Let this be the decade of hope.
People seeking sanctuary to be held at Europe’s borders

In December, Germany’s Ministry of the Interior proposed reform of the common European asylum system, suggesting a system of processing asylum applications at the EU external border alongside a new mechanism for sharing newcomers between different EU countries. The proposals include a new accelerated process at the EU’s southern border (predominantly Malta, Greece, Croatia and Italy) for people who have travelled through what the EU calls ‘safe third countries’ or who are coming from a country which is generally considered safe. In practice, this will mean that people seeking sanctuary in Europe will have to live in new transit camps, with more limited legal advice during their asylum procedure and shorter appeals periods. The proposals will be discussed by EU member states at a summit in July 2020.

Libya horrors update

Around Europe readers will be aware that QCEA has been following the widespread detention, abuse and torture of African migrants in Libya. December has seen further evidence of the anti-migrant violence being committed in Libya, but also some successful and significant human rights advocacy in France.

Desperation in Libya

The OOC Panther, a commercial vessel from Germany, picked up thirty people travelling across the Mediterranean in a dinghy. The people were then transferred to the EU-sponsored Libyan Coastguard at which point some threatened to set themselves on fire and others jumped overboard. Similar stories of people preferring to die rather than be taken back to detention in Libya have been relayed directly to QCEA staff – testimony of the inhuman treatment of African migrants there. Making this particular story more tragic was the fact that an NGO rescue vessel arrived to collect the stranded people before the Libyan Coastguard arrived, but the commercial vessel refused to let them disembark.

Advocacy success

Also in December, at the last moment the French government prevented their arms industry from delivering six new boats to the EU-sponsored Libyan Coastguard. This change of policy followed advocacy by a coalition of NGOs, including legal action. QCEA hopes that this might be the beginning of a change of policy from European governments and the EU, as their role in facilitating human rights abuses in Libya is now subject to a legal submission to the International Criminal Court. We are grateful to the European Council for Refugees and Exiles for their similar action against Italy at the European Court of Human Rights.

Tory landslide clears way for hard Brexit

After months of unprecedented political instability, British voters went to the polls on December 12 and provided Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party with a larger-than-expected majority in Parliament. The result breaks the deadlock in the House of Commons and gives Johnson free rein to take Britain out of the EU by the end of January 2020.

The election campaign was marked by a paucity of policy detail from Johnson, who avoided significant scrutiny by refusing to take part in various interviews and debates. Indeed, despite the long shadow cast by Brexit, the Prime Minister failed to set out any concrete proposals whatsoever for securing a promised trade deal with the EU.

The vote feels to be a turning point for British politics, setting the country on a social and economic path more akin to the United States than the European model. With an absolute majority, the Tory party is now free to implement its neoliberal and securitised vision of society with no real opposition. Despite initial hopes that voter engagement appeared to be particularly high, turnout was actually slightly lower than in 2017.

In Scotland, another strong performance by the Scottish National Party (SNP) suggests that there may be a renewed push for independence there in the future – perhaps even within the next year.

In Northern Ireland, the cross-community Alliance Party won a seat, whereas the strongly pro-unionist DUP – who had propped up the previous Tory government in an informal coalition – lost two.
A busy end to 2019 for QCEA's advocacy

The beginning of a new year represents the ideal opportunity to reflect on QCEA's peace and human rights advocacy over recent months. Our team has been busy with both ‘quiet diplomacy’ efforts (see box opposite) as well as more public outreach at several major civil society events across Europe. Here’s a summary of a productive autumn at Quaker House Brussels and beyond.

SEEN STRASBOURG
28—31 October

Earlier in 2019, Quaker House Brussels played host to SEEN, an exhibition of portrait photography taken by women living in an asylum centre on the Greek island of Chios. The striking images – taken in the context of a project run by the Swiss civil society organisation Action for Women – help to give a human face to the reality of Europe’s migration policies, as well as the women who must live with the consequences.

