



EURODIACONIA & THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH

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Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

MISSION

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

VISION

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized

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INTRODUCTION

The past years and months have been challenging for countries across the EU. Whether it is the (still ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine, inflation and the rising cost of living, or increasing energy prices, youth have been disproportionately affected by these events and face an increased risk of poverty, social exclusion, and consequences to their well-being.

In the occasion of the European Year of Youth, this report sets out the situation of youth during the past years and discusses which policies have been put in place at the EU level in favour of youth. Moreover, it introduces some projects Eurodiaconia members are implementing across Europe to help improve the situation of youth in different areas, and presents some of the events that we as Eurodiaconia have carried out this year related to youth, aiming to channel their voices. Finally, we deliver some key policy recommendations.

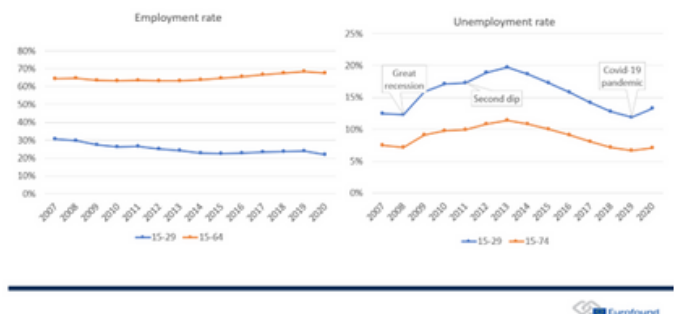
What began as a health crisis in 2020 is developing into an economic and social crisis. While COVID-19 itself was most dangerous for elderly people, young people were significantly affected by the economic and social consequences of government restrictions. Exacerbated inequalities in the areas of education and employment were observed, along with multidimensional impacts on youth including mental health and social capital. Long-lasting effects of school closures during the pandemic and challenging labour market conditions led to a lack of recovery of young people's overall wellbeing.

Two years later, a survey among Eurodiaconia members from July 2022 showed clearly that our members' biggest concern in the current context is the increased risk of poverty, related to the rising cost of living.[1] Indeed, Russia's war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, inflation and increasing cost of living pose a renewed threat to all, but particularly to young people. Precarious job situations, such as unstable income due to short-term contracts, unpaid or underpaid jobs, and most of the times no backup sources, make young people aged 18 to 30 the most financially vulnerable group to these crises and have significant negative impact on their lives, mental health and overall well-being.

When we look at the numbers we observe that many young people in Europe are unable to find quality jobs, and about 46% of youth are involuntarily in temporary contracts.[2] Moreover, 13.1% of the 15-29 years old in the EU in 2021 were neither in employment, nor in education and training (NEETs). [3] As the graphic below shows, the pandemic ended a decade-long decrease in youth unemployment and led to an increased unemployment rate of young people between 15 and 29 years.[4]

Alarmingly, inequalities and social exclusion among certain groups of youngsters are more prominent. 63% of young Roma in eastern European countries are NEETs, compared with 12% of their non-Roma peers in general.[5] Moreso, in some countries, up to 76% of young black people are NEETs compared to 8% of the general population.[6] Capturing the views of young people with disabilities it shows that 65% of young people with disabilities feel left behind and say that mainstream political parties do not care about them.[7]

The pandemic ended a decade-long decrease in youth unemployment



Eurofound, 2021

[1] Eurodiaconia (2022), State of the Social European Union Report.

[2] Eurostat (2018), European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions - Microdata - Eurostat (europa.eu) (accessed 01.12.2022).

[3] Eurostat (2022), European Union Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training (accessed 02.11.2022).

[4] Eurofound (2021), Impact of Covid-19 on young people in the EU. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people-in-the-eu> (accessed 02.12.2022).

[5] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). <https://fra.europa.eu/en/youth> (accessed 02.11.2022).

[6] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). <https://fra.europa.eu/en/youth> (accessed 02.11.2022).

[7] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). <https://fra.europa.eu/en/youth> (accessed 02.11.2022).

In view of the above, several measures to improve the situation of youth have been implemented at the EU level. For example, 2022 was designated as the [European Year of the Youth](#) by the European Commission. By bringing youth to the top of the political agenda, policy makers are recognising that the serious challenges young people are facing must be addressed.

