

Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women – England Forum

Contribution to the Faith in Europe Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women is an international, church-related organisation that is active in over 30 European countries. In the UK the forum is strongest in England and Scotland. Since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic the England Forum has been holding a monthly Gathering, via zoom. This has given us opportunities for share own spirituality and expression of faith, prayer, discussion and we have been joined by a range of speakers as well as participated in several events.

We are pleased to be able to respond to the Faith in Europe Consultation. The EU conference paper was discussed at our monthly gathering, with particular consideration of the priorities identified by CEC, the EU itself and that Faith in Europe listed for its future work.

We sought to identify our priorities as Christian women, active within our own church traditions, within our communities and as part of a Europe wide network. Our list of priorities is listed below. Whilst these are not ranked we have listed priorities that we believe should be added to the lists. We want to make an overall comment that the dynamic of the conversation, especially from the EU itself, does not seem very self-aware or self-critical. We would want to recognise that the European relationship to the rest of the world has a chequered history that has caused significant harm to people and the environment. We feel that an important part of the consultation should be the inclusion of reflection and repentance.

We are pleased to put forward our priorities in **bold** with some explanation of the themes, where we see that to be necessary:

Gender based violence – we are dismayed that this is absent from the paper. Gender based violence is both a cause and a contributor to **gender inequality**, also absent.

In the EU	1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence
	1 in 2 women has experienced sexual harassment
	1 in 20 women has been raped
	95% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are women

Trafficking – an issue that is linked to sexual exploitation and violence against women as well as **migrants and refugees** – an issue mentioned, but that we would want to emphasise the way in this specially affects women and children.

Climate change – which many of us, as women of faith, are keen to engage with.

Human rights – we were also concerned by this absence. Those of us in England observe how the concept has been derided in recent public life, for example in the EU referendum. Those joining us from Germany for our meeting, aware of the further establishment of human rights law following World War 2 also brought their dismay to this.

The divide between rich and poor and social fairness

We strongly suggest that as part of the consultation care is taken to recognise **intersectionality**, there is a risk in listing priorities that there will be a failure to consider the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender and the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage that can be created.

We want different traditions to be respected and to encourage respectful dialogue and for women's contribution to society to be fully acknowledged in the consultation and outcomes. One participant also referred to the difference between laws and not enforced values.

The role of the churches did not feature in our discussion. It would seem appropriate to note that churches can also overlook both women's experience and the contribution they are making. The priorities are also those that we would want our churches to give attention to.

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