together, with efforts to reintegrate them in society again. Certain elements of this complex methodology have been built into the state social system in Hungary.” Hungary (Hungarian Interchurch Aid)*

- **Development in the provision of specific services** such as food banks, debt counselling, community support, social enterprise provision, services to elderly.

*“Community support and social enterprise provision for users of CrossReach’s services for adults.” Scotland*

*“Assistance and support for elderly and families in difficult social situation.” Poland*

### **Fighting over-indebtedness: Diaconia of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**

The 2003-2005 Finnish National action plan states that “the number of over-indebted households in Finland, based on self-evaluation, is about 100,000.

Those who have a low income, who do not have a job or are single parents, are the most at risk of having problems with debt. A pilot project of the church of Finland meets this social need, targeting the heavily indebted. The Accord Fund Settlement project helps debt victims who have exhausted all other options and cannot pay off their debts.

According to this model, heavily indebted people pay what they can during five years, once decent costs of living (for housing and food) have been deducted from their income. The rest of the debt is paid by means of an aid provided by the church and debt forgiveness by the creditor. The aid amount may not exceed the amount of the “forgiven” debt.

With this model, between 2000 and 2009, the Diaconia of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has contributed for 28 M€ to be paid back, helping 320 families, using 0,76 M€.

## An increased provision of services in scope and quantity

Eurodiaconia members were asked if their organisation **has increased its provision of services in the past twenty years? Or did it have to change its structure so as to deliver these services?**

It appears that indeed, Eurodiaconia members have, to varying degrees had to increase the provision of services they offered. This evolution and adaptation varies according to the member, but is often correlated with the members' country evolutions, matching its social needs.

*"Yes, dramatically. After 1945 we had 14 social services. Now there are 180."*  
Hungary

When it comes to Nordic countries such as Norway, Finland, and Iceland, new services have often been created and adapted.

*"We have increased our provision and adapted our structure (not changed it)"*  
Denmark

*"New services and strategies. Organisations are bigger and working in larger fields than 20 years ago"* Finland

In countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Romania, many organisations seem to have grown dramatically, with many new services being established. Poland, for example has received legal status as a public benefit organisation. And in the Czech Republic, the number of services increased from zero to more than 50 centres.

*"We have been continuously widening our provision of services since the middle of the 90s according to the actual needs of the most vulnerable strata of the population. The organisation is operating a national network of social institutions providing a total of 45 different social services to different target groups.(...) The organisation is working in wide co-operational structures, involving many partners from both from the civil and the state sector. During the last year – as a result of the global crisis – many families in Hungary became even more vulnerable (losing their homes, with no assets to pay back their loans, to pay their overheads, etc.), so [we]*

*had to find solutions to support these people, families in crisis."* Hungary

## The changing forms of poverty

**Do you think poverty and/or social exclusion have reduced since 1990 in your country? How do you think your organisation contributed to the evolution of poverty and social exclusion in your country?**

According to Eurodiaconia members overall poverty has not increased or decreased but has changed and manifest itself differently. Absolute poverty has decreased, but inequalities have increased.

Changing societies have brought new challenges to social inclusion and the fight against poverty. Our members mention changing family structures and growing indebtedness as the first consequences of the financial and economic crisis. Faced with these challenges, our members are very active, adapting their services to new demands, raising awareness on some of the structural shortcomings, helping one person at a time and therefore sometimes feeling that their actions are only *"drops on a hot stone, doing good work but not being able to turn the tide"* (Germany).

The general opinion is well summarized by a quote from our Slovakian member: *"Poverty has undoubtedly decreased in absolute terms since 1990; however the transition to capitalism might have deepened relative poverty of marginalized groups and social exclusion. We work to modify the situation but so far it is too small to be able to affect it truly significantly"*.

Social exclusion of some groups of people have decreased – before 1990s people with disabilities were kept in closed institutions, excluded from the rest of the society, but now community-based services are much more widespread and thus people with disabilities are better integrated into the rest of society. On the other hand, a number of people today argue that some minorities suffered less social exclusion before the 1990s (under the former rule of the Soviet Union) – for instance the Roma minority.

## CONCLUSION

Our members are experts in the field of poverty and social exclusion in their countries. They testify that at national level either poverty has increased or forms of poverty have changed.

