



**Innovative projects to promote quality
employment and entrepreneurship
for the future of work**



European Economic and Social Committee

The 2017 EESC Civil Society Prize – Innovative projects to promote quality employment and entrepreneurship for the future of work

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President's introduction

Almost ten years after the economic and financial crisis began, the EU is still struggling with high unemployment. Despite recent improvements, 8.6% of the active population – almost 21 million people – were out of work in 2016.

Several forms of unemployment need to be tackled as a priority. Long-term unemployment accounts for almost 50% of the total and leads to skill depreciation, reduced labour market attachment and a higher risk of social exclusion. Youth unemployment is another pressing problem, standing at over 19% in 2016. Women, particularly mothers and those that have caring responsibilities, remain under-represented in the workforce. Many have lower salaries and shorter careers, which often turn into lower pensions.

The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU rose from 116 million in 2008 to almost 118 million in 2016. Unemployment is one of the main causes of this, as work generally enables people to participate fully in society, build social networks and fulfil their potential.



Technological development, demographic change, globalisation and new production patterns tend to encourage social dumping, exploitation of the workforce, ideologies that turn their back on solidarity, and the erosion of the achievements of the European social model. In practice, we are losing decent, stable and full-time jobs to various forms of irregular and precarious work, or even jobs that pay so little that they do not even offer a way out of poverty.

Against this background, the European Economic and Social Committee's 2017 Civil Society Prize rewards projects that promote quality jobs and entrepreneurship with the potential to create such jobs. The projects focus on young people, migrants and others finding it hard to get onto the labour market.

It is a great pleasure and a privilege to present this prize to the winners. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate them, of course, but also to pay well-deserved tribute to every person and civil society organisation whose hard work and commitment to making people's lives better is an example to us all.

EESC President **Georges Dassis**

The annual EESC
Civil Society
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Job creation: a challenge for the EU, Member States and civil society

EU Member States have primary responsibility for employment policy, while the EU works with them on a coordinated strategy – the European employment strategy – to support creation of more and better jobs.

After many efforts and important reforms in recent years, Europe has seen a return to economic growth and some positive labour market and social trends.

However, almost one person in ten is unemployed in the EU-28 and one person in four is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Today's youngsters, even the most educated, face 19% unemployment and significant challenges: school-to-work transitions are not easy, and they are exposed to job insecurity, non-standard work contracts and precarious jobs to a greater extent than were previous generations. In addition, significant disparities exist between EU Member States as regards unemployment and risk of poverty.

For their own well-being and that of the whole of society, especially in the context of demographic change, Europe cannot leave its people behind and risk losing their talent and potential. Further efforts are therefore needed to make labour markets more inclusive, remove barriers to participation and encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to move into employment or entrepreneurship. Organised civil society contributes to this by identifying opportunities for creation of rewarding, quality jobs and promoting entrepreneurship, particularly among groups who are disadvantaged or under-represented in the workforce. Civil society initiatives are often able to help people who are furthest away from the labour market in a more personalised manner, which is crucial for meeting their needs.

EESC Civil Society Prize: the background

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is the only body that represents the interests of all sectors of organised civil society at EU level. One of its main tasks is to raise awareness of the vital role that civil society organisations play in fostering the development of a European identity in a way that underpins the values that shore up European integration.

To this end, the EESC launched the Civil Society Prize in 2006. It rewards projects – either completed or ongoing – that have achieved real results in promoting European identity and integration and improving life in their communities.

The competition is open to all civil society organisations officially registered within the EU and acting at European, national, regional or local level, and to individuals from across Europe, be they EU citizens or nationals of other countries legally resident in the EU. Each year, it focuses on a different field.

In previous years, awards have gone to initiatives that improve the lives of refugees and migrants, combat poverty and social exclusion, support Roma communities, promote sustainable lifestyles and green jobs, encourage networking, education and campaigning, and defend the interests of young people.

The 2017 edition

Given the need to bolster the EU's struggle against unemployment, the 2017 Civil Society Prize recognises initiatives which support the labour market integration of groups requiring specific support. Such groups include young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training, people from migrant backgrounds, the long-term unemployed, women detached from the labour market, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and people living in poverty. The initiatives cover at least one of the following areas:

- Implementation and enforcement of non-discrimination in labour market integration;
- Inclusion of newcomers and disadvantaged people in the labour market, through quality jobs or self-employment, or as entrepreneurs;
- Development of innovative forms of workforce integration for disadvantaged and vulnerable people;
- Provision of regular or sheltered jobs for disadvantaged and vulnerable people in order to help them move into regular employment;
- Individualised advice and guidance services on labour market integration for the unemployed;
- Tailored learning and training to enhance the employability of vulnerable people;
- Awareness raising, promotion of mutual learning and dissemination of good practices on innovative approaches to integrating people, including those furthest away from the labour market, into the workforce.

