# Eurodiaconia submission Thematic report to the UN Human Rights Council "Eradicating poverty in a post-growth context: preparing for the next Development Goals"

**12th January 2024**

Eurodiaconia is a network of 58 organisations founded in the Christian faith, fighting poverty and promoting social justice in 33 countries across Europe and representing over 30 000 health and social service providers. With over 1 million employees working in diaconia and more volunteering, and millions more using our services, we believe we can provide an important perspective on **"Eradicating poverty in a post-growth context: preparing for the next Development Goals".**

Despite a slow-down in inflation rate and solid improvement in employment rates, Eurodiaconia members report a deep tearing of the social fabric in 2022 to 2023, leading to profound concerns for social cohesion in the European Union in 2024. A joint survey on the cost-of-living crisis conducted by Eurodiaconia and Caritas Europa3 among our memberships showed a 40% increase over a year in people seeking support from our members’ social services, many of whom were new beneficiaries. Eurodiaconia members report an increase in poverty across various demographics, including an increase in energy poverty, child poverty, and elderly people's poverty, as well as challenges linked to integration of migrants and refugees and the development of in-work poverty. An additional important element is the degradation of Social Services. Social Services face increasing pressure both internally (staff retention and recruitment) and externally (increasing demand). Yet, they are an essential element of a cohesive society and must be accessible, affordable, available and of high quality. The current eco-system for social services does not enable many providers to recruit and retain the staff needed, financing is increasingly complex, and the understanding of quality often based on economic reasons.

**Questions and Answers on behalf of Eurodiaconia**

**4) The way societies conceive of work, relate to the environment, and finance their economies and welfare systems locks them into growth-oriented economic models. What measures should be taken to overcome such growth dependencies in each of these areas? And how can human rights guide efforts to overcome such self-reinforcement?**

Eurodiaconia recommends:

1. Promoting holistic indicators similar to the [human development index](https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI) (HDI), and societal well-being including indicators such as social equity, health, housing and life conditions, quality of life and services, education...
2. Sharing best practices in overcoming growth dependencies in different contexts, considering pressing challenges in societies, such as increasing number of people facing material deprivation, cost-of-living crisis, child poverty, in-work poverty, energy poverty and homelessness.
3. Promoting the importance of social economy and its mission of placing people's well-being and social or environmental objectives above the pursuit of profit.
4. Reinvesting a significant portion of profits and surpluses to advance social or environmental goals and conduct endeavors benefiting 'collective interest' and 'general interest'.
5. Introducing transparent management open to stakeholders input, democratic decision-making processes, and involving members or employees in decision-making.1
6. Supporting various actors in transitioning to sustainable practices and investing in eco-friendly, social technologies (see for example the sustainable textile project from Diakonie Deutschland and Caritas Europe 2 in Germany, and Nueva Vida Textil project in Spain3) to limit social and environmental harm.
7. Making social safety nets and welfare systems resilient to economic turmoil, working towards better implementation of the rights of marginalized groups (addressing non-take-up) in creation, implementation and monitoring of the social impact of economic policies.
8. Emphasizing job quality and prioritizing dignified work, fair wages, adequate minimum income schemes, and working conditions/labor standards over economic output.

**Eurodiaconia national members’ input**

**1) Has your government designed measurements of social progress that complements GDP, in accordance with target 17.18 of the SDGs? If so, what alternative indicators were designed and how? Have such measurements accounted for unpaid care, reproductive, and household work and, if so, how?   Which mechanisms, if any, have been established to increase accountability towards improving the performance of the State according to such indicators? Please share any lessons learned from the use of such alternative measurements of progress and associated monitoring mechanisms.**

Headline social indicators are crucial measures, particularly in gauging poverty reduction, social exclusion, access to education, and health and social services. When coupled with economic measures, these indicators provide a snapshot of society and reveal its direction. Complementary well-being indicators are essential, but caution is warranted with subjective indicators based solely on emotional evaluations tied to people's feelings. However, over longer periods, these subjective indicators, such as 'self-rated state of health,' 'perceptions of society’s fairness,' and 'confidence in government,' may prove more reliable. When proposing new social indicators, it's vital to assess the availability and accuracy of the data. Some current indicators, while comprehensive, may overly focus on employment rates rather than the quality of employment.

