

Common Horizons

Interreligious Pathways to Social Cohesion and Climate Justice in Europe



European
Policy
**DIALOGUE
FORUM**

EPDF EXPERT MEETING
8–9 APRIL 2025
ROME

“*No one is saved alone.*”

— Pope Francis

BACKGROUND

On 8–9 April 2025, an Expert Meeting in Rome brought together 32 specialists from ten faith traditions across Europe, including young leaders, mayors, and activists. The event, co-organised with the European Council of Religious leaders/Religions for Peace Europe and the KAICIID-supported platform the Network for Dialogue, discussed two pressing challenges: the erosion of social cohesion and the growing climate crisis.

This report, produced for the upcoming 6th European Policy Dialogue Forum, taking place in Geneva on 10–13 November, captures the key insights of the meeting, grouped into three main areas: 1. Reclaiming equity in a fragmented world; 2. Human rights: Universality under strain; and 3. Building values-based municipal governance. In particular, it reflects on how the interconnectedness of care for people and the planet – a value shared across faith and religious traditions – calls for collective responsibility and action that transcend religious divides.

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OVERVIEW: INTERSECTING CHALLENGES, INTERSECTING SOLUTIONS

Today's world faces overlapping crises – climate change, conflicts, economic instability, health emergencies, and rising authoritarianism – that disproportionately impact marginalised groups, as confirmed by a significant body of research.ⁱ

Although efforts to tackle intersecting challenges are increasingly characterised by multi-stakeholder collaboration – drawing in policymakers, civil society, and the private sector in more coordinated and inclusive ways – religious leaders and faith-based institutions continue to be largely sidelined. When engagement does occur, it is often fragmented or charity-driven rather than considering them as systemic contributors. This is a missed opportunity. In today's multireligious and multicultural Europe – where faith, culture, and identity are deeply interwoven – this siloed approach limits the transformative impact that interreligious engagement could offer to drive meaningful social change and respond to today's complex challenges.

This posture can be traced to the seeming religious-secular binary, which is a feature of European societies, and which can manifest in a variety of ways, ranging from uncertainty to how religion can be factored into policy choices through to more hostile responses to the presence of religion in society.ⁱⁱ





In an increasingly diverse Europe, religion and spirituality are no longer peripheral to public life. They are central to the lived experiences of millions and can be powerful sources and drivers of resilience, belonging, and civic responsibility. Yet, the full potential of faith communities often remains untapped, largely because spirituality is often considered as pertaining purely to the private sphere of each individual, resulting in their limited structural inclusion in wider policy and societal discussions.

While the roles and influence of religions and religious leaders vary across contexts, and can be ambiguous at times, those committed to dialogue and the values shared across traditions hold a unique capacity to bridge divides, counter polarisation, and foster cooperation. Interreligious dialogue offers a vital pathway to bridge lines of division for strengthening social cohesion and shaping a shared future rooted in dignity, inclusion, and mutual respect.

At the Expert Meeting, participants expressed a clear position: religion matters in addressing the intersecting social and environmental crises affecting Europe. Religion and spirituality are relevant in their own right. Despite declining attendance at places of worship, a significant proportion of Europeans – including young people – continue to identify as religious or hold spiritual beliefs, making religion and spirituality an important part of many lives. At the same time, the participants recognised how faith and belief remain largely untapped resources that municipal authorities could draw on to promote inclusion and tackle discrimination.

Drawing on their personal experiences as faith leaders, activists, academics, and civil society representatives, participants reflected on how entrenched inequalities – including those faced by religious minorities – undermine social cohesion. They described how limited access to essential services, quality employment, education, and public health deepens feelings of exclusion within communities. Participants also explored how living in environmentally degraded urban areas – often the most vulnerable to climate change – further erodes people's opportunities and sense of belonging.

Participants also recognised the need for a systemic approach to strengthening social cohesion and environmental protection. In mapping the landscape of actors, they highlighted the limited role of the private sector and stressed the importance of bringing it into the conversation. Businesses shape community life through their investment choices, employment practices, and environmental impact. The recommendation was clear: strategies to advance social cohesion must include active engagement with the private sector in both dialogue and decision-making.

Despite these challenges, participants were energised about the opportunities ahead. They emphasised that cities, with all their complexity and plurality, can serve as pivotal arenas for transformation. Urban spaces offer fertile ground for participatory governance, community-driven solutions, and the scaling up of shared values that underpin cohesive and sustainable societies. Participants shared examples of how interreligious and intercultural dialogue can be leveraged to address inequalities, advance climate action, and foster equitable partnerships between communities and municipal authorities. Working together on climate action at a city level was highlighted as a particular point of common action that diverse communities could work on locally together.

1.