Building on the success of the exhibition in Brussels, QCEA and Action for Women brought SEEN to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where the portraits were displayed on the sidelines of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

This event brought together hundreds of mayors and heads of local government from across Europe – an excellent opportunity to reach policymakers at the sub-national level who are often responsible for day-to-day implementation of migration policies.

Hundreds of delegates had the chance to view the exhibition and hear a speech by Action for Women’s founder, Gabrielle Tay, who observed that the photos represented “a dignified representation of an uprooted, transitory state as something powerful, courageous and humane”.

QCEA remains committed to raising awareness through cultural outreach. This includes exhibitions, film screenings and our ongoing reading group which explores the theme of white privilege.

What is ‘quiet diplomacy’?

So much thinking about policy begins with conversations – but constructive, inclusive and trust-based conversations are not guaranteed. Here in Brussels, QCEA offers a supportive space where key stakeholders can frankly discuss policy and build common ground in an informal, off-the-record setting. Our role is to facilitate important conversations, make sure the right people are around the table and that all voices are heard. QCEA is rare in its capacity to perform this role: as Quakers, our reputation for trustworthiness and integrity has proven vital in allowing us to bring people together, meaning we can play host to the discreet discussions which lead to real change. We call these structured dialogue processes ‘quiet diplomacy’.

JOINT EVENT WITH OSCE ON POLITICAL NARRATIVES
7—8 November

November saw QCEA organise its first joint event with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a human security-focused international institution with fifty-seven participating states. The two-day event, ‘Political Narratives and Migration’, brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to develop a better and more nuanced understanding of the process by which public opinion is formed around migration.

As anti-migrant stereotypes and hostile narratives increasingly form the basis of policymaking and politics across Europe, the event offered participants the space to unwrap the complex dynamics between political discourse, public opinion and media narratives on migration, how they are shaped and how they interact with each other.

The outcomes of the discussions will feed into our longer-term Human Rights Programme work, which aims to build an ongoing dialogue between a diverse range of relevant actors in order to address the framing of migration in European political discourse.

Questions we sought to address included —
- How are narratives about migration – and people who migrate – constructed?
- Who benefits from the dominant narrative and who is negatively affected by it?
- Which stakeholders have the power to create change and which are rarely identified?

The event was part of QCEA’s quiet diplomacy work, about which we say little so as not to undermine the ability of participants to share openly. However, we can report that the event was widely commended for how it found new openings to change political narratives on migration, and for addressing difficult questions head-on. One participant said it was the most useful event she had participated in during her thirty-year political career.

WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY
5—8 November

Readers of Around Europe will be familiar with #ChooseRespect, QCEA’s pilot project aimed at responding to anti-migrant hate speech on the internet. Launched in the context of the 2019 European elections, it reached 11 million EU voters with advice on how to construct more positive narratives around migrants and refugees.

Internet companies, regulators and governments are still struggling to find sustainable ways to handle hateful content online, and our approach – changing the tone of conversations, with a view to shifting perspectives – caught the interest of the Council of Europe, who invited us to present our work at the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg.

The Forum is a week-long annual gathering of politicians, journalists and representatives of the private sector, who meet to discuss the challenges facing democracy in an era of misinformation and declining public trust in institutions. Over 2,000 delegates attended, including QCEA’s Communications Coordinator Martin Leng, who presented #ChooseRespect and its findings.

Our presentation was well-received and our participation allowed us to meet with others working on similar issues at a high level – important for building recognition of our work on narrative change as our Human Rights Programme begins to re-focus around this topic in the years to come.

Join QCEA’s online conversation

Want to keep in touch with QCEA’s work in a more informal, interactive way? If you use Facebook, why not join our Friends of QCEA group, where you can discuss our work and our concerns with Friends and QCEA Supporters across Europe?
PARIS PEACE FORUM
11—13 November

The second edition of the Paris Peace Forum took place in November. It brought together various actors – policymakers, heads of state, international and regional organisations and also civil society organisations – to discuss conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches. QCEA’s Peace Programme Assistant Clémence Buchet–Couzy was also in attendance.