One main policy commitment is the [European Pillar of Social Rights \(EPSR\)](#), proclaimed in 2017. Its [Action Plan](#) was launched in 2021 and sets out concrete initiatives and proposes headline targets for the EU by 2030. The first target covers the area of employment and envisages to have at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 in employment by 2030 with the sub target of decreasing the rate of NEETs aged 15-29 from 12.6% (2019) to 9% by improving their employment prospects.

Second, the [EU Youth Strategy](#) is the general framework that the Commission has set for EU youth policy cooperation, covering the period 2019-2027. Focusing on three core areas of action (engage, connect, empower), the strategy should contribute to enhancing youth participation in democratic life and supporting social and civic engagement.

Then, as part of the [2020 Youth Employment Support Package](#), the European Commission has put forward the reinforced [Youth Guarantee](#), that all EU member states have committed to implement. The reinforced Youth Guarantee initiative incorporates a focus on particularly vulnerable young people and ensures that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed. The Council Recommendation on [vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) also takes part of the Youth Employment Support Package, and aims to help young people get ready for their first job and ensure a smooth transition from school to work. It defines key principles that aim to keep vocational education and training agile and adaptable to labour market needs.

Moreover, to ensure that each Member State dedicates sufficient financial resources to youth employment, Member States that experienced an average NEETs rate above the EU average throughout the period 2017-2019 must allocate at least 12.5% of their [ESF+ funds](#) to targeted youth employment measures. To further step up youth employment support, the Commission has urged Member States also to make use of the funding available under the [NextGenerationEU](#) budget.

Additionally, further initiatives include the [European Solidarity Corps](#), a EU funding programme for young people engaging in solidary activities, or the creation of the [EURES portal](#)[1], the European Job Mobility Portal. Equally, the newly created [ALMA](#) (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative was put in place this year by the Commission to help especially the most disadvantaged NEETs aged 18-30 to find their place in the labour market. The initiative offers participants a supervised stay in another EU Member State for several months and comprehensive coaching and counselling at every step to improve their skills, knowledge, and experience.

In light of the above, some of the Member States have improved their policies in the field of youth or introduced specific youth policies. The improvement was often greatly supported by the involvement of local civil society and youth organisations. Others, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis, focused on the implementation of broader, short-term policy responses rather than youth-specific, long-term solutions.[2] Measures included emergency income support for young people, hiring subsidies to promote employment of young people, and emergency mental-health services.[3]

Data from a [Fundamental Rights Survey](#) carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2020, shows that 56% of young people across the EU feel left behind.[4] Thus, crucial challenges remain to be addressed.

[1] A network shaped to facilitate free movement among the workers in the EU countries.

[2] Eurofund (2021). Impact of Covid-19 on young people in the EU. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people-in-the-eu> (accessed 02.12.2022).

[3] OECD (2021). OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus: What have countries done to support young people in the covid-19 crisis?.

[4] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). <https://fra.europa.eu/en/youth> (accessed 02.11.2022).



MEMBERS MAPPING

EURODIACONIA MEMBERS: WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUTH

Diaconal youth work is a unique approach to youth work in Europe and contributes significantly to increased education, employability, and social cohesion. Many of our members have long-lasting experience building and advocating for better education, employment opportunities, empowerment, and social inclusion for all young people, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Work is an integral part of a person's development and well-being, and now amid a pandemic, economic and cost-of-living crisis, young people are struggling to find permanent and appropriate job opportunities. Having a job is not only about securing a fixed income. It is also about being part of society, being able to contribute, creating fixed routines and being able to plan for the future. Becoming part of the labour market means people grow, develop, and gain increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

Within this context, our members put in place diverse projects to ease access to employment for youth, particularly for NEETs and those coming from disadvantaged background. Here, we would like to highlight some of these projects.

Picture Access to Employment Network Meeting:



A photograph of two young women sitting on a paved path outdoors. The woman on the left has long brown hair, wears glasses, a black hoodie, and blue jeans. The woman on the right wears a bright yellow beanie, a patterned scarf, a dark green jacket, and blue jeans. A golden retriever dog is sitting between them, looking towards the camera. The background shows dry grass and a path leading into the distance.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Picture provided by Diakonija Latvija

DIAKONIJA LATVIJĀ LATVIA

The project **PROTI un DARI!** was initiated in 2014 by Diakonija Latvijā. The project activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science and implemented by the Agency for International Programmes for Youth together with different civil society organisations.

