

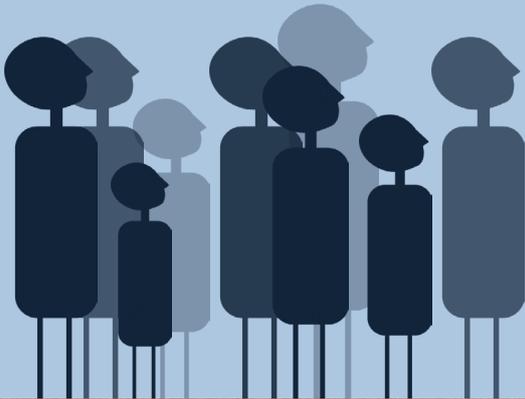
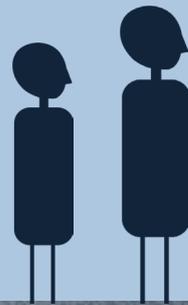


Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs

around europe

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Class and Privilege



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Europe in brief

↑ *Flags in front of the European Commission*

PHOTO: Guillaume Perigois

Hot off the press: “Black Book of Pushbacks”

In December 2020, watchdog groups presented a 1,500-page document called “The Black Book of Pushbacks”, relating hundreds of illegal pushbacks of asylum-seekers on Europe’s external borders. The document was presented at the European Parliament and handed over to the Commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson. The book was compiled over four years by the Border Violence Monitoring Network and features contributions from more than 15 organisations. It contains **hundreds of group testimonies and a total of 12,654 survivors of human rights violations** on the Balkan migration road. Every day, this route is taken by thousands of people trying to reach Europe. For years, [charities](#) have denounced abuses by authorities along this road. Abuses have regularly included stripping people naked, burning clothes and possessions, and beating people with police batons.

The EU’s first Global Human Rights Sanction Regime adopted!

On 7 December 2020, EU Ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council adopted a decision and regulation establishing the EU’s first Global Human Rights Sanction Regime. This document will allow the EU to “target individuals, entities and bodies – including state and non-state actors – responsible for, involved in, or associated with **serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide**, no matter where they [occurred](#).” The text follows the model of the U.S. ‘Magnitsky Act’. One criticism is the absence of [‘corruption’](#) as a criterion in the text.

EU top court finds that Hungary and Poland violated EU migration and asylum rules



The Court ruled in one case that Hungary had violated EU rules by **detaining asylum-seekers in so-called ‘transition zones’** and by forbidding them to remain in the country during the appeal process. The court also said that the legislation in the country made it **“virtually impossible” to apply for asylum**, which is unlawful. Likewise, the forced deportation of people staying in Hungary without official documentation is against the bloc’s rules.

For **Poland**, an opinion from the court’s advocate general stated that the country had broken EU law with the new laws established last year which reduced judicial [independence](#).

Afghanistan peace talks

In December 2020, the Afghan government and the Taliban have reached a preliminary deal, the **first written agreement in 19 years**, which paves the way for further peace talks, including on a **potential ceasefire**. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation, said that the two sides created a “three-page [agreement](#) codifying rules and procedures for their negotiations on a political roadmap and a comprehensive ceasefire.”

After a break for the holidays, the peace talks resumed on 5 January. The main points of negotiation are the formation of a “new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government”, a power-sharing agreement, and a potential [ceasefire](#).

Nuclear Weapons Treaty



An international [treaty](#) banning all nuclear weapons came into force on 22 January.

Almost three-quarters of UN member states have agreed to a treaty with more than 50 states having already ratified it.

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons makes it illegal under international law to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess, stockpile, transfer, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons, with the ultimate goal being their total elimination.

Activists all around the world were celebrating this milestone, including many Quakers who were involved in campaigning about this matter for the last 75 years.

EU budget finally adopted – including a new Rule of Law Mechanism



On 10 December 2020, after months of negotiations, EU leaders finally reached an agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027, after a **compromise** made between Germany (holder of the Council presidency at the time) and Poland and Hungary. The latter had used their vetoes to block the budget agreement because they opposed the [new Rule of Law Mechanism](#), which is part of the agreement.

With this mechanism, EU funds can be suspended if a country is found guilty of corruption or conflict of interest affecting EU cash, or if there's a risk of non-independent judicial supervision. The European Commission is due to draft the guidelines on how to apply the Mechanism, which had started retrospectively on 1 January 2021. Soon after, the European Parliament voted on the Mechanism and insisted on the fact that the legal text was more important than the leaders' interpretation (referring implicitly to [Poland and Hungary](#)).

The European Parliament adopted the MFF on 16 December 2020, with an increase of €15 billion in some key EU Programs, such as Erasmus + and EU4Health, negotiated by the [Parliament](#).

Following this decision, the MFF was adopted with a total amount of **€1.8 trillion**. Different policy areas were reinforced such as migration and border management (€22.7 billion) with the objective to fund up to 10 000 Border guards for the Agency FRONTEX by 2027 and the field of "security and defence" with a total of €13.2 billion, including the establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF) of **€7bn**.

In the same period, the Council reached a political agreement on the so-called **European Peace Facility** (EPF), an off-budget instrument supposed to finance the EU's external action with "[military or defence implications](#)." The final budget will be €5 billion for the period 2021-2027 – half of the amount in the initial proposal (€10.5 billion) in 2018.