As at last year’s event, the lack of multilateralism in peacebuilding was the key concern touched upon by the keynote attendees, including Emmanuel Macron and Ursula Von der Leyen, the newly-appointed President of the European Commission.

This was the second time that QCEA was present for the Forum, enabling us to compare it to the first edition held in 2018. There were some improvements: in terms of gender balance on panels, for example, and an increased presence for peacebuilding organisations such as Search for Common Ground and Interpeace, with both having a stall at the conference.

Nevertheless, local civil society organisations doing grassroots peacebuilding were missing – due largely to the high cost of participation. Much remains to be done in order to guarantee inclusiveness and local ownership at this high-level event, which represents one element of Emmanuel Macron’s efforts to re-establish France’s historical position at the centre of international diplomacy.

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SECONDARY TRAUMA PROJECT TO CONTINUE ITS GOOD WORK

Around Europe readers will be familiar with the Helping the Helpers project, that over the last two years has brought Quaker psychotherapists together from several countries to address the needs of long-term volunteers who serve people seeking sanctuary in Europe, with a view to enabling them to avoid the long-term effects of vicarious and secondary trauma.

Participants were volunteers who have devoted their time without pay to helping refugees and migrants. The project gave participants skills that will enable them not only to address their own trauma but also to avoid retraumatisation of those they work with.

The final residential institute took place at Woodbrooke in the Autumn. The five days focused on how to pass on the what participants have learned to others, as well as specific considerations for people with special needs, including LGBT+ people, children and women. Finally, the programme allowed participants to work on self-care plans for their lives beyond Helping the Helpers.

For a copy of the final Helping the Helpers newsletter, where you can hear directly from the participants about how they benefited from the programme, email Kate McNally – kate.mcnally@yahoo.com.

QCEA has been pleased to support this pilot project. It will now be taken up by Heidi Pidcoke and Evan Welkin who have supported the project throughout. If you would like to contact them about the future of this work, please email evan@borgobasino.org.

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On November 21-23 I was invited to present QCEA’s research and advocacy work on peace education at a workshop on the ‘Culture of Good Neighbourhood’ course, which is being run in education institutions in Ukraine’s Chernivtsi region. This event was organised jointly by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science of and the NGO Integration and Development Center for Information and Research (IDCIR).

It was an opportunity to meet and exchange with members of the Peace Education Working Group (PEWG) established by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflicts (GPPAC), which organised its annual meeting after the workshop. Before my visit to Ukraine, we translated flyers about QCEA into Ukrainian and Russian so that all the participants would be aware of our work, including our Russian edition of Building Peace Together.

I took part of a panel discussion on “the development of peace education in Ukraine and abroad” alongside two members of the PEWG. The audience seemed very interested by the discussion. Several participants approached me to know more about our work, our Peace Education report and our advocacy towards the EU in this regard. After the panel discussion we distributed over fifty copies of our two reports.

The event offered me a unique opportunity to understand in great details the ‘Culture of Good Neighbourhood’ course and its impact in Ukrainian education. The course has existed for more than 15 years and has since been expanded to neighbouring Moldova. Its aim is to build social and civic competence and tolerance in the broader sense, including ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender and social tolerance. It is designed for children and their parents. Interaction with the parents and the local community are key components of the course.

Through various activities, the children can improve their conflict resolution skills, discover school mediation and negotiation process, or develop their critical thinking. Not only does this help pupils to deal with interpersonal issues, but also introduces ideas like intercultural communication to both children and their parents. The course is part of the formal curriculum, so every child can benefit from it throughout their education.

During this workshop, we visited a school in the region which is implementing this course. I could exchange with the students and their teachers and therefore truly assess the impact of the initiative. It was really interesting to see how such a course is implemented in a country which dominated the headlines a couple years ago due to violence and tensions with Russia.