Prior to the initiation of the project, Latvia had no tailored experience with working with inactive NEETs. So far 82 out of 119 local municipalities across Latvia are involved in the project to provide support to young people in a NEET situation.

The main aim of the project is to develop the skills of young people aged 15 -29 who are not registered at the state employment agency as unemployed and to facilitate their involvement in the education system, the labour market, non-governmental organisations or youth centre activities. The duration of the individual support programme may vary from 1 to 9 months depending on profiling results and the young person's needs.

At the moment around 50 youngsters are involved in the project run by our member. The majority of them started to work, involved themselves in non-governmental structures or acquired competences in different fields of interest. Around 30% of involved persons are youngsters with special needs or serious health diagnosis.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

SWEDISH CITY MISSIONS SWEDEN

Unga i jobb is a collaborative project between Stockholm City Mission and Uppsala City Mission, co-financed by AMIF (the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund). The implementation of the project took place between January 2020 and December 2022. By offering them various initiatives and job-search strategies, the project seeks to improve the living and working conditions for young adults affected by the Swedish Upper Secondary School Law. These are young adults with a migrant background that arrived in Sweden as unaccompanied minors. After they finish school, they have 6 months to find a permanent employment in order to remain in Sweden.

To accelerate the target group's entry into the Swedish labor market, the project has also been entrusted with creating a working model for the job integration of these youngsters. Several ongoing and coordinated actions that seek to improve participants' abilities while improving the environment for future employment are at the heart of the model. The project uses a coaching approach to provide tailored support based on the participants' own preferences, interests, and choices while also methodically establishing relationships with employers.

With the project ending, nearly 75% of the participants were able to acquire a job. Young participants see that the project's efforts and support, combined with their extremely high motivation and ambition, contributed to this impressive result. Despite the special conditions of the participants, our member observes that the developed working method can largely be applied to work with other target groups.





YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Picture provided by Diakonie Kosovo

DIAKONIE KOSOVO KOSOVO

Diakonie Kosovo and its **Diakonie Training Center** are helping people in need and preparing young people for the labour market.

After the last war in Kosovo, thanks to the help of organisations such as Diakonie Deutschland, Diakonie Kosovo established a training centre for the unemployed youth in Mitrovica, the Diakonie Training Center (DTC). The work done by Diakonie Kosovo involves young people from all kinds of backgrounds who are 15 to 35 years old, including youngsters from Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and Serbian communities. They run a variety of activities and projects using different educational methodologies. They offer tutoring services to recreational activities, including sports, summer camps and volunteering activities that lead to empowerment. Their work covers a diverse spectrum, including employment, social inclusion, fight against marginalisation, participation in civil society, prevention of violent radicalisation through social inclusion and equality.

Given Kosovo's high unemployment rate of over 50%, the main goal is to provide training and get young people ready for the job market. The participants get the chance to learn the fundamental skills required for a variety of jobs, from culinary to cosmetology to electrical installation. Both the theoretical and practical training are accredited. The participants are given the chance to learn in cutting-edge teaching labs. After the courses are finished, a high number of students are chosen and suggested to local businesses.

A photograph showing a man with glasses and a woman working together at a table. They are focused on a task, possibly related to the 'Ferry4You' project mentioned in the text. The man is leaning over the table, and the woman is looking down at something on the table. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or office environment.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Picture provided by Diakonie Michaelshoven

**DIAKONIE
MICHAELSHOVEN
GERMANY**

The project **"Ferry4You"** supports young people in their integration into the labor market. The project is mainly targeted at youth under 25 years who are educationally or socially disadvantaged and/or deal with health impairments.

Diakonie Michaelshoven, on behalf of the job center in the region, helps with the planning and implementation of measures to find a job or training position and starts where school-based support for access to the labor market is not sufficient to reach young people.

It gives youth practical on-the-job experience in different occupational fields and individual support from a case manager or job coach. Participants commit to work five days a week for at least five hours a day in the beginning. The individual duration of participation is set at six months, however, follow-up support can be provided by the supervisor for up to 6 months after. Challenges Diakonie Michaelshoven faces include a lack of confidence from youngsters and a lack of investment in youth and in their skills, as well as a lack of apprenticeships available.