↑ PHOTO: Deva Darshan

Raised environmental target for the EU: 55% reduction of emissions by 2030

On 11 December 2020, EU leaders finally agreed a **target of a 55% reduction of the EU emissions for 2030**, an important increase compared to the **current 40% target**. Just a year ago, such an agreement would have been impossible to agree. To reach this target, the whole of Europe's economy needs to be [remade](#) across every sector. On 17 December 2020, EU environment ministers reached an agreement to enshrine the 55% target for 2030 in the law. The agreement was welcomed by many, **but environmental NGOs said that such a target is still insufficient and that a 65% cut in emissions by 2030 is necessary to reach the 1.5°C of the Paris Agreement**. Another criticism is that the inclusion of carbon sinks (such as forests and soil) in the new target will make it much easier to reach the goal and therefore works as an "**accounting trick**." Also, some sectors such as aviation, shipping, and goods manufacture outside the EU are [not included](#) in the target.



Guterres calls for new envoys for mediation in Libya



After a long delay, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, has proposed new envoys to help mediating the conflicts in Libya and in the Middle East region, at the Southern border of the EU.

A ceasefire was reached in October 2020, under which all foreign forces are to leave within three months. But for now, no resolution was adopted to send international monitors to support the fragile ceasefire, despite [pushes](#) from Guterres and Tunisia (which currently has the presidency of the Security Council).



QCEA celebrates launch of new report on peace mediation

↑ screenshots of the QCEA's new report on peace mediation

On 21 January QCEA hosted the online launch of the new report called [Peace Mediation: from Concept to successful implementation, learning from Quaker experience](#). The report focuses on the implementation of the new [Concept on EU Peace Mediation](#) which got published last December. It advocates for learning from Quaker experience in mediation and conciliation and using the learnings for practical guidance, underlining the **unique Quaker approach to mediation based on trust, independence, principled impartiality, long-term engagement as well as humility**. It analyses risks and opportunities for the implementation of the EU Concept on Peace Mediation in today's geopolitical context.

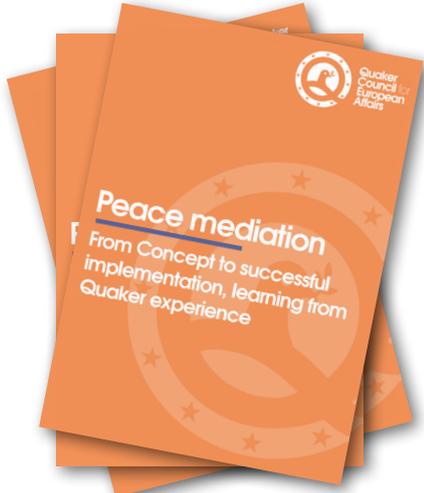
QCEA was at the forefront of interacting with EU officials regarding the Concept and, as the European Commission speaker pointed out, the first organisation to host an event on the new EU Concept. The role and contribution of civil society actors in building the Concept and the guidelines were acknowledged and praised.

Approximately 40 people participated in the event and listened to four speakers discussing the new Concept, its implementation, and challenges. Speakers included an EU official who introduced the

Concept and its accompanying [guidelines](#), a mediator with a Quaker background who shared their personal experience in mediation and offered best practice advice, an official from the German permanent representation (who had held the Council presidency at the time of the adoption of the Concept), and finally a representative of the Portugal presidency who shared their thoughts on the implementation of the Concept for the next months.

Many crucial issues were addressed in the discussions, including the current militarisation and securitisation of the EU, the meaningful inclusion of local voices in mediation processes, and the EU's added value as a mediator.

In the upcoming weeks and months, the Peace Programme team will disseminate the report to relevant people in the EU and abroad.



Introducing Atiaf Alwazir the new peace programme lead



Hello, my name is Atiaf. It's an Arabic word that means spectra and colors of the rainbow. I'm really honored to join QCEA as the new peace programme lead. Starting a new job in the midst of a pandemic is challenging, but QCEA has made me feel right at home.

Professionally, I wear many hats and have lived in many countries.

My work intersects across political struggles and I have been involved in various movements. But overall, I have focused on peace, equality, and human rights.

Part of what got me here today is my family history. My grandfather was executed for his political actions and my father was a political prisoner as a teenager.

It has shaped how I view peace and social justice. For me, peace is a child's ability to sleep without the deafening sound of bombs but it is much more than the end of fighting. Peace is the presence of equality and justice and the recognition that although we're in the same storm, we're on different boats. The storm will impact different people in different ways.

In the peace programme, I will continue to implement the QCEA strategic plan 2019-2024, including focussing on disarmament and climate justice with an intersectional and decolonial approach, remembering that we're the extension of all those who came before us and their resilience is our true inheritance.

As author Nadim Aslam wrote, "pull a thread here and you'll find it's attached to the rest of the world."

I look forward to working with you all!

Register
now!



The possibilities of peace education

Evidence + opportunities



QCEA / QPSW Conference
20-21-22 May 2021

The online conference "The possibilities of peace education" which QCEA organises in partnership with Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) will take place online on **20-22 May 2021**.

Together, we will explore how education can sow the seeds of sustainable peace and heal divisions.

Registration for the event just opened, so make sure to visit www.qcea.org/conferences to register!



A year in human rights: How our programme kept busy during the pandemic

↑ image taken at the