

**Briefing paper****Conference on the Future of Europe**

Caritas Europa<sup>1</sup> welcomes the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) as an initiative to involve all European citizens and civil society in the discussion about what kind of European Union we want. A broad, open and inclusive discussion about the future of Europe is a much needed first step to renew trust in and reinvigorate commitment to the European Union as a true community of values as envisaged by the Founding Fathers. The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) provides an opportunity to create a more resilient, democratic and fairer Europe for all people living within its territory.

Caritas Europa believes the Conference on the Future of Europe is a valuable initiative to seek effective and specific solutions to current and future challenges. This paper seeks to lay out different elements, based on the experiences of our members on the ground working with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation, that ought to feed into the Conference discussions, which will take place ongoing until the spring of 2022. This paper will help us in our advocacy to influence the discussions, which could include, for instance, a focus on policies that create European economic, social and environmental cohesion as well as possible changes to the functioning of the EU institutions needed to implement these policies.

**The common good**

Respect for people and for planet, human dignity and fundamental rights, the social well-being and development of the community, as well as peace and cohesion should be at the centre of the European Union's and its Member States' policies in all policy areas. Caritas Europa is committed to solidarity among all people, but particularly with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation, and sees the world through their eyes. We have long recognised the interdependence of the human family. The determined contribution of every person to the common good, supports and fosters community-building. The integral development of every human being and of the entire human family is a gift and a responsibility of every person and community.

**Participation and empowerment of all people and civil dialogue**

All people, and in particular those in the most vulnerable situations and the organisations supporting and advocating for their empowerment, should be encouraged to be actively involved in the Conference on the Future of Europe process. Being present at all levels in European societies and present in all EU Member States and beyond, Caritas Europa is uniquely positioned to add value and contribute in a constructive way to the Conference. We also consider it important to include civil

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<sup>1</sup> Caritas Europa is the network of 49 Caritas organisations in 46 European countries. Though a Catholic network, Caritas Europa works with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all people. We are part of the global Caritas Internationalis network that has over 160 members around the world. We believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies. We oppose all kinds of exclusion and support all initiatives that promote sustainable development that benefit everyone and enable all people to find a meaningful role to play in society.

society organisations as well as countries that are considered candidates for EU Membership in the discussions about the future of Europe.

Caritas Europa will, among others, promote participation via the [digital platform](#)<sup>2</sup>, because the participation of all people, including those in the most vulnerable situations, is of crucial importance for the success of the project. For the Conference on the Future of Europe to have a real impact, the process must be inclusive and be driven by the people, thus bringing in the diversity of voices and opinions as represented through the diversity of our society.

In this regard, ensuring the [involvement of young people](#) in the Conference on the Future of Europe is vital. Caritas Europa will encourage the mobilisation of the Young Caritas, a movement within the European Caritas network, which aims to increase youth engagement including in decision-making and to give young people ownership of their involvement. It is essential to listen to the prophetic voice of the youth and to ensure that European decisions and the future vision of Europe are guided by them. The youth are not only the future, but they are also the present, and as Caritas we will be stronger and better able to respond to the signs of the time, remain relevant and sustainable in the time ahead, only if we ensure the youth are onboard.

### **Thematic priorities**

In its advocacy work, Caritas Europa focuses on fighting poverty and inequalities, ensuring an inclusive and just green transition, developing migration policies based on respect for human rights and the human dignity of everyone and through a development lens, international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Considering this, Caritas Europa stresses the following priorities in the dialogue on the Future of Europe:

- **An economy that works for people**

We advocate for a human-centred economy, in line with the values of solidarity, social justice, intergenerational cooperation, equality and just green and digital transitions. A systemic change is the only way to overcome poverty and inequalities; we consider the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in a holistic and coherent way. The principles of Agenda 2030 are integrated and indivisible, and we will aim to help bring them and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) to fruition in our actions and service for the common good. We expect the same of policy makers and that this be prioritised in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement for respecting the dignity of every human being, but also for contributing to sustainable development. We also recognise that equality between women and men, girls and boys, and equal rights and opportunities for all people are essential to realise integral human development and sustainability. Caritas Europa sees an important role for the EU Institutions in coordinating an adequate policy response to them.