YOUTH WELLBEING

Youth overall wellbeing has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically accelerated a decline in youth mental health. Mental health is extremely important since it affects both a young person's future health and welfare. The ability of young people to participate effectively in work and leisure, family life, communities, and society as a whole is also influenced by their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being. Our members are actively supporting young people's needs through a holistic approach, providing mental health and related services.





YOUTH WELLBEING

DIAKONIE AUSTRIA AUSTRIA

An Austrian-wide study shows that a quarter of all young people in Austria are currently suffering from a mental illness (Medical University of Vienna). Mental health disorders are among the most common causes of loss of quality of life in young people. They may cast long shadows well into adulthood. Roughly half of all adults with mental illness were diagnosed in their teens. Prevention and appropriate treatment are therefore of great importance in terms of health, economy and society as a whole.

Diakonie Austria provides specialised psychological aid for a wide range of mental health issues for young people. They enable children to leave a life of dignity, safety and security. The child and adolescent psychiatric service of Diakonie Austria offers help to young people in the province of Upper Austria. They provide safe spaces, therapeutic help (from diagnosis to psychotherapy) while cooperating with parents, creating a strong supporting network.



YOUTH WELLBEING

STOCKHOLM CITY MISSION SWEDEN

Young people are the focus of the Stockholm City Mission's mental health programs. Their two primary services are a **“Facility for Young Men Only”** and a **Therapy Centre**, which is a psychotherapy clinic for all genders. Users can receive individual and group counselling at the Clinic and Therapy Centre. The Stockholm City Mission furthermore maintains a Youth Care Center that is connected with the other two organizations and offers general counselling services as well as services for sexual and reproductive health. The target group of these services is young adults between the ages of 16 and 25 (the average age is 21), and 55% of users are female.

The services run by the City Mission are filling a gap because these types of services -of a more specific and targeted nature- are not provided by public mental health services in Sweden. The services are financed through donations from the general public and are carried out by professional psychotherapists with experience as nurses, psychologists or social workers. In addition, the services are also a space for skill development among qualified therapists who are willing to gain experience in the framework of their graduate studies.

Moreover, the Stockholm City Mission is actively involved in breaking down negative stereotypes and takes part in public awareness actions.



YOUTH WELLBEING

Picture provided by Helsinki Deaconess Foundation

HELSINKI DEACONESS FOUNDATION FINLAND

In Finland, Helsinki Deaconess Foundation has implemented various services to aid youth. Many young people battle substance misuse, mental health issues, financial stress, social exclusion, or loneliness in this country. The **Vamos Project** is a particularly effective project, with 50% of beneficiaries managing to get into education or employment. Founded in 2008 and operating in 11 cities across Finland, Vamos provides young people aged 16 to 29 individualised and holistic support to (re)enter education, access jobs and improve their social inclusion and general wellbeing. Around 2000 young people participate in the project each year.

At Vamos, young people's needs are always prioritised, and the support offered encompasses various aspects of the young person's life. Each young person is assigned a personal youth worker who has the time to get to know them and their needs. There are group and individualised coaching and holistic support through integrated services (nurses, liaisons with psychologists and psychiatrists, etc.).

Vamos offers targeted support for young individuals who require psychotherapy and are waiting for mental health treatments. Our member service provides quick and human chat, preventing problems from accumulating. The Oulu youth between the ages of 16 and 30 are the target audience for the brief therapeutic sessions. During the meetings, professionals examine the young person's past accomplishments and present resources and develop optimistic prospects.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Young people must have the opportunity to lead change within their own communities and participate in political decisions at the local and national level. Community-based and political youth participation should include young people from underprivileged and marginalised places and groups.

Through volunteer programs, empowerment and capacity building activities that are specifically designed to foster young involvement as well as provide them with opportunities to acquire new skills, our members are at the forefront of promoting and facilitating youth empowerment.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Picture provided by Diaconia Valdese

DIACONIA VALDESE ITALY

Italy's Waldensian Church is home to the national non-profit organization Diaconia Valdese. The purpose of Diaconia Valdese is to "serve with the people." It places the individual at the centre of its approach by concentrating its efforts on helping those who are experiencing difficulty or pain. It also seeks to provide more than just a service to those in need.