We also met with some participants of the workshop in order to have a better understanding of the scope of peace education in Ukraine, and talked with peace education practitioners from the Institute for Peace and Common Ground who are working on a pilot project: the Peace School model, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, which includes activities such as peer mediation.

After the workshop I participated in the Annual Meeting of the Peace Education Working Group of GPPAC. Several of its members contributed to our Peace Education report, notably by being interviewed for it. I was able to learn more about the activities of the members of the PEWG who all explained their backgrounds and work in peace education.

Their experiences truly highlight the diversity of peace education and its various challenges, depending on the political and social environment in which it is implemented. I shared with the group what we have achieved with our Peace Education project, in particular our cooperation with our sister organisation QPSW, and what we want to achieve in 2020. The exchange was very fruitful; we identified many ways forward for cooperation between projects. It gave me even more motivation and energy to advocate for peace education approaches back in Brussels.

QCEA’s Peace Education report is available at www.qcea.org/PeaceEducation

What is GPPAC?

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a network led by civil society organisations actively working to prevent violent conflict and build more peaceful societies based on bottom-up approaches. It is divided into fifteen regional networks which meet every year. It has also five working groups —

- Peace Education (PEWG)
- Youth Peace and Security
- Improving Practices
- Influencing Policies
- Enabling Collaboration
Let’s hear from Yuko...

I am Yuko Hanada and starting my placement after my MA in Advanced Practice in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution. I have gained a huge amount of knowledge and skills from my time at Bradford. For example, the Applied Conflict Research module provided me with a foundation in conflict analysis and conflict mapping, and I learned about conflict sensitivity workshop from Professor Owen Green, who has a deep connection with Quakers. All of my studies are extremely relevant for my work at QCEA. I cannot count the number of times that I have appreciated the decision I took to choose Bradford. At QCEA I have been researching the gaps in the current political discussion on peacebuilding and climate change, and I have had some great opportunities to attend meetings on this issue. As QCEA is located in Brussels – a centre of international diplomacy – it is not unusual to meet people working at the heart of this policy agenda. This diverse and inspiring environment also reminds me of my time at Bradford. Through my research and meetings with different stakeholders including experts in this field from international organisations, diplomats and academics, several I have started to look at multiple layers of peace. The more I face the complexities of peacebuilding, the more I see a variety of solutions to the root causes of conflict. The term peacebuilding is not familiar to most people, but it actually relates to everyone in our daily lives. Various activities and initiatives can make a change at the individual level, no matter who or where we are. Every choice we make and every word we say can impact conflict.

I am so fortunate to see peace in practice in the activities undertaken at Quaker House and the way it is run. I am grateful to be able to work at QCEA, which seeks to represent people whose voice are not heard, such as undocumented migrants, and provides seeds of peace from Europe to the world in the form of advocacy. I am also pleased to be the first student from Bradford University for this initiative with QCEA. The Quaker Peace Studies Trust has been helping Bradford students in many ways, including with the African Study Visit and Northern Ireland Trip. I encourage other Bradford graduates to broaden their horizons at Quaker institutions, including QCEA.

On my return to Japan I will visit Tokyo Friends Centre to view Quaker work from the perspective of Japan, a country which is missing the essence of peace. I feel a responsibility as a citizen of Japan to spread the seeds of peace there.

Last but not least, nothing could be possible without the support from my aspiring and considerate colleagues, Quakers, housemates, friends, and family – I cannot thank them enough.

QCEA was not the only Quaker peace initiative of the 1970s. The Quaker Peace Studies Trust was also launched that decade to advance the learning and knowledge of the nature of peace and how peace can be developed and extended. It funded the first Chair of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford and financed research and teaching in peace studies, and continues to support the work of the Division of Peace Studies and International Development by the provision of grants and bursaries. The first Chair of Peace Studies was the well known peace activist and Quaker Professor Adam Curle, who continues to inspire the work of QCEA today.