Eurodiaconia members offer insights into their national contexts:

* **Denmark:** The Danish government has not designed new measurements of social progress to complement GDP. The Danish Statistical Survey reports on all the SDGs4. Denmark, while among the least unequal nations globally, hasn't escaped the recent rise in income inequality5, according to the official statistics. It maintains a low poverty rate, stable for decades, thanks to its robust redistributive system and extensive social protection coverage.
* **Germany:** To enhance accountability, the German Bundestag revised the General Equal Treatment Act, empowering the federal anti-discrimination agency. The head of this agency is now elected by the Bundestag for a fixed five-year term, becoming an independent commissioner for anti-discrimination.An interesting initiative (re. alternative indicators), is Diakonie Deutschland project: a comprehensive participation project in which people with experience of poverty receive support to represent their interests as experts on their own behalf, promoting self-organization and networking (2021). Diakonie supports a growing group of people in the “AG Beteiligung” and provides resources so that people living in poverty can organize their own interests: travel costs, technology, conference costs, organizational support, help with access to media and political exchange opportunities.
* **Norway:**   Recognizing the limitations of the existing national survey conducted by the Norwegian State Housing Bank, Church's City Mission Norway conducted a quantitative survey ("I count") to gather data on EU destitute migrants experiencing homelessness in Oslo, not covered by the official counting. Out of 209 respondents 23% answered that they were living permanently in Norway, though many of them were rough sleepers.    
  The National Strategy for Social Housing Policies (2021-2024)6 was put in place by the Norwegian government to help those that are disadvantaged in the housing market, outlining the following priorities: "no one shall be homeless; children and young people shall have good living conditions; people with disabilities shall, like everybody else, have the opportunity to choose where and how they want to live."
* **Serbia:** The Serbian Orthodox Church, Philanthropy (Čovekoljublje) reports,in 2022 and 2023, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in Serbia organized several meetings on the topic of homelessness with all relevant stakeholders and formed a working group. For the first time, partners from civil society organizations and representatives of several ministries discussed the main challenges regarding homelessness, trying to find solutions, develop indicators for a strategic document with identified issues, challenges and good practices, as well as to raise. Some of the issues identified by the working group are lack of access to personal identification documents, lack of access to social and healthcare services, lack of definition of homelessness and data collection, as well as housing shortages.
* **Spain:** Nueva Vida and Diaconia Spain report thatthe Spanish government has recently adopted a "Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2023-2030”, with the two main objectives of preventing, detecting and eradicating homelessness, putting the focus on preventing the causes of homelessness such as health problems, addictions, unemployment, family breakups, social isolation, lack of social support, loss of habitual residence, etc.
* **Sweden:** In December 2020, Sweden's Parliament, the Riksdag, endorsed a government [bill](https://www.government.se/contentassets/3097642c99fc4259a4d218b49be01049/the-2030-agenda-and-sweden--a-summary.pdf) aimed at driving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The overarching goal is to realize economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable development in Sweden through unified national and international policies.  The Swedish government has put in place a new national homelessness strategy in 2022, with the purpose of reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness, as well as preventing people from becoming homeless7. The strategy proposes preventive measures and actions for addressing social and structural homelessness for the period 2022-2026. However, Stockholm City Mission8 [notes](https://www.stadsmissionen.se/press-och-opinion/dags-att-synliggora-fattigdomen)  that the Swedish government's report to the UN (to evaluate Sweden's SDGs work), there is no absolute poverty in Sweden. The government believes that social security protection creates security for everyone . [Stockholm's City Mission](https://www.stadsmissionen.se/vad-vi-gor/barn-och-unga/barnfattigdom-i-sverige) on the contrary meets more and more children who live in families with severe economic vulnerability - poverty.