Through the European Solidarity Corps (previously known as the European Voluntary Service), the French Civic Service, the German Civil Service, and other voluntary service programs, Diaconia Valdese has a well-established, decades-old tradition of hosting long-term full-time young volunteers, both Italian (National Civil Service) and foreigners. Every year, Diaconia Valdese also sends long-term Italian volunteers to more than ten EU and non-EU nations because of the EDYN12 (Ecumenical Diaconal Year Network), Phiren Amenca (the Roma youth network), and other bilateral relationships. Each year, roughly 100 volunteers participate in this programme.

An international community of young people eager to get involved through volunteering experiences that can have an impact on the local, national, and international contexts as well as on the individual participants, in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, according to a mutualistic and pro-social framework, has been fostered and encouraged by the large pool of social action and the nourished number of volunteers welcomed throughout Italy.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

PHILANTHROPY SERBIA

Isolation, loneliness, and marginalization are also issues that have a great impact on young people. These issues have only become more predominant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Serbian member Philanthropy -a charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, performing humanitarian and development programmes - and supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation, initiated the three-year project “ACT NOW against youth marginalisation in Serbia in times of COVID-19”. The project aims to make concrete changes for marginalised young women and men in terms of their preparedness and resilience to actively participate in society, while working to strengthen the awareness, cooperation and capacity of those who support young people.

The target groups are marginalized young women and men (aged 15-29), who, given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, live in socially and economically challenging conditions and need additional support: (1) youth deprived of parental care, preparing to exit the social welfare system or having recently exited, (2) young people living in informal Roma settlements, (3) young people living with HIV/AIDS, STDs, youth with substance addictions and sex workers, (4) young people living in remote rural areas.

1,200 young women and men from Belgrade, Sremska Kamenica, Nis and Kraljevo receive support in the field of education, health care, social protection, gender-based violence prevention, community-based support, peer support, humanitarian and financial aid. The project also offers a practice-oriented capacity building cycle to empower youngsters, provides individualized counselling as well as develops and distributes simplified guides to services in social protection, employment and self-employment, and health.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Picture provided by Lahti Diaconia Foundation

LAHTI DIACONIA FOUNDATION FINLAND

The Lahti Diaconia Institute is a non-profit foundation based on Christian values. It offers social services and trainings to the people who need it most. With the aim to empower young people and aiding them in acquiring new skills for a changing world the Lahti Diaconia Institute developed a project to help young people under the age of 29 to strengthen their digital skills.

The **DIGI workshop** operates with ESF funding from 1 October 2021 to 31 July 2023. In the workshop young people are coached in developing new digital skills and in gearing towards work opportunities or studies. The young people of the DIGI workshop develop and maintain an online store built according to the principles of ethical and sustainable development. NEET youth can benefit from this program and no specific previous digital skills are necessary to enrol.

Since October 2021, 23 young people have participated in a workshop and so far, 14 have completed it - 36 % started to study or work after the workshop period. Out of the 23 participants 57 % was unemployed, out of which 63 % needed social and health care services and 37 % continued to search for work by themselves and 9 % was out of workforce (rehabilitation).



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Picture provided by Helsinki Deaconess Foundation

HELSINKI DEACONESS FOUNDATION FINLAND

In Finland, many actors have supported the involvement of young people in decision making processes but still not everyone's voice is being heard. In order to diversify the voices and increase marginalised youth participation in society and political decisions, our member run a programme to listen to the voices of young adults between 16-29 years old, touring around the country. Concretely, the **Youth Programme Tour** took place in different Finnish cities from April to August 2022, during which our member actively reached out to 140 young service users asking them specific questions about their experience with social services, and their views on societal and political issues. Outreach to young people was planned together with the staff in the sites to enable the best way of reaching young people, the most appropriate and delivery methods. One of the most used methods in the workshops was Legos.

Some of the messages from these youngsters were the need to improve access to services, increased mental health awareness, and more education on emotional skills, practical skills and managing their finances.

"Feels like we (younger generations) arrived after the parties have been celebrated and everyone has already left, and we are left with cleaning up the mess." A young person from Rovaniemi.