Bradford’s Peace Studies department proudly declares “we don’t sit in an ivory tower – we make knowledge work by collaborating with governments and organisations around the world such as the United Nations, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Africa and the China Development Banks, the Aga Khan Foundation, the UK Ministry of Defence, Safeworl, and the Oxford Research Group, to name but a few.”

And now a new partnership with QCEA! University of Bradford Peace Studies graduates now have two opportunities a year to apply for a special development opportunity working with the team at Quaker House Brussels, during the Spring and Autumn terms. The first placement began in October with Yuko Hanada – supporting QCEA peace work with a project on peacebuilding and climate justice.

Hope for the new year

Finland’s new PM

Finland bucked political trends in much of Europe by swearing in 34-year old social democrat Sanna Marin as Prime Minister in mid-December. Marin, a young mother, will lead a coalition government comprised mostly of women. Known for her commitment to equality, she is now the world’s youngest-serving head of government.

Viségrad cities defy populism

The mayors of Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava and Budapest have signed a Pact of Free Cities – a pledge to work together and stand against the populist governments of their respective countries. The mayors, who all identify as liberals, have declared they will seek EU funding directly in efforts to bypass corruption at the national level, and stated that their cities would become “islands that defend our values.”

Sarajevo marks first Pride

Over 3,000 people took to the streets of Sarajevo in September for the city’s first ever LGBT Pride march. The event, the result of years of grassroots activism, only drew limited counter-protests and received the backing of the Bosnian government – as well as some police protection.

For those concerned about our politics, our planet and the treatment of those seeking sanctuary, 2019 was another year of mixed emotions. But across Europe, there are reasons to be hopeful!

Here is our selection of the good news which you may have missed.

Italiana say no to Salvini

The leader of Italy’s far right League party, Matteo Salvini, has drawn the ire of thousands of protesters in a movement which has become known as the ‘Sardines.’ The grassroots initiative was launched in Bologna in November after a call to action on Facebook drew 15,000 citizens who identify as “anti-fascist, pro-equality, against intolerance, against homophobia” onto the streets. The protests have now spread across Italy.

Climate progress in Brussels

With the exception of Poland, the EU’s member states have agreed the European Green Deal, a pact which sets the EU on a course for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Reluctant central and eastern states were convinced to sign the agreement after the European Commission pledged a €100bn transition fund to aid in their shift to a greener economy. Poland, heavily coal-dependent, has agreed to reconsider the matter next June when there is more clarity on funding.

Hopefully, governments will agree to more ambitious action then.
Donate to QCEA today

QCEA's important work on peace and human rights depends on your generous support. Over 50% of our income comes from donations, and we receive no money from the European institutions, meaning we can speak truth to power without fear or favour.

Donating is quick, easy and makes a real difference to our work. Here's how to help.

Bank transfer

£ Pounds Sterling
“British Friends of Quaker Council for European Affairs”
CAF Bank
ACCOUNT 00004748
SORT CODE 40-52-40

€ Euro
“Quaker Council for European Affairs”
BNP Paribas Fortis Bank
IBAN BE58 2100 5598 1479
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Donate online

To set up a recurring contribution or to make a one-off donation, either via DirectDebit or PayPal account, visit www.qcea.org/donate

Cheque

Friends in the United Kingdom only can also donate by sending a cheque or charity voucher payable to British Friends of Quaker Council for European Affairs to:
1 Castle Mews, Maidenhead, SL6 1HP

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In 2019, over €12,000 was raised for QCEA by runners, knitters and other volunteers — two colleagues even ran in the Brussels Marathon!

British Friends of QCEA is a registered charity in the United Kingdom, no. 293776. If you would like confirmation that your donation has been received, please email office@qcea.org with your name and details of your payment. Alternatively, enclose a contact detail with your cheque when posting.