RECLAIMING EQUITY IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

Widening inequalities in wealth and rights – including a healthy environment – threaten social cohesion and call for ethical leadership and faith-based engagement

Imagine a family where both parents work full-time yet still struggle to pay rent, cover medical expenses, or ensure their children receive quality education. This reality is no longer confined to those traditionally considered poor. Across Europe, even middle-class households – once





seen as financially stable – are increasingly feeling the squeeze. Reports from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Eurofoundⁱⁱⁱ show how such families are increasingly questioning whether the current economic development model has truly benefited them, as intersecting crises – including climate change, conflicts and growing social tensions – deepen their sense of insecurity.

At the same time, wealth is becoming ever more concentrated in the hands of a small elite. Reports from the UNDP, World Bank, and Oxfam highlight that the richest few control a disproportionate share of resources, with their fortunes growing exponentially. This concentration of wealth deepens the divide between those who have and those who have not, undermining social mobility, entrenching inequality and limiting opportunities for large segments of the population to participate fully in economic and civic life. The resulting imbalance fuels a sense of exclusion and erodes trust in public institutions meant to ensure equity and equal opportunities.

For minorities and historically marginalised groups, the picture is even starker. The social ladder that once promised upward mobility often no longer works for them. Instead of providing fair opportunities to climb, it leaves many stuck on the lowest rungs, facing barriers in employment, housing, healthcare and education. These inequities are compounded by environmental degradation, which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable.

The same economic model that allows wealth to concentrate in fewer hands also depletes natural ecosystems, treating them as resources to exploit rather than fragile systems to protect. When livelihoods are undermined, so too are the social bonds and cultural identities that give communities a sense of belonging.

The result is a growing sense of competition for scarce resources, fuelling fear, prejudice, and social conflict. While the wealthiest remain largely unaffected, most of society struggles with rising inequality and environmental decline – two sides of the same coin. Among the underprivileged, the challenges are often strikingly similar, cutting across more visible divides of ethnicity, nationality, gender and religious or faith affiliation. Ultimately, the deeper fault line lies between those with access to opportunities and resources and those without. Recognising this broader reality is essential to fostering solidarity across differences and shaping responses that ensure no one is left behind.

For further reflection:

1. **Economy and religion.** Across faith traditions, economic life is envisioned not merely as wealth creation, but as a practice of justice, solidarity, and care. Religious teachings converge on the idea that real wealth lies in generosity and mutual support. In Christianity, the principle of the “preferential option for the poor” calls for prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable as an expression of justice and solidarity. In Islam, the principle of *zakat* enshrines the moral duty to share one’s wealth to support those in need and promote social balance. In Judaism, the concept of *tzedakah* represents righteousness expressed through acts of justice and generosity towards others. In Buddhism, the teaching of *karuṇā* encourages a mindful responsibility toward all living beings and the natural world. All these principles encourage responsibility towards others and the environment. Similarly, human-centred business models promoted by institutions like the World Bank emphasise inclusive growth, ethical stewardship, and the intrinsic value of work as a means to serve society.^{iv} Together, these perspectives suggest that an economy aligned with moral imperatives fosters societies where caring for one another is the truest measure of prosperity and collective richness.
2. **Social cohesion and social development.** Despite the lack of a common definition, according to the conceptualisation provided by different international organizations such as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank, social cohesion broadly refers to creating conditions that foster belonging, legitimacy, recognition, and participation within diverse communities. It encompasses both a horizontal dimension focused on the recognition and respect for diversity, bridging ethnic and religious divisions as well as fighting discrimination while promoting equal opportunities, and a vertical dimension centered on transparency and accountability of public authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector, as well as market institutions that work for the well-being of all the members of the community, tackling inequalities and enabling upward social mobility, particularly of the most fragile and excluded.^v Social cohesion is therefore essential for peaceful, inclusive societies where people feel safe, have access to justice, and participate in decision-making. This holistic approach is reflected in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, adopted at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, and is part of the foundation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. **Climate justice.** Academic research has shown that climate justice addresses the unequal distribution of climate change impacts and responsibilities, recognising that marginalised and minority communities bear disproportionate burdens despite contributing least to the problem. This framework builds on decades of environmental justice scholarship pioneered by Robert Bullard, including his seminal book “Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality”, which documented how toxic facilities and environmental hazards were systematically located in communities of Colour.^{vi} His research methodology and findings established the academic foundation for understanding environmental inequities, which now extends to climate impacts. Climate justice principles emphasise that wealthy social groups and countries, including the private sector – particularly multinational companies – must take greater responsibility for solutions, while ensuring vulnerable populations have meaningful participation in climate policy decisions. The movement advocates for a “just transition” that protects workers and communities as economies shift away from fossil fuels, promoting equity throughout the process of climate action. This aligns with the 2015 commitment of the international community to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under the banner of “Leave no one behind” – a universal call to action to ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs recognise that ending

poverty must go hand-in-hand with improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth, while tackling climate change and protecting the environment.

