



AGM Declaration

TOGETHER TO ADDRESS PRECARIOUSNESS

On the occasion of its Annual General Meeting, Eurodiaconia members want to respond to the political and economic developments threatening people's rights and well-being. Our joint response is based on our common hope, our willingness to act together, and in the belief, that one of the key components of the Christian faith is that all humans are valued for what they are – creations in the image of God - and not valued because of their social, economic or religious status. Therefore, we have agreed:

1. The assessment: an increasing precariousness endangering Europe

Uncertainty, insecurity and fragility have characterised the human condition throughout history. Societies across Europe have worked to create social safety mechanisms to temper life risks and to moderate inequalities. However, the past decade has seen the resurgence of political justifications for weakening social welfare protection. While pushing towards more flexibility and mobility of the labour force, and increased conditionality and reduction in social benefits, this political dynamic has led to a dramatically increased precariousness of people's lives across Europe, with 118.7 million people in the EU-28 in or at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

- a. **Precariousness in social protection:** In the decade since the 2008 crisis, several EU member states have adopted austerity measures which often have had a negative social impact. Clad in the rhetoric of “modernization”, many governments have implemented widespread cuts in the financing of social protection and social services, with sometimes dramatic reductions in health service provision, education, housing and social welfare. As in the past, it is the already most disadvantaged segments of our societies that carry the heaviest burden of these policies, exacerbating existing precariousness.
- b. **Precariousness in employment:** Whereas labour law had advanced over centuries toward the protection of workers' rights, many countries have recently started to move in the opposite direction. Precarious forms of employment have grown based on the questionable justification that ‘any job is better than no job’. The deregulation of labour law has seen the development of exacerbated forms of precariousness in people's lives, with the introduction of zero-hour contracts, the end of wage indexation, the proliferation of temporary work and low-wages.
- c. **Precariousness in community cohesion and democracy:** The stability and predictability required to establish and maintain social networks and build communities of belonging have been unsettled. New ways of life and the consequent increase of loneliness have jeopardised traditional social support networks, leaving individuals all the more exposed to precariousness. In the long run, this risks further propagating the polarisation of society, as specific groups see and blame each other of being ‘burdens to the state’ and antagonisms are mobilized through populist and extreme political movements.
- d. **Precariousness of hope:** As the very essence of our social fabric is seen as being threatened, trust in institutions and people is declining. In many parts of Europe, today's generation fears poverty in old age and does not believe their children will have a better future than they do. As such, the hope and belief in a Europe that provides and cares for its citizens becomes increasingly vulnerable.





2. The commitment: Diaconal organisations working together for change

Eurodiaconia members, active in 32 countries in the European Union and beyond, provide services and advocacy to address the root causes of precariousness.

Through *Advocacy*, we will continue to work for just social protection systems, for quality affordable and accessible social services, and to resist political pressure to turn a blind eye to the development of all forms of precariousness; instead proposing courageous social reforms anchored in our belief in the inherent value of human life, as well as in the legitimate pursuit of dignity, well-being, happiness and social justice.

Through *Praxis*, we will continue to exchange and learn from each other to continuously improve our work and services, to serve and protect those exposed to precariousness, working with individuals and communities to be empowered in equal and just societies. We will continue to work in partnership with Churches, trade unions, businesses and civil society to build alliances to resist economic ruling.

Through our diaconal *Identity*, we will continue to carry the Christian faith and values that make us who we are, working for and with individuals, families and communities exposed to precariousness, to bring hope and concrete effective support to fight the oppression of those in need without discrimination.

Eurodiaconia members believe Social Europe must urgently be strengthened, developing policies and actions that ensure sustainable and just economic development and social protection. We therefore urge our national governments and the European institutions to resist financial, economic and ideological pressures which leave a large part of the population at risk of precarious situations. Instead, we advocate for promoting participatory democracy and adopting long-term policies placing peoples' rights, well-being and protection at the centre of all future growth strategies.