The EU should continue to promote upwards social and economic convergence by setting adequate standards regarding working conditions and social protection by implementing the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#). This includes binding initiatives regarding minimum wages, minimum income, access to affordable housing, social economy, a healthy environment, long-term care, and retirement pensions, as well as instruments to monitor and enforce their implementation by the Member States. Caritas Europa insists that the Action Plan should be complemented by a focus on the essential role of social services in ensuring access to social rights, a binding initiative on minimum income systems as well as EU accession to the Revised European Social Charter.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://futureu.europa.eu/>

- **A European Green Deal**

For Caritas Europa, the earth and all its resources are entrusted to all humankind. As a basic ethical principle and a responsibility, understanding that the environment, the economy, society, our daily lives, the common good and justice between generations are interconnected, Caritas Europa is firmly committed to making the EU's economy sustainable. We can do this by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities and making the transition just and inclusive for all. In addition, seriously pursuing the [implementation of the SDGs](#) and the 2030 Agenda's transformative principles would greatly contribute to addressing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions in a balanced manner, while anchoring decisions in human rights obligations.

- **Promoting welcoming societies**

Caritas Europa believes that integration is a dynamic, multi-directional process in which newcomers and the receiving communities intentionally work together, based on a shared commitment to promote, protect, welcome, and integrate, toward creating a [just, welcoming, vibrant and cohesive society](#). The responsibility for integration must not rest with one group but rather with many actors, including migrants themselves, the receiving government, institutions, communities, and so forth. A cohesive and welcoming society must provide migrants with the necessary means to overcome challenges and barriers that hinder their integration as well as ensure their full participation, empowerment and the inclusion of all members of society: migrants and autochthonous communities alike. Ensuring both aspects will benefit not just migrants but the common good, i.e., society as a whole. Effective implementation of the [EC Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion](#) is greatly needed, which must coincide with adequate funding and well-designed integration initiatives.

Related to this is the need to create a [culture of encounter](#) and a [positive narrative](#) about migrants and migration more generally. It is important to humanise migration and migrants through stories and testimonies, applying a people-centred approach and making visible migrants' many contributions to their countries of destination and origin. European leaders need to also fight against misinformation and disinformation by supporting evidence-based research and promoting an objective debate on migration, targeting the media and wider public.

Caritas Europa also advocates for the EU and its Member States to design sustainable and human rights-based migration and asylum policies that are anchored in the original EU values and that facilitate human mobility rather than build walls and divisions. The [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) should expand safe and legal pathways to Europe and link policy to practice, supporting channels for protection, employment (across skills levels) and family reunification. It should also foster resettlement, humanitarian admission programmes, humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, family reunification, visa facilitation for labour purposes and other mobility schemes and expand intra-EU solidarity and responsibility sharing, to avoid creating undignified camps along the EU's border. The EU should ensure access to asylum, meaning that asylum policies and the granting of refugee status are in line with the Geneva Convention, that the right to asylum is respected, and that the right to seek asylum in the EU is guaranteed.

- **A stronger Europe in the world**

Caritas Europa advocates for development cooperation policies that [incorporate the 2030 Agenda](#) transformative principles and that prioritise poverty eradication, reducing inequalities, fostering sustainable and human development, and pursuing social justice. For this to happen, we believe that development policies must move away from an emphasis on economic growth only, and from

perpetuating unbalanced partnerships. Instead, the EU's international development cooperation must prioritise the strengthening of social protection systems, promoting public access to quality education and healthcare services, and investing in local private sector development through local markets and actors and sustainable and inclusive business models. We also advocate for all international cooperation initiatives – including the implementation of the [new EU-OACPS Agreement](#), the [programming of the Global Europe Instrument](#), and the design of a [new EU-Africa partnership](#) – to reflect partner countries' priorities and national development plans, to mainstream the reduction of inequalities and to enhance Policy Coherence for (Sustainable) Development, to be undertaken in consultation and collaboration with local civil society actors.

In the area of humanitarian action, Caritas Europa advocates for the EU to contribute to peace and stability in Europe and globally; to give adequate support to victims of conflicts and natural disasters worldwide; to model the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in all humanitarian interventions; to [support local and national civil society organisations](#) by investing in their capacities and recognising their frontline role when an emergency strikes; to recognise that humanitarian crises are steadily lasting longer on average, requiring multi-year funding to allow a better and more efficient response; and to implement the Grand Bargain commitments in a coherent and comprehensive way.