4. **Religion, the environment and a paradigm for dialogue.** Many religious communities have long engaged with climate issues in line with their teachings. In Buddhism, the principle of *interbeing* teaches the interconnection of all life. In Islam, *khalifa*, meaning stewardship, calls on humanity to care for the Earth. In Judaism, *tikkun olam* urges the duty to repair the world. While in Hinduism, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, meaning the world is one family, affirms the unity and mutual responsibility of all beings. In 2015, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* – his letter calling for care for our common home and ethical responsibility

toward the environment – highlights how climate pressures affect human populations, including through migration. By offering a holistic language that links the sacred with the environmental crisis, the *Laudato Si'* emphasises the interconnected nature of environmental and social challenges. Importantly, *Laudato Si'* introduces a non-dualistic approach, fostering dialogue between faith traditions where such ideas are deeply rooted. Creating valuable space for faith-inclusive discussions on climate change's environmental and social impacts, the *Laudato Si'* marked a pivotal moment for faith-based action on climate change. Such inclusive conversations are essential to building broad societal consensus on climate justice and collaborative action to mitigate the crisis, ensuring that diverse communities can work together towards sustainable solutions.

2.

HUMAN RIGHTS: UNIVERSALITY UNDER STRAIN

Challenging the 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' divide is essential to uphold human dignity for all, confront systemic inequality, and build cohesive and sustainable communities where everyone can thrive

Growing inequalities translate into a shrinking of opportunities that current policies seem unfit to properly rebalance. Such trends are increasingly putting strain on the European ideal of "Unity in Diversity", embodied in cohesive communities that offer equal opportunities for all to reach their full potential, regardless of race, religion, gender, class, income, generation, or geography.

Businesses, through their investments, employment practices, and use of natural resources, bear responsibility for the living conditions they contribute to shape. A values-based approach to economic development, centred around equity for individuals and respect for the natural environment is no longer optional; it is essential to sustaining communities and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Economic literature has long demonstrated that high and persistent inequality is not an inevitable outcome of market economies, but rather the result of policy choices, institutional arrangements, and power imbalances. Concentrations of wealth and political influence distort market functioning, erode social cohesion, and undermine democratic governance. Inequality restricts access to essential public goods and human rights – such as quality education, healthcare, and housing – thereby limiting social mobility and perpetuating disadvantage.



Such trends are dangerously reinforced by narratives that divide people into ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ of equal opportunities. This distinction often intersects with what scholars describe as a blame culture toward those living at the margins. In this framework, social and economic exclusion is primarily explained as the outcome of individual failings – such as lack of effort, poor decision-making, or moral weakness – rather than as the result of structural conditions. Moral and religious narratives of this kind can be powerful, shaping public perceptions and influencing social and economic policy priorities. In several contexts across Europe, such narratives are amplified by political movements – particularly far-right and populist – that capitalise on social and economic insecurities, often attributing inequality to certain groups or communities, particularly migrants, minorities, and other marginalised populations. The undeserving narratives risk narrowing the space for collective solutions by framing poverty and marginalisation as a problem of personal responsibility first and foremost, as opposed to a shared societal challenge.^{vii} Within this dynamic, grievances linked to inequalities rooted in the prevailing economic model risk being redirected toward scapegoating these groups, thereby weakening solidarity and eroding trust in democratic institutions.



Yet such narratives do not account for the complex, multi-layered causes of poverty, which global research consistently identifies as driven by an interplay of economic, social, and environmental conditions – ranging from birthplace, parental income, gender, or race unequal access to education, markets, and resources, as well as exposure to conflict or climate shocks – factors that extend far beyond the control of any single individual.^{viii}

The costs of inequality are therefore both moral and economic: unequal societies tend to experience slower and less sustainable growth, as weakened aggregate demand and unequal opportunity hinder innovation and productivity. Moreover, inequality fosters political polarisation and social unrest, threatening stability at local, national, and global levels. A sustainable, people-centred economy must be rooted in shared values, recognising that the costs of inequality will ultimately affect all members of society as insecurity, instability, and environmental degradation increase.^{ix} Addressing inequality therefore requires a comprehensive approach that tackles both its immediate effects and its underlying structural causes.