**2) Which measures have been adopted, if any, to ensure that growth primarily benefits the bottom 40 per cent of the population, in accordance with SDG target 10.1? Have other tools to assess progress towards the reduction of inequalities been designed and implemented?**

* [**Austria**](https://www.diakonie.at/unsere-themen/armut-und-soziale-krisen/armut-in-oesterreich-wichtige-zahlen-und-fakten%22%20%EF%B7%9FHYPERLINK%20%22https:/www.diakonie.at/unsere-themen/armut-und-soziale-krisen/armut-in-oesterreich-wichtige-zahlen-und-fakten)**:** Living wages and unemployment benefits make a significant contribution to preventing poverty. 297,000 people live in households in which, despite working, earnings are not enough to secure a dignified existence -. 143,000 of these “working poor” are households with children (Statistics Austria, 2021). Eurodiaconia members confirm this situation from their work on the field and devote their work to a better redistribution of growth, for it to benefit all in need.
* **Denmark:** DanChurchSocial (Kirkens Korshær)9 states, no measures have been adopted to ensure that economic growth primarily benefits the bottom 40 percent of the population. On the contrary, inequality has been on the rise since the SDG’s were adopted. In the Danish political debate, it is often argued, however, that economic growth always benefits the bottom 40 percent. The Danish Parliament adopted a new homelessness strategy in May 202310.
* **Norway:** Although in Norway systems are supposed to safeguard everyone's rights and give equal opportunities to everyone, there are many who fall outside the scope. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that systems, offers and measures are designed so that not everyone is able to understand and make use of their rights and opportunities. The Church's City Mission11 therefore works to maintain and further develop measures which enable the individual to experience empowerment, and which strengthen various groups and individuals to be able to look after their own interests.
* **Spain:** Nueva Vida and Diaconia Spain12 report thatthe Spanish government has recently adopted a "Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2023-2030”13, with the two main objectives of preventing, detecting and eradicating homelessness, putting the focus on preventing the causes of homelessness such as health problems, addictions, unemployment, family breakups, social isolation, lack of social support, loss of habitual residence, etc. Eurodiaconia members’ effort towards reduction of inequalities is reflected in their work with people in social emergencies, in extreme poverty or at-risk, in homelessness, victims of sexual exploitation, children and marginalized groups, providing the most vulnerable with basic goods such as food, medicines, clothing or payment for basic supplies and in-work trainings.
* **Sweden:** Eurodiaconia’s Swedish members, report that structural homelessness is increasing in Sweden. However, over recent years, household disposable income has risen consistently, even when adjusted for inflation. But economic gaps between societal groups and geographical regions have widened14. This is in line with the findings from the [OECD](https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-distance-to-the-SDG-targets-country-profile-Sweden.pdf) (2022) report, which states that no progress has been made (or moving away) for the SDG Target 10.1 Income Distribution and the SDG Target 10.2 Social inclusion.

**3) Which obstacles did the State encounter in its search for development pathways not dependent on economic growth, consistent with its economic sovereignty and the prioritization of the well-being of the population? Which enabling international environment should be established in order to encourage the search for such alternative development pathways?**