The EESC received 111 applications – of which 104 were eligible – from 25 countries. A 10-member expert panel evaluated the eligible initiatives on the basis of various criteria. These included potential to have a long-term impact and inspire others in Europe in the same or different fields, involvement of beneficiaries and other actors, and the ability to share good practices and raise awareness of issues related to the theme. The panel also looked at creativity, uniqueness and innovation, in terms of new ideas and new or improved ways of implementing existing approaches or adapting them to different contexts or groups.

Based on the panel's evaluation, the EESC presented the winners with their prizes at an awards ceremony in Brussels on 7 December 2017. A total of EUR 50 000 was shared between five projects, with EUR 14 000 for the first prize and EUR 9 000 for each of the other winners.

Further information

2017 EESC Civil Society Prize:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/2017-eesc-civil-society-prize-innovative-projects-promote-quality-employment-and-entrepreneurship-future-work>

EESC webpages on employment:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/policies/policy-areas/employment>

Discovering Hands

Breast cancer is the most common and one of the most lethal types of cancer. More than 360 000 women a year are diagnosed with it in the EU and for over 90 000 of them, it is fatal. At the same time, job opportunities for people with disabilities in Europe are scarce, with fewer than half of them in work.

Feeling that he lacked sufficient time to perform optimal breast examinations, it occurred to German gynaecologist and Discovering Hands project director Frank Hoffmann in the shower one morning that blind and visually impaired people have an enhanced sense of touch that could help detect breast cancer early.

“Discovering Hands aims to improve the quality of early breast cancer detection in a very human way by turning a disability into a life-saving gift, opening up a completely new field of work for the visually impaired,” says Hoffmann.



The non-profit social enterprise developed a curriculum for a 9-month programme run by certified instructors to train blind and visually impaired women as medical tactile examiners (MTEs). It also set up partnerships with vocational training centres for blind and visually impaired people and negotiated contracts with public healthcare funds. The maximum training intake is currently 24 people a year.

Once they are qualified, the women use their skills in gynaecological clinics and hospitals and at the

Discovering Hands centre in Berlin, a prototype which opened in mid 2015 and employs six full-time MTEs. The social enterprise has also developed a personnel-leasing model that makes it possible for individual MTEs to see patients at different medical centres, particularly smaller practices and those in rural areas.

MTEs perform examinations in line with a standardised concept, taking at least 30 minutes and dedicating a maximum amount of time and attention to each patient. Initial studies show that MTEs detect 30% more alterations in breast tissue than gynaecologists and also notice changes 50% smaller in size than those which gynaecologists are usually able to detect.

Early detection means that the cancer can be treated in less harmful ways and significantly increases patients' chances of survival. Discovering Hands thus achieves the twin goals of improving healthcare and creating meaningful long-term work for blind and visually impaired women. Moreover, MTEs can do this job not despite their disability but thanks to their abilities, and by stressing this point the project helps to foster a positive change in social attitudes towards people with disabilities.



"The next challenge for Discovering Hands is to bring our well-developed model to other European countries. The EESC prize will help to open many new doors," Hoffmann adds.

Thus far, 45 MTEs have been trained and employed in Germany and Austria, while up to 8.8 million women across Germany have free access to breast examinations by MTEs, paid for by their health insurance. The target is to reach 200 MTEs in Germany in the next 5 years, while for 2018, pilot projects are planned in Spain, Portugal and Poland.

Further afield, Discovering Hands is already active in Colombia – where five people have qualified as MTEs, four of whom work in the public health service in Cali, with another employed in Mexico – and India, where six instructors have been trained and have start-ed running courses. Also, a Mexican pilot project began in October 2017.

Discovering Hands aims to improve the quality of early breast cancer detection in a very human way by turning a disability into a life-saving gift, opening up a completely new field of work for the visually impaired.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.discovering-hands.de

DUO for a JOB

Belgian project DUO for a JOB's work is based on two findings: unemployment is extremely high among young people, particularly those from migrant backgrounds; and Belgian senior citizens have one of the lowest activity rates (48.8 %) of all EU countries, but 70% are willing to get involved in volunteering.

"DUO for a JOB matches young job seekers with an immigrant background with people over 50 who have professional experience in related fields and who can accompany and support them in their job search," explains coordinator Emmanuelle Ghislain.



Over 6 months, participants follow a 10-step process from an initial information session to a final evaluation. For 2-3 hours a week, the duo work on developing a professional project for the young jobseeker. This includes defining the project, writing CVs and covering letters, and attending project activities such as CV or LinkedIn workshops and mock interviews.