For further reflection:

1. **Human dignity.** Human dignity reflects the intrinsic worth of every individual, serving as a unifying principle that transcends cultural, religious, and ideological divides. This shared principle provides a common ground for dialogue and collaboration, offering a lense to reframe policies and reshape societal attitudes towards inclusion and cohesion. Many traditions affirm this principle. In Christianity, *imago Dei*, is the belief that every person is created in the image of God. In Islam, the Qur'an teaches God honoured humanity by endowing Adam with knowledge and dignity (*'izzat al-insan*). In Judaism, the principle of *kavod habriot* emphasises that preserving human dignity overrides many other commandments. Both the Hindu ideal of *ahimsa* and the Buddhist teaching of *karuṇā* stress compassion and the sacredness of all life. In Indigenous worldviews, the recognition of the interdependence of all beings guides respect for every form of life. In the Bahá'í faith, the conviction that all human beings are noble and equal and that the “unity of humanity” is the cornerstone of peace and justice. These perspectives root human dignity in a deep spiritual and moral consensus. At the same time, human dignity is both the precondition and the ultimate objective of societies founded on equity and human rights, which makes the concept resonate strongly with secular commitments at the heart of inclusive and cohesive communities.
2. **Equity or equal opportunities?** Equity in human rights literature refers to the principle of fairness in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and outcomes, taking into account the different needs, disadvantages, and structural barriers that individuals or groups may face. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity recognises that treating people identically does not necessarily result in justice, especially in contexts marked by historical and systemic discrimination. This means that states and institutions – both secular and religious – must take positive action, often referred to as affirmative measures, to correct imbalances and enable all individuals, particularly those from marginalised or disadvantaged groups, to enjoy their rights on an equal footing.

3. **Social economy: a people-centred sustainable model.** Pope Francis' "Economy of Francesco" calls for an economy that nurtures human dignity and prioritises the well-being of the most vulnerable, where success is measured by communal flourishing rather than individual accumulation.^x This is not a theoretical concept. The social and solidarity economy (SSE) offers a people-centred, sustainable model where the aim is to make money while doing good for people and the planet alike. With its roots tracing back to the emergence of the cooperative movement – most notably the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844,^{xi} this approach places equity, sustainability, and shared prosperity at its

core, reshaping traditional economic paradigms. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the SSE encompasses enterprises and organizations – such as cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, and social enterprises – that operate with democratic governance, autonomy, and the primacy of social purpose over capital. Surpluses are reinvested in the common interest, advancing long-term viability while prioritising quality work, environmental care, fairness, and accountability.^{xii} Rooted in solidarity and cooperation, SSE shows that profit, thriving communities and a healthy planet can be achieved through equitable, mission-driven economic activity.

3.

BUILDING VALUES-BASED MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE: WHY RELIGION MATTERS

By fostering dialogue, shared values, and religious literacy, religious leaders and municipal authorities can transform urban governance into an innovative space that builds trust, bridges divides, and drives collective action toward more equitable, cohesive, and sustainable communities.

Urban spaces – given their complexities – stand as pivotal environments of transformation, places where ethical governance, community-based solutions, and shared values underpinning cohesive and ecological communities can be scaled into meaningful change. It is in cities that marginalised voices can be amplified in dialogue with those who feel threatened by the “Other”, and where inclusive policies can be forged thanks to thoughtful leadership from mayors and local authorities, who stand on the frontlines of social and environmental challenges. Religious leaders and faith-based actors are often among the first to respond to the challenges of exclusion, offering not only material support but also the moral conviction that every person’s dignity must be upheld. Their presence in local communities – in neighbourhood centres, schools, workplaces, markets, places of worship, and social services – helps weave the bonds of trust and solidarity that are essential for building a shared sense of belonging. By working side by side with civic groups, local authorities, and residents of all backgrounds, they show that the most effective fight against marginalisation begins close to home, in the shared spaces where people meet, work, live, and dream together.

Despite the increasing instrumentalisation of religion – often intertwined with nationalist rhetoric – which has intensified social tensions between national majorities and ethnic or religious minorities, municipal governance stands as a space for innovation where deeper, more structural engagement with religious communities and their leaders can be explored and harnessed for the benefit of the whole community.

This calls for enhanced religious literacy within local public institutions and the promotion of interreligious dialogue across diverse communities, laying strong foundations for peaceful and respectful coexistence. While the roles and influence of religious leaders can vary – and sometimes be ambivalent – those committed to dialogue and shared values, working alongside municipal institutions, can help transcend polarisation. As religious leaders and faith-based actors continue to be anchors of care, proximity, and hope, municipal authorities have a unique role in addressing social vulnerabilities through inclusive policies. Together, they can inspire collective action toward a more equitable and sustainable future grounded in ethical principles shared across religious traditions, cultures and human rights commitments.