Members have had to extend the scope of their activities, ranging from local relief projects to nationwide advocacy strategies, constantly adapting their services and working to meet changing needs. Through this permanent struggle and adaptation, they have developed quality work and professionalism, often going from small local community projects to strong national networks of increasing political influence based on grassroots long-term experience. They did not lose their initial identity but continue to assert their Christian identity as the central pillar of their work, striving for the best quality services for the most vulnerable.

Eurodiaconia members' identity and values also stand out in the way services are provided. They look at the individual, not only to provide a service but aiming for his/her re-integration through full restoration. This can be seen for instance through the strong emphasis given to family services (prevention and reinsertion), counselling and pastoral counselling services.

However, our members do not stop at trying to equip people for self help (for instance trying to guide them toward manageable living standards) as they also act in emergency situations, tackling needs wherever they are and being especially present and recognised for their work in the provision of emergency services such as food banks and shelters.

From its 33 members' long ranging experience in scope and time, Eurodiaconia regularly develops policy recommendations, translating grassroots experience into EU policy propositions. This study is an opportunity to highlight some of these key recommendations in our common work against poverty and social exclusion and work toward better social cohesion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Ensure access to quality social services

- Everyone should have the right of access to quality social services. Where services are provided for remuneration they must be affordable to all. The scenario in which a two-tier care system develops, whereby in some areas only low-quality care is accessible because quality services are not affordable should be avoided by sufficient funding. Improving the quality of services can lead to an increase in cost but investment in social services, particularly in preventive services, reduces need in the long-term and therefore expenditure.

### Protect and Invest in Social Services of General Interest

- **Facilitate access for all to social services of general interest.** Eurodiaconia believes that access to social services is necessary to uphold human dignity and is a fundamental right. The Commission must continue to monitor the impact of EU rules on the sector and take action where necessary.
- As societies face deep financial and economic crises, and given the demographic trend, more people will need the support and care that Eurodiaconia members provide. Investing in and improving the quality of SSGI, especially preventive services, will reduce the need in the long-term and therefore reduce expenditures as well as develop the efficiency of the services.

### The bigger picture: social cohesion through trust through equality

- **Enhance the EU's efforts to impact on some of the current cultural trends** in which unnecessary consumption and pursuit of excessive wealth are promoted, to value alternative models such as moderation and charity.
- Evidence is clear that more equal societies do better; it is therefore in the European Union's interest to work further than the fight against poverty and to work for greater equality, achieving a better level of trust between people and ultimately stronger social cohesion.
- Eurodiaconia, together with its church partners<sup>4</sup>, believes in the necessity of strong social cohesion, and therefore call for measures to be taken by the EU and Member States to avoid more pressure being put on a "middle class", while very high earners continue to find ways to avoid their necessary contribution to an inclusive society.

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<sup>4</sup> Proposals for combating poverty and social exclusion in the European Union in the new framework of the Lisbon Treaty. Caritas europa, the secretariat of the commission of the bishops conference in the European community (Comece) and the church and society commission of the conference of European church (CSC of CEC). September 2010.

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### List of respondents

CZECH REPUBLIC: Slezska Diakonie

DENMARK: Kofoeds Skole

FINLAND: Association of Diaconia Institutes in Finland (ADIF)

FINLAND: Church Resources Agency

FINLAND: Church council of the Finnish evangelic Lutheran church; Kirkon Diakonia

GERMANY: Diakonisches Werk der EKD

HUNGARY: Magyarorszagi Reformatus Egyhaz, Ungarn

HUNGARY: Okumenisches Hilswerk Ungarn Magyar Okumenkus (HIA)

ICELAND: Den Evangeliska Lutherska Kyrkan i Island

ITALY: Commissione Sinodale per la Diaconia Valdese

LATVIA: Diakoniezentrum der Ev. Luth. Kirche Lettlands

NETHERLANDS: Kerk in Actie

NORWAY: Kirkeradet (Church of Norway National Council)

POLAND: Diakonia Polska – Polish Diakonia

ROMANIA: Episcopia Reformata Din Ardeal

SCOTLAND: CrossReach

SERBIA: Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO)

SLOVAKIA: Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovakia

SWITZERLAND: Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund – Federation des Eglises protestantes de Suisse (SEK-FEPS)