"Through its mentoring programme, DUO for a JOB encourages exchange of experience between generations and cultures, thus facilitating the future employment of young people while recognising the value of our elders' experience," adds Ghislain.

An additional aspect of the work involves lobbying for more diversity and intercultural and intergenerational exchange in civil society, companies and institutions.

DUO for a JOB was created in 2013 by a group of friends who wanted to help build a more inclusive society. It was composed of just two volunteers and a dozen mentors in Brussels. Today, it has 25 full-time employees, 500 mentors and 150 volunteers in Brussels, Antwerp and Liege, and is supported by various private and public institutions.

Thus far, the project has created 900 duos and 56% of young participants find a job within a year of taking part. If traineeships and enrolment on professional training programmes are included, this rises to 75%. Furthermore, 94% of the more than 500 mentors return for a further 6-month period, with some having coached as many as nine people.



The project currently involves people of over 70 nationalities and from 50 sectors of activity. Over the next 5 years, the aims are to increase the number of beneficiaries by 50% annually and to expand the project to Ghent and Charleroi in Belgium and five cities in other European countries, initially France and Italy. The team is working on a model to support international development without jeopardising programme quality. DUO for a JOB is also looking to maintain a rate of 50% of participants finding work within 12 months and to recruit a further 2 000 mentors.

"Being nominated for the EESC prize confirms that our efforts are in line with a global movement towards more equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion. It is an honour and a fantastic opportunity for us to meet and exchange with other initiatives, building together a stronger Europe," Ghislain concludes.

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MORE INFORMATION:

www.duoforajob.be

Laundry ID

Laundry ID is an innovative solution aimed at creating rewarding and sustainable jobs for people with disabilities.

Based at Sitges, near Barcelona, the Institute of Robotics for Dependency (IRD) was created by the Ave Maria Foundation, a residential facility for people with intellectual disabilities. The IRD uses advanced technology to design systems that improve the lives of such people, their families and professionals who support them.

Several years ago, the Ave Maria Foundation was struggling to find jobs for residents, while its laundry was having trouble sorting clothes and getting them back to their owners. Volunteers and relatives came up with a system for simplifying the task. It has been used at the foundation since 2008 and has enabled four people with disabilities to join the laundry team as regular employees.

The problem with the system was that it was too complex to be installed at other institutions. The IRD has overcome this by redesigning it under the Laundry ID project, making it wireless, low cost, easy to use and adaptable for facilities in Spain or abroad.



Laundry ID not only eliminates sorting errors, but also standardises the labelling process by attaching a water and heat resistant label containing a reusable radio-frequency identification chip to each garment. It identifies the garment while the worker is folding it, showing who the owner is on a screen. A light in the shelves is illuminated to indicate where the garment should be left for distribution.

The system provides traceability, letting managers and relatives know where a garment is and how many times it has been washed, and reduces costs by speeding up sorting. Ease of installation further cuts expenditure, with implementation costing less than 0.5 % of the average annual budget for a small care home. Cloud software enables administrators to access and update the system, and provide support from anywhere.

Laundry ID allows care facilities with a laundry to improve service and makes it easier for those without to install one. A standard 60-resident facility normally employs 3-4 workers in the laundry. In Spain alone, there are more than 4 000 such facilities for people with disabilities and another 5 000 for the elderly. The project thus has enormous job creation potential.



For coordinator David Lopez, *“Laundry ID is an innovative solution aimed at creating rewarding and sustainable jobs for people with disabilities. It adapts the work at residential and care facilities, guiding the worker in all steps of the process and eliminating the common clothes losses due to errors in classification and distribution.”*



The Ave Maria Foundation is a member of Plena Inclusion, an organisation representing people with intellectual disabilities in Spain. It has publicised the initiative and several institutions have shown an interest, as have care homes for the elderly that heard about it on local media, with the result that Laundry ID is now being installed in two more facilities.

“Being shortlisted for the EESC prize will help to further disseminate knowledge of an ergonomic, eco-friendly, adapted, low-cost and inclusive laundry model at European level. It will also help to facilitate greater labour market inclusion through the use of technology in fully adapted laundries,” says Lopez.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.institutorobotica.org

Progetto QUID



Unemployment amongst disadvantaged groups – which include 5 million people in Italy – and the amount of fabric wasted by the clothing industry are big social and environmental challenges. With its fashion label Progetto QUID, Italian social enterprise QUID has developed a business model to support the disadvantaged while recovering waste textiles to make clothes.