For further reflection:

1. **Religious leaders as bridge builders.** Many faith leaders occupy a unique public position, bridging grassroots communities and elites, which makes them valuable assets in addressing a wide range of community challenges. Their well-established ability to listen and communicate both ‘up and down’ allows them to engage effectively across different social levels. Moreover, many religious leaders already maintain relationships with leaders of other faith communities and have connections with state or municipal institutions. This presents an important opportunity to reframe the role of religion – not as a source of division, but as an active partner for unity and a fundamental pillar of a thriving civil society. While there is a common perception that traditional faith hierarchies tend to collide with the holistic and inclusive approaches increasingly prevalent in grassroots movements, leadership within religious communities is often more diverse than assumed. Influence can come from multiple sources, including younger activists and women, leading some to advocate for the term ‘religious influencer’ rather than ‘religious leader’ to better capture this evolving dynamic.
2. **Interreligious and intercultural dialogue: a way of (re)thinking power relations.** Across major world religions and spiritual traditions are shared core values of love for one’s neighbour, mercy, tolerance, coexistence, and respect for the earth and the natural environment. Beyond rituals, doctrines and theological dogmas, religious principles and values inform social and cultural norms, for believers and unbelievers alike.^{xiii} In an increasingly multireligious and multicultural Europe, interreligious and intercultural dialogue creates spaces where people from diverse backgrounds, identities, and beliefs (secular, religious, spiritual) can connect meaningfully, navigate tensions, and co-create solutions for the common good. Grounded in common values such as empathy, mutual respect, and openness to different perspectives, dialogue is among the most effective tools to bridge divides between “us” and “them”, to act as a transformative force, not just for resolving societal conflicts, but for building shared purpose and forging new alliances across differences. Far from being abstract exercises, these dialogues foster mutual understanding and respect, rebalance power dynamics between “majorities” and “minorities,” help resolve disagreements, and nurture trust within neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and shared public spaces.
3. **Faith in action.** Faith communities are not only moral voices but also significant economic actors. Faith-based investors were pioneers in directing capital toward reducing inequities and advancing social good – long before terms like environmental, social and governance criteria^{xiv} and impact investing became mainstream. Today, faith-aligned funds across Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions manage an estimated 5 trillion US dollars in assets. As the World Economic Forum’s 2024 Faith in Action report underscores, such investment models offer untapped potential: mobilising vast global networks, embedding values of solidarity, dignity and stewardship into economic life, while forging innovative partnerships with business, government, and civil society could bring a critical contribution to address interconnected crises.^{xv} In this spirit of connecting moral vision with concrete action, UNEP’s Faith for the earth programme shows that the presence of faith actors in the international climate space is steadily growing, most visibly through the recent Faith Pavilions at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP). Yet this growing visibility faces a persistent challenge: though numerous and diverse, these voices often struggle to translate their momentum into tangible policy outcomes. Greater support is therefore needed to strengthen the capacity of faith actors to engage governments and policymakers effectively, enabling their moral and social leadership to contribute more directly to transformative climate action.

CONCLUSION

The insights from the Rome Expert Meeting have laid the foundation for the 6th EPDF, where social cohesion and climate justice will be explored as inseparable dimensions of Europe's future. The challenges identified – growing inequalities, the strain on human rights, and the urgent need for values-based governance – will guide our collective reflection in Geneva. The Forum will not only diagnose fractures but also highlight pathways forward: how interreligious and intercultural dialogue can advance equity, how cities can pioneer inclusive governance, and how the private sector can be engaged to help drive the transition towards fairer and more sustainable societies.

These insights will be expanded upon at the forum, to discuss the role of sub-regional organizations, which, positioned at the crossroads of local realities and regional frameworks, are uniquely placed to embed dialogue into policy and practice to amplify local innovations, link them to regional strategies, and foster resilience across diverse communities.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of the collaborative contributions of Josh Cass, KAICIID consultant, as well as KAICIID staff: Teresa Albano, Senior Programme Manager, Europe Region Programme; Jana Jakob, Europe Region Programme Officer; Tim Mortimer, Europe Region Programme Officer; Aleksandra Djuric Milovanovic, Network for Dialogue Coordinator; Vera Ferreira, Chief, Regional Programmes and Oversight; Margarita Fourer, KAICIID Publications Consultant.