Moreover, Finnish marginalised youth dream of a future where they are accepted as they are, their opinions are listened, and where they can find more positive news in the media. The results of this project were shared in a series of podcasts where youngsters participated and were compiled in a report presented to some Finnish decision makers last year. Our member is currently preparing the second round of the programme, and searching for funds and partners to replicate it at a transnational level.

THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH AT EURODIACONIA: OUR EVENTS



YOUTH SPEAKS AT EURODIACONIA EVENTS

Eurodiaconia members across Europe have proven that much can be done at a local level. The establishment of regular dialogue with youth, the appropriate use of EU funds, capacity building and the exchange of good practices have played a vital role in increasing the capacity of organisations in shaping youth policies.

As abovementioned, 2022 was designated as the European Year of Youth. Taking this opportunity, Eurodiaconia has also focused its work this year on youngsters, particularly in the topics of youth employment, mental health and overall well-being, as well as social inclusion and empowerment of youth. Below you can find the main activities that we carried out this year on this topic.



ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT NETWORK MEETING: STRATEGIES TO EASE YOUTH ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Picture of access to Employment Network Meeting

Our Access to Employment Network Meeting for members in Riga was hosted by our member the Diaconia Centre of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. The meeting focused on initiatives and holistic strategies to ease youth access to employment. Among other things, we addressed the need of reinforced and holistic support and training for school-to-job and job-to-job transitions for young people. Equally, discussions were held around the need for up and re-skilling programs to address the challenges brought by the green and digital transitions.

HIGHLIGHTS

During the meeting we learned about different projects that Eurodiaconia members put in place for youth, their challenges and lessons. We also had the opportunity to visit our Latvian member day centre “Well of Life” for children and youth. Here, Natalia, a young woman from Latvia shared her experience as a user of the day center where she attended as a child, and how they supported her in developing her capacities, studying, and finding a job later. She is currently working as a staff member of the day center.

We listened to two keynote speakers. The first one, Stanislavs Babins, a non-formal education trainer and board member of the Latvian NGO Radi Vidi Pats, advocated for strategic approaches which include youth autonomy over choices and environment, mobility and youth exchanges to build confidence and new opportunities for youth as well as social inclusion to make everyone feel part of society.

We also heard from Eszter Sandor, researcher from Eurofound discussed the multidimensional impact COVID-19 had on youth as it affected their mental health, social capital, education and employment. On mental health, she stressed how this became a parallel pandemic among youth, as they were likely to experience fear from illness, uncertainty, financial hardship, isolation, and increased family tensions.

**"I'M THANKFUL TO THIS PLACE FOR
HELPING ME GROW FROM A CHILD TO AN
EMPLOYEE IN THE DAY CENTER. THAT IS
REALLY IMPORTANT FOR ME"**
NATALIA



BREAKFAST ROUNDTABLE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE – PLACING YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE

Picture of Breakfast Roundtable event

Our breakfast roundtable at the European Parliament hosted by MEP Leila Chaibi, Vice Chair EMPL Committee of the European Parliament addressed youth unemployment in Europe. During the event we discussed with panelists from the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Youth Forum and the Helsinki Deaconess Foundation in Finland about the challenges youth face when accessing the labour market and reflected on the perspectives of young people across Europe.