“Progetto QUID is an ethical fashion brand with the aim of creating effective social inclusion of people who come from vulnerable backgrounds,” says coordinator Giulia Houston. *“In particular, it does so by creating employment opportunities for whoever encounters the most obstacles to entering the labour market, like disadvantaged workers, asylum seekers, victims of violence and many others.”*

Employing eight people when it was founded in 2013, Progetto QUID increased the size of its workforce to 17 in 2014, 25 in 2015 and 60 in 2016. As of September 2017, it had reached 80 workers, of whom 70% belong to groups recognised as disadvantaged and 40% are foreign born.

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The workers help to create Progetto QUID's collections by manufacturing garments and accessories, and dealing with quality control, packaging and logistics at the enterprise's base in Verona. The QUID team creates opportunities for staff bonding with monthly gatherings to share information on project advancement and social events. QUID also works with social organisations who put it in touch with possible beneficiaries and support its staff with non-work matters such as administration, family, accommodation and integration.

As regards the environment, Progetto QUID recovers and reuses fabrics left over from previous collections by other brands. It thus eliminates the environmental impact that their disposal would otherwise have. The project further benefits the environment by making it unnecessary for QUID to buy material, the production of which also has negative ecological effects. In 2016, Progetto QUID recovered 200 kilometres of fabric, underlining its contribution to preventing emissions of dangerous substances.

The products are distributed through various channels. Progetto QUID has five stores and has established partnerships with 10 fashion companies across Italy. Their involvement is helping to attract further interest. Revenue went from EUR 90 000 in 2013 to over EUR 1 million in 2016 and is projected to reach EUR 2 million by the end of 2017.

For the future, Progetto QUID aims to employ up to 20 new staff a year. To achieve this, it looks to develop two new partnerships with fashion industry players and to open 1-2 new stores annually. As the issues it tackles are universal, the team also hopes to set up franchises in other European countries.



“If we had the honour of being awarded the 2017 EESC prize, QUID would definitely benefit from stronger credibility and visibility in a more international environment. This would give us the chance to learn from fellow winners, share our experience and possibly inspire others to follow suit. Moreover, winning the cash prize would allow QUID to strengthen the internal welfare support system it provides to its employees,” Houston concludes.

MORE INFORMATION:

progettoquid.it

REvive Greece

REvive Greece is a registered NGO with a mission to help refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to integrate into receiving countries, and at the same time, to fight the digital skills gap in Europe.

Europe faces an estimated shortage of 400 000 software developers and this is projected to reach 800 000 by 2020. As the main point of entry to the EU for Middle Eastern refugees, Greece is the perfect place to look to fill this skills gap, as the REvive project shows.

“REvive Greece is a registered NGO with a mission to help refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to integrate into receiving countries, and at the same time, to fight the digital skills gap in Europe,” explains coordinator Theodore Dimakarakos. *“To that end, while they wait in Greece for approval from other European governments, we utilise our innovative e-Learning platform to train them in computer programming – an in-demand skill – and then connect them with young European entrepreneurs to collaborate and form tech start-ups.”*

Participants follow a 6-month curriculum via smartphones, which 90% of migrants are thought to own. Online interaction with volunteer educators from across the world takes place through real-time digital classrooms. Technologies taught include HTML, CSS, JS, Python and Java, among others.



The next step is to provide support to teams composed of course graduates and European tech entrepreneurs. The graduates develop their skills further and access the project's mentoring services in a protected real-work environment which ensures an effective transition to regular employment. They also get a living allowance from the project during this period.

If they have applied for relocation to another country or decide that self-employment is not for them, participants can get work in the private sector through REvive's agreements with ICT companies or link up with its tech partners elsewhere.

As well as helping newcomers to integrate, REvive can boost the economies of their receiving countries. Its support, combined with refugees' motivation, resilience and entrepreneurial spirit and European entrepreneurs' local knowledge, has the potential to create highly competitive start-ups.



A crucial advantage is that the refugees will not be competing with local people for jobs and so will not attract resentment, especially in countries with high unemployment like Greece. They will also be able to use their skills in the rebuilding of their home countries should they return.

The e-Learning platform currently operates only in Greece but the model is easy to transfer and there are plans to expand it internationally. On the support side, REvive will start accepting candidates from all over Europe and use its agreements with other European partners to replicate the process elsewhere. In addition, the project is setting up a physical refugee computer coding school which both uses and complements its e-Learning platform.

“Should we win the EESC prize, it will give us extensive coverage capable, not only of attracting the attention of potential beneficiaries, but also of helping us create partnerships with other organisations across Europe who share the same vision. At the same time, it might bring our initiative onto the radar of the private sector which could have a significant role in our work,” says Dimakarakos.

MORE INFORMATION:



mntmigration.org



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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

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