ENDNOTES

- i UNDP (2020) *The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*, [Human Development Report 2020](#), New York
- ii For an exploration of this seeming binary religious-secularism paradigm, see, for instance: Pew Research Center (2018) [10 key findings about religion in Western Europe](#), 29 May 2018
- iii OECD (2019) *Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class*; Eurofound (2019) *Recent developments in the state of the middle classes*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
- iv See World Bank (2019) *Human-centred Business Model*, 11 April 2019
- v See conceptualisations of social cohesion: UNDP (2020) *Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual framing and programming implications*, New York
- vi Bullard, R. D. (1990) *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, Westview Press
- vii Montes, N., Curto, G., Osman, N., & Sierra, C. (2023) *An Agent-Based Model for Poverty and Discrimination Policy-Making*, ArXiv
- viii World Bank (2024) *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis*, Washington, DC
- ix Watch presentations by speakers Joseph Stiglitz, James K. Galbraith, and Branko Milanovic on “Global Inequality” at SOF/Heyman on 22 February 2013
- x See the [Economy of Francesco](#) website
- xi As stated in Sahakian, M. (2016) *The Social and Solidarity Economy: Why Is It Relevant to Industrial Ecology?*. In: Clift, R., Druckman, A. (eds) *Taking Stock of Industrial Ecology*. Springer, Cham, p. 205: “In the past decade, a slew of terms have emerged to describe new economic models: the people-first or human economy (Ransom and Baird 2010; Hart et al. 2010), the new economy (Schor and Thompson 2014), the green economy (UNEP 2011), the sharing economy (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Gansky 2010), diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham 2008) and the varying definitions of the circular economy (Yuan et al. 2006; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2013), to name but a few. In some cases, these terms represent alternatives to the dominant market economy, understood here as being based on competition and private ownership”
- xii See the European Commission’s [EU Social Economy Gateway](#) website
- xiii KAICIID (2021) *KAICIID Guide to Interreligious Dialogue*
- xiv See Investopedia (2025) *Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investing: What It Is & How It Works*, updated 19 August 2025
- xv WEF (2024) *Faith in Action: Religion and Spirituality in the Polycrisis*, Insight Report

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European Council of Religious Leaders
 Religions for Peace



European
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Annotated Agenda

EXPERT MEETING AHEAD OF 6TH EUROPEAN POLICY DIALOGUE FORUM

Common Horizons

Interreligious Pathways to Social Cohesion
and Climate Justice in Europe

EPDF EXPERT MEETING

8–9 APRIL 2025

ROME

TUESDAY, 8 APRIL 2025, H. 09:00-19:30

TIME AND ROOM	SESSION	DESCRIPTION
08:30-09:00	Welcome Coffee	
09:00-09:40 San Francesco Hall	Opening: Welcome and Introduction	Words of welcome: • Prof. Agustín Hernández Vidales, Rector of the Pontifical Antonianum University Introductory remarks: • H.Em. Cardinal George Jakob Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue of the Holy See • Ambassador Antonio Almeida-Riberio, Acting Secretary General, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) • Bishop Kari Mangrud Alvsvåg, President, European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) • Ms. Kiran Bali, Member of the British Empire (MBE), Justice of the Peace (JP), Chairman of Prosocial World, Global Interfaith Leader • Father Giuseppe Buffon, Vice Rector and Director of the Research Center, Pontifical University Antonianum Moderator: • Ms. Teresa Albano, Senior Programme Manager, Europe Region Programme, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
09:40-10:00	Group Photo	
10:00-11:15 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Session 1: Promoting Human Dignity in Times of Increasing Polarisations	The concept of human dignity is fundamental to fostering more inclusive and cohesive societies in Europe. However, the current political climate – marked by rising populism, anti-migrant rhetoric, and political polarisation – poses significant challenges to advancing social cohesion. Rooted deeply in both religious and secular traditions, human dignity reflects the intrinsic worth of every individual, serving as

TIME AND ROOM	SESSION	DESCRIPTION
	Guiding questions: How can the principle of human dignity be reinforced at the local level to counter the emerging divide between the “deserving” and “non- deserving” groups in European societies? How can interreligious dialogue be used at the local level to strengthen the principle of human dignity and foster a sense of belonging and shared values?	a unifying principle that transcends cultural, religious, and ideological divides. This shared value provides a common ground for dialogue and collaboration, offering a means to reframe policies and reshape societal attitudes towards inclusion and cohesion. This session wishes to explore the concepts of “Just Inclusion” and “Just Cohesion” underscoring that, efforts to integrate refugees and migrants, foster youth participation, and counter hate speech are not merely acts of charity and goodwill but matters of rights and shared responsibility. The intention is to address the seemingly religious-secular binary – a feature of European societies. This can manifest in a variety of ways, ranging from uncertainty to how religion can be factored into local discourse on the future of European societies and subsequent policymaking to more hostile responses to the presence of religion in society. Speakers will discuss how to “win the argument” for social cohesion in a polarised context and explore ways to bridge the secular-religious divide at both local and national levels. Given the decline of public funding for interfaith initiatives and increasing policy resistance, the discussion will furthermore consider economic arguments for social cohesion, as well as the role of digital communication and youth participation in shaping public discourse. Moderator: • Dr. Taras Dzyubanskyy, Theologian, Research Fellow at the Collins Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Issues Adviser to the Mayor of Lviv, Ukraine and KAICIID Fellow Input speaker: • Ms. Zlakha Ahmed, Vice-Chair, European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and Chief Executive Apna Haq UK Facilitator: • Mr. Josh Cass, Interreligious Dialogue Advisor
11:15-11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30-13:00 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Breakout Session 2: Equity in Action – Advancing the Inclusion and Participation of Marginalised Groups Guiding questions: How can we move from raising awareness about social cohesion to implementing concrete, actionable measures that foster truly inclusive communities? What are the main barriers preventing interreligious and intercultural dialogue from fostering inclusive and resilient societies, and how can these barriers be transformed into opportunities for collaboration? What strategies are effective in engaging young people from both minority and majority backgrounds, including young migrants and refugees, in meaningful action beyond their own narratives and comfort zones?	Interreligious and intercultural dialogue can help create inclusive spiritual, socioeconomic, and political spaces where marginalised communities can actively participate and lead. This session explores policies and initiatives that enable interreligious and intercultural dialogue to foster such spaces, while identifying existing gaps, untapped opportunities, and existing challenges. A core theme will be the role of religious and secular leadership in shaping these inclusive environments, reflecting on the need to adopt a posture of openness and active listening – essential qualities for co-creating spaces where marginalised groups are not only heard but integral to shaping the policies and measures that directly affect them. This session will explore how to move from awareness to action, ensuring that efforts toward equitable societies are both sustainable and impactful. Moderator: • Ms. Jana Jakob, Programme Officer, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) Input speaker: • Ms. Stacy Ogembo, Catalyst for Cohesion, Breachbuilders Initiative, Centre for Migration, Gender and Justice, and Research Assistant, Technical University of Darmstadt Participants will be divided into two groups to facilitate further exchange and interaction. The groups will reconvene at 12:30h to report and discuss key takeaways.