* **Denmark:** Denmark has not actively sought to find new development pathways not dependent on economic growth. Quite the opposite, changing governments have been committed to ensuring as high economic growth as possible, whilst arguing that this is the only possible way to ensure a high level of welfare for Danish citizens.
* **Germany:** Diakonie [Deutschland](https://www.diakonie.de/informieren/infothek/2021/september/wissen-kompakt-armut#c808) criticizes the contradictory design of family policy benefits in Germany and calls for the introduction of basic child welfare, which brings together the subsistence benefits for children and young people and is higher the greater the need. There is a need for further action for children with parents who live separately. Their needs are higher than for children who live with both parents. Diakonie is proposing the introduction of an additional contact requirement, which is staggered according to the days of presence in the respective households, but overall is higher than for families in which both parents and the children live together in one place. The financing of municipal services of general interest must be permanently secured. In Diakonie's opinion, there should be no further tax cuts at the expense of social infrastructure and the municipalities that offer it. Where municipalities no longer have sufficient resources to ensure social offers and assistance, as well as swimming pools, libraries, leisure activities or childcare, no voucher that is intended to enable free access can help.
* **Sweden:**The lack of significant public investments poses a threat to Sweden's economic efficiency and societal cohesion. To support this claim, in Sweden's City Mission's poverty [report](https://www.stadsmissionen.se/press-och-opinion/fattigdomsrapporten2022), the ten municipalities at the poverty peak and poverty bottom are reported, showing geographical differences in Sweden. Malmö topped the list with 14% of the municipality's residents living in economic vulnerability (about 48,000 people). At the bottom of poverty is Malmö's neighboring municipality, Vellinge, where 1.9% lived in economic vulnerability. Statistics Sweden themselves say that the statistics are not comprehensive. This is also shown by Sweden's City Mission's poverty research in collaboration with Professor Magnus Karlsson, Marie Cederskiöld University. For example, the multi-year research shows that around 11% of people who live in poverty and visit Stadsmissionen's social activities are "unhelped". They are probably entitled to the support of the welfare system but have not received help. Then they are also not registered as grant recipients and thus excluded from the public statistics. Sweden's City Missions have long demanded a national mapping of poverty and a national poverty strategy.

**4) The way societies conceive of work, relate to the environment, and finance their economies and welfare systems locks them into growth-oriented economic models. What measures should be taken to overcome such growth dependencies in each of these areas? And how can human rights guide efforts to overcome such self-reinforcement?**

* [**Diakonie Austria**](https://www.diakonie.at/unsere-themen/armut-und-soziale-krisen/armut-in-oesterreich-wichtige-zahlen-und-fakten)**:** Strong welfare states reduce the risk of social decline and protect middle income groups from poverty. Social benefits make a decisive contribution to social balance and have a poverty-preventing effect. They reduce the risk of poverty from 45 %to 13%. The strongest effect: unemployment benefit, emergency and minimum security, as well as housing assistance and care allowance. They protect and support the population. This includes benefits such as minimum income, which was converted into reduced social assistance. A good minimum income should ensure a minimum level of self-determination and help to avert hardship.
* **DanChurchSocial (Kirkens Korshær) Denmark: "**shift away from growth-oriented economic models must ensure economic progress for the poorest people of each country."
* **Diakonie Deutschland Germany:** "A strong and reliable welfare state is needed that adequately protects against life risks and supports people in standing on their own two feet and does not devalue them. This includes a higher standard rate, strengthening social security and more future investments in work, the environment and education."
* [**Church's City Mission Norway:**](https://kirkensbymisjon.no/baerekraft/)"Cooperation and strong partnerships are needed, and civil society plays an important role. Through the great voluntary effort, there are many people who are helping to promote strengthened social sustainability around our businesses. We also experience that volunteering itself contributes to empowerment and social inclusion for many of those who participate in voluntary work.

**More information:**

* [Statement by Eurodiaconia - International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2023](https://www.eurodiaconia.org/international-day-against-poverty-2023/)
* [Eurodiaconia- Caritas survey on energy poverty](https://www.eurodiaconia.org/ru/stark-warning-on-europes-cost-of-living-crisis/#:~:text=The%20survey%20reveals%20that%20the,buying%20food%20or%20paying%20rent.)
* [Eurodiaconia UN input on homelessness and poverty decriminalization](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/joint-activity/decriminalization-homelessness/subm-decriminalization-homelessness-extreme-cso-eurodiaconia.docx)
* [Eurodiaconia Homelessness Prevention report](https://www.eurodiaconia.org/new-report-homelessness-prevention-in-europe-state-of-play-and-challenges-ahead/)
* More examples of members best practices: “[Social innovation hub](https://www.eurodiaconia.org/ru/social-innovation-hub/)”.