

Renewing Europe after the pandemic

The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) General Assembly calls on the institutions, national governments and local authorities responsible for launching Europe's recovery from COVID-19 to be guided by values not expediency. As Quakers we assert that the European community is bound together by a commitment to equality, integrity, and respect for all people and for nature, and that this must be the common basis of our work. As early as 1693 a Quaker advocated the establishment of a European Parliament and since the 1970s the Quaker Council for European Affairs has promoted Quaker values in all of Europe including the European Union. Return to these core values offers a way to guide the European institutions and governments beyond the Covid-19 shock and should be at the heart of all Covid-19 recovery efforts.

We therefore support the call by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to turn the immediate challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic into a future that is both sustainable and inclusive. Now is the time to lay the foundation for stronger social bonds and a European economy that is nature-, climate- and people-friendly. Since the beginning of the pandemic some people have been hugely enriched while others have become destitute. Already existing inequalities have become worse, yet the European Union, governments and local authorities across the continent can reverse these trends and build back better.

We call on all those responsible for launching and implementing the recovery to rebuild a better Europe by:

- 1. Ensuring livelihood security.** We need to ensure that all adults have a way to make a decent living. This includes both a liveable income and the skills required to achieve it. No one must be left out, especially migrants, people with disabilities, and others who may be disenfranchised. Of first concern is maintaining the economic safety net throughout the foreseeable future in the form of basic financial support. Such underpinning will enable people who are currently unpaid or underpaid or whose source of livelihood has foundered during the pandemic, to continue their activities which are of such value to society. The second concern is to stimulate economic activities that are green and sustainable through public investments and incentives. Essential to this is reinvigorating and greatly expanding formal and non-formal education and technical training. Not only do new skills and new income opportunities create financial independence, but they help to restore peoples' sense of self-worth and dignity.
- 2. Building inclusive communities.** We must address the divisive trends gaining speed in Europe by creating opportunities for dialogue and cooperation at all levels. Inclusive communities communicate well and interact across generations and, backgrounds. This interaction and training in nonviolent communication can help to reduce polarization and incivility. We need civic education to celebrate our shared European identity in all its diversity, to uphold the core values of the European Union and to promote awareness that we have both rights and responsibilities. Peace, unity and justice are not only European aspiration, but universal – and require us to address structural inequality and racism.
- 3. Fostering a world which is sustainable and without conflict.** Europe must accelerate achievement of its international commitments (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Climate Agreement). The European Union, established as a peace project, cannot be true to itself while exporting arms and brandishing nuclear weapons. If we are not to repeat, post Covid-19, the conflicts of the 20th Century then we must remember and learn from them.

The pandemic has forced us to see the suffering caused by social and economic exclusion and inequalities. Yet it has also offered a glimpse of new possibilities. We have seen many examples of compassion and initiatives at all levels to mitigate at least some of these effects. It is these which give us hope that we can indeed build a more sustainable and inclusive Europe built on common values.

General Assembly of the Quaker Council for European Affairs, March 2021

QCEA works to bring a vision based on the Quaker commitment to peace, justice and equality to Europe and its institutions. We seek to build support for humane, non-military policies at the EU level, both inside and outside its borders. We do so in the spirit of peaceful cooperation which forms the foundation of European politics. Our General Assembly is made up from representatives from Quaker communities across Europe.