TIME AND ROOM	SESSION	DESCRIPTION	
		Group 1 San Bernadino da Siena Hall Facilitator: Mr. Josh Cass, Interreligious Dialogue Advisor	Group 2 San Francesco Hall Facilitator: Ms. Jana Jakob, Programme Officer, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
13:00-14:30	Lunch		
14:30-16:00 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Session 3: Caring for the Planet – The Role of Religious Leaders in Intergenerational Justice Guiding questions: How can different faith traditions and communities work together to promote climate action in the face of polarised narratives? What strategies can support intergenerational dialogue in conveying messages of shared responsibility across generations?	In today's post-truth era, climate scepticism is fuelled not only by misinformation but also by a growing distrust in institutions and expert knowledge. Traditional climate advocacy, with its strong focus on scientific accuracy, often struggles to connect with audiences that perceive science as uncertain or politicized. Shifting the conversation toward precaution, moral responsibility, and the risks of inaction may foster more constructive dialogue and engagement. Interreligious dialogue can contribute to countering climate denial and polarisation. Religious leaders, often seen as trusted figures in their communities, can play a unifying key role in fostering climate awareness and dialogue, encouraging reflection on shared moral responsibilities rather than focusing solely on technical data. By drawing on moral and ethical perspectives, religious leaders can engage communities that may be sceptical of institutional narratives. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on the role of religious leaders in fostering trust, inclusivity, and collaboration. They will explore how interreligious dialogue can reshape the climate justice conversation, focusing on collective action, moral imperatives, and community-based solutions to drive a unified response to the environmental crisis. Moderator: Dr. Amjad Mohamed-Saleem, Manager Strategic Engagement: Youth, Peace, and Fundamental Principles, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and member of Network for Dialogue (N4D) Input speakers: Mr. Satwinder Singh, Chairperson, EcoSikh Ireland Facilitator: Mr. Josh Cass, Interreligious Dialogue Advisor	
16:00-16:15	Coffee Break		
16:15-17:15	City Tour	Walking tour from the conference venue to Senatorial Palace. Alternative transportation will be offered.	
17:40-18:20	Reception at the Mayor's Office	Senatorial Palace , Piazza del Campidoglio, 00186 Rome	
18:40-19:30	Interreligious Reflections on Faith and Hope	Hosted by the Focolare Movement , Via del Carmine 3, 00187 Rome	
20:30-22:00	Dinner for Non-Local Participants	Restaurant Le Terme del Colosseo , Via del Cardello 13, 00184 Rome	

