

1) *What is happening and what needs to happen to build a fairer society after this pandemic for all groups that tend to be more affected by inequalities?*

The Conference of European Churches is a fellowship bringing together 114 churches from Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican traditions from all over Europe for dialogue, advocacy, and joint action. Through its member churches, the CEC is involved in social and diaconal work throughout Europe especially with migrants and socially distanced minorities.

1. Minority groups and Human Rights

The crisis has highlighted essential systemic elements of a functioning society and revealed social imbalances in a drastic way. During the crisis, all kinds of public gathering were prohibited in most countries. Churches, the Muslim community and other religious communities were particularly affected, because the essential component of a communitarian faith, i.e. physical meetings in the form of worship and prayer, was no longer possible.

On the other hand, especially vulnerable and elderly people, who were considered as a risk group, had no advocacy and have sometimes been treated in a discriminatory way. A Crisis is in some way litmus tests in how far democratic societies care for their minority groups.

2. Better cooperation between the private, civil society and public sectors

The pandemic wave that has rushed across the globe in recent months resembled an emergency stop. It became obvious that governments, institutions and administrations were not prepared for it, but were helpless in the face of the wave. When it came to strict restrictions up to the lock-down and curfew in some European countries, the dialogue between civil society and the state also seemed to have broken down. Urgency situation need quick and efficient reactions, but they should never happen without comprehensible explanation and discussion.

3. Education

In our societies, public schools are an important instrument in socialisation. Schools aim to offer education to everyone and, thus, to tackle inequalities. In times of distance learning, these inequalities come to the surface again. Inequalities in learning environments of homes can increase existing injustice in the opportunities for children from what are often underprivileged backgrounds. Education plays an essential role in the Judeo-Christian tradition. CEC sees it as a task for churches to contribute to the shaping of a society through education. It is not only about the transfer of knowledge; it also needs to promote community through its unifying element.

Education has a definite role in the development of the social life and growth of individuals but as well for a common sense of the wellbeing of every individual without discrimination. It prepares young people for participation in democratic citizenship and awakens their cultural awareness for diversity.

The essential characteristic of a democracy is the protection of minorities. Education awakens a sense of the responsibility for the whole society, which includes minority groups. Democracy works only when there is trust and this sense for collective responsibility supported by individuals.

All these are essential elements in promoting peaceful coexistence in a socially responsible and just society, which need to be strengthen not only through formal but as well through non-formal education.