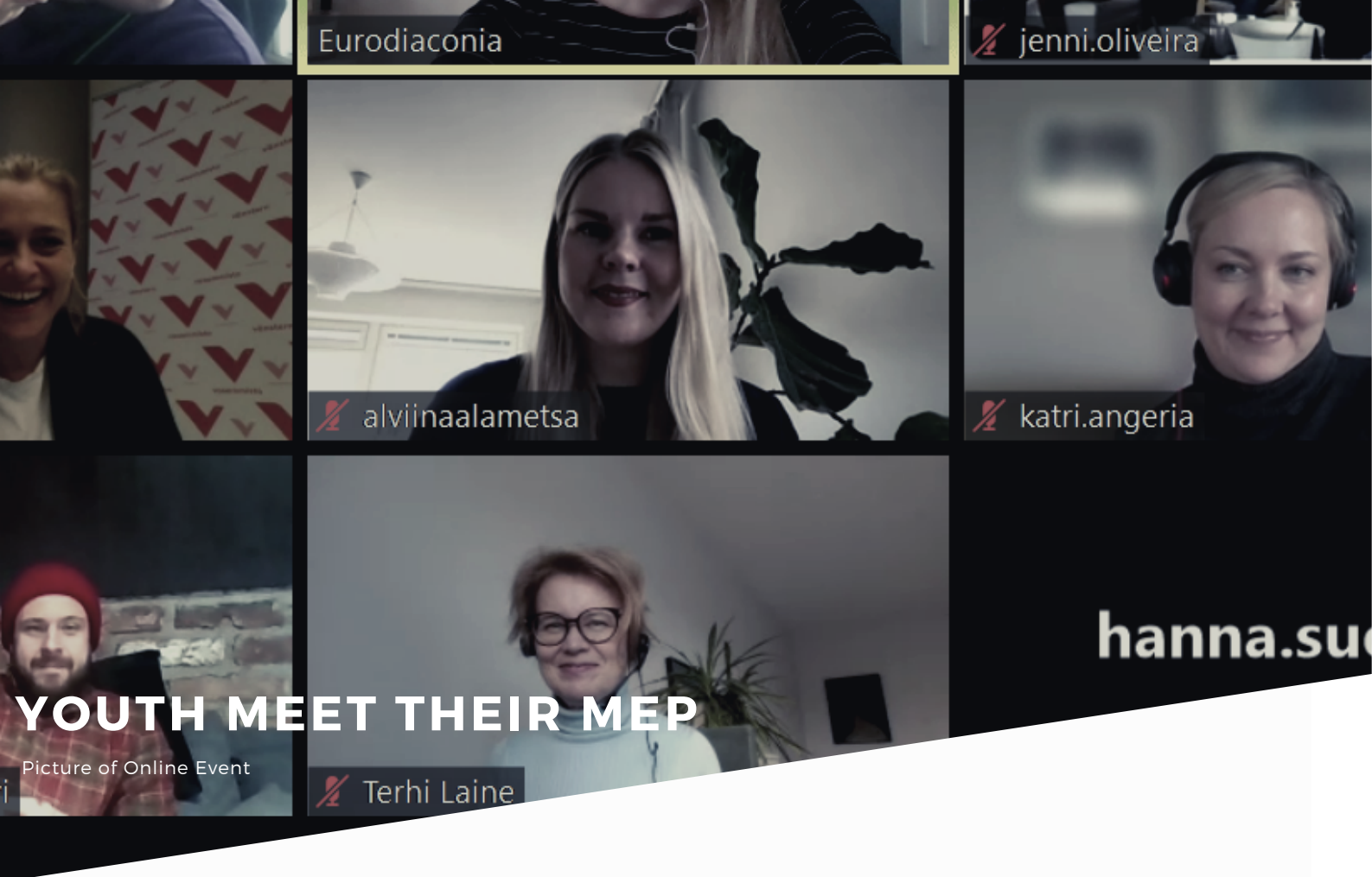
HIGHLIGHTS

As a central part of the event, we listened to Denise's testimony, a young expert by experience who was assisted throughout her youth by social workers of Diakonie Austria. She shared her experience explaining how very low wages often force young people into precarious living concepts, such as moving in with a partner at a young age or staying with their families longer than expected.

A social worker from Diakonie Austria complemented on the need to include young people without higher education fully into the labour market, as well as young people with special needs who are available to access the labour market but too often neglected and restrained by "occupational therapy" which does not provide the valuable work experience needed.

Other young experts by experience from Austria and Finland were also present at the event, and actively engaged in the discussions. One youngster from Finland raised the issue of barriers to access the labour market for people without higher education but with meaningful life experiences.

“GOOD INTERNSHIP POSITIONS ARE MOSTLY FILLED BY HIGHLY EDUCATED YOUNG PEOPLE. THAT’S WHY THE HELSINKI DEACONESS FOUNDATION HAS STARTED THE YOUTH PROGRAM TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET”



On the 12th of October Eurodiaconia together with our member the Helsinki Deaconess Foundation organized an online event for young people to meet with the Finnish MEPs, Alviina Alametsä (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance) and Silvia Modig. (The Left Group in the European Parliament – GUE/NGL). The theme of the event was mental health and wellbeing of young people. The young people in the Vamos project were actively involved in the planning, and were also part of leading the discussions in the event. The event was interactive, and questions were asked by both the young participants and the MEPs.

HIGHLIGHTS

The essence of all the discussions were clearly the need to invite young people to the table and ask for their input into decision making, hear their experiences and empower them to make their voice heard on a political level. One participant expressed: ***“Invite us into the discussion! Make the language more understandable and simpler, even for us that do not have a high level of education. One class in high school explaining the role of the EU is not enough, we simply have no idea what you politicians are doing”.***

The need for decision makers to listen and actively involve young people when decisions that directly concern them are made was expressed by both MEPs: ***“We need to listen to you! These kinds of events should happen more often.”*** stressed Alametsä. The feedback from the young participants confirm that what is often needed is first of all to make them aware of the possibility of addressing decision makers, and second of all to provide them with an opportunity to take the first step: ***“If someone would have told me that it’s possible to have conversations with two MEPs in the same room, I would not have believed it”*** expressed one participant. The discussions in the event confirmed that young people have strong voices and a lot to contribute, but they need to be invited to the decision making table. The Meet Your MEPs events provide a low-threshold opportunity for young people to realise they can have an impact, or as expressed by one of the young participants: ***“I got the feeling that any young person, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to get involved and influence what happens in society”.***

8 POINTS FOR BETTER YOUTH POLICIES

1. Inclusive education!

Access to good quality, inclusive education is key for youth future employment opportunities, social inclusion, and full participation in society. Thus, our members observe that more public funding must be allocated to inclusive education across the EU to tackle persisting inequalities and educational segregation. Governments need to invest in the availability and accessibility of educational, afterschool and school-related services so no child is denied the support they need.

2. Support for transitional periods!

We call on EU institutions and Member States to put in place better, targeted and more effective policies to concretely fight unemployment and to support young people in their school-to-job and job-to-job transitions, in particular those coming from marginalised groups. Here, our members highlight the need to focus on prevention and early intervention to avoid youth to fall out of the system.

3. Good quality, well paid jobs!

Employment prospects are lacking for young people as they are more likely to be on low-paid jobs, temporary contracts or non-standard forms of work, leading to insecurity and precarious working conditions. It is crucial to provide quality, well-paid internship and jobs that fit youngsters' education and interests, access to social protection, and to tackle structural barriers to access the job market such as racism and agism.

4. Better coordination at all levels!

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee and related policies that address youth do not exist in a vacuum. We need to ensure they are implemented in coordination with other policies such as education and mental health so youth are holistically supported, and have improved access to employment opportunities, education and other services. In this vein, better coordination amongst all stakeholders at the local, national, and European level should be further promoted and supported.





5. Inclusive mobility programmes!

Mobility and volunteer programmes such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and the new ALMA programme should be further addressed to groups of youth experiencing disadvantage and discrimination. For this, active outreach to these groups is needed, as well as the provision of sufficient financial support for them, the delivery of easy-to-read and accessible information, and avoidance of additional burdens in the application process. Equally, these programmes should aim to involve youngsters from disadvantaged groups as experts, as well as implementing organisations and civil society in the programme planning, implementation and evaluation.

6. Accessible mental health!

Our members observe a worrying surge of mental health issues among young people. They also report that mental health services are not accessible, available or affordable for all people, particularly for youth in difficult situations and who find themselves far from support networks. Thus, it is crucial that Member States invest in these kinds of services to make them accessible for every youngster that needs them. Equally, we call on the EU to propose an ambitious Mental Health Strategy that has a focus on disadvantaged youth.

7. Participatory approach!

Eurodiaconia calls on the strengthening of meaningful participation of young people in every step of policymaking and implementation processes, both at the EU and the national level, with the objective of creating effective youth policies and programmes with a bottom-up approach. Therefore, we join the European Economic and Social Committee ¹³ and civil society organisations calling on the EU to adopt an impact assessment tool which ensures that young people are considered when the EU is deciding on new policies and law (the so-called EU-Youth test).

8. Support service providers!

Often Eurodiaconia members experience difficulties in accessing EU funds, or see their projects ending too soon because the funding finishes after a short time. Thus, we call for more sustainable funding to be made available at the local level to support programmes and projects in the long-term. It is also necessary that EU institutions improve their evaluation and monitoring systems to ensure that funds are allocated to projects that are assisting youth who experience marginalisation, social exclusion and unemployment.



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