WEDNESDAY, 9 APRIL 2025, H. 9:30-16:00

TIME AND ROOM	SESSION	DESCRIPTION	
09:30-11:00 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Breakout Session 4: Mobilising for Climate Justice – Religious Communities as Agents of Regeneration Guiding questions: What concrete actions can religious communities take to mobilise resources and their networks in advancing climate justice? How can faith-based organisations (FBOs) ensure accountability in their climate- related commitments, and what mechanisms are needed to assess their impact? How can interreligious and intergenerational dialogue be leveraged to ensure that youth perspectives and underrepresented voices are not only heard but also drive climate policy and action?	Religious communities have long served as custodians of moral and ethical values, often guiding humanity through moments of crisis and renewal. In the face of escalating climate challenges, their role in fostering resilience, justice, and regeneration is more critical than ever. Rooted in religious and spiritual traditions that emphasize care for the Earth, religious teachings provide powerful narratives to inspire action. Building on the growing action at the intersection between faith and climate, this session will examine how faith- based actors can harness their networks, moral influence, and resources to move from awareness to action. It will focus on advancing sustainable practices and advocating for policies that protect marginalised communities, disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Participants will be encouraged to explore how faith communities can serve as bridges between policymakers, grassroots activists, and local populations, advocating for equitable solutions and amplifying younger voices as actively integrated into decision-making processes. This session will highlight the unique capacity of religious communities to lead regenerative efforts – restoring ecosystems, promoting climate justice, and building a more inclusive, climate-resilient future for all. Moderator: Mr. Tim Mortimer, Programme Officer, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) Input speaker: - Ms. Romy Dematons, Stop EACOP and Muslim Community Organiser, GreenFaith Participants will be divided into two groups to facilitate further exchange and interaction. The groups will reconvene at 10:30h to report and discuss key takeaways.	
		Group 1 San Bernadino da Siena Hall Facilitator: Mr. Josh Cass, Interreligious Dialogue Advisor	Group 2 San Francesco Hall Facilitator: Mr. Tim Mortimer, Programme Officer, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break	Possibility to take part in reflection exercise on social cohesion led by Ms. Zlakha Ahmed , Vice-Chair, European Network Against Racism (ENAR)	
11:30-13:00 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Session 5: Building a Common Ethical Dimension in Municipal Governance	Cities and local governments stand at the forefront of shaping more just and inclusive societies. This session will explore how interreligious and intercultural approaches can amplify the voices of all community members, including the most marginalized. By fostering participation and engagement, dialogue methods help shape a social pact rooted in shared values that transcend secular, cultural, and religious boundaries. This common ethical framework strengthens municipal governance and envisions cities as living ecosystems where human dignity and planetary health are interconnected, advancing a collective path toward justice, equity, and regeneration. By rethinking development at the local level, municipalities can serve as incubators for innovative policies and collaborative practices that prioritize both social equity and environmental sustainability. Participants will share successful models of inclusive governance, focusing on both big cities and smaller, more conservative communities, where resistance to social cohesion initiatives may be stronger. Participants will reflect on how cities, as spaces where diversity should flourish, can cultivate inclusive governance models	

TIME AND ROOM	SESSION	DESCRIPTION
	Guiding questions: What mechanisms can be developed to bridge the gap between research and policy, ensuring that local governance is informed by evidence-based approaches to inclusion? What innovative governance models can cities adopt to ensure that marginalized communities have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes? How can cities and local governments integrate climate resilience and social equity in their policies in more effective ways so that marginalized and underserved groups can be included?	that address the needs of all communities, including the specific opportunities and challenges facing marginalized groups, while advancing climate resilience, shaping the policies and measures that define urban futures. Moderator: Ms. Sofia Barbeiro, Project Manager – Sustainability, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Input speaker: Mr. Benedetto Zacchioli, President, European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) Facilitator: Mr. Josh Cass, Interreligious Dialogue Advisor
13:00-14:30	Lunch	
14:30-16:00 San Bernadino da Siena Hall	Conclusions Guiding questions: What key insights and actionable recommendations have emerged from the discussions on interreligious and intercultural dialogue as key elements in fostering social cohesion and climate justice? How have our perspectives on the role of interreligious and intercultural dialogue evolved throughout this meeting? What concrete steps can we take to move from discussion to implementation in advancing social cohesion at the municipal, national, and European levels? How can this meeting contribute to countering political polarization and fostering a more inclusive public discourse?	As Europe navigates an era of deepening polarization and social fragmentation, the need for effective, action-oriented approaches to social cohesion is more urgent than ever. This closing session will synthesize the key insights from the discussions, highlighting practical takeaways for policymakers, religious actors, and civil society leaders. The takeaways will be instrumental in shaping the agenda of the 6th EPDF, ensuring that the reflections of the past two days inform and shape the framework for the EPDF. Input speakers: Father Laurent Basanese, SJ, Official of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue – Holy See, Vatican Professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Member of the Board of Directors, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) Ms. Sophia Massrouri, Policy Officer, Bahá’i International Community Ms. Marta Guglielmetti, Senior executive expert in sustainability and inclusiveness Moderator: Dr. Aleksandra Djuric Milovanovic, Coordinator of the KAICIID-supported platform “Network for Dialogue” and Principal Research Fellow, Institute for Balkan Studies Serbian Academy of Science and Arts Discussion Way forward and goodbye: Ms. Teresa Albano, Senior Programme Manager, Europe Region Programme, International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)
16:30-17:30	Field Visit to Sacred Heart Project	A KAICIID Fellow's project at Basilica del Sacro Cuore di Gesù a Castro Pretorio, Via Marsala 44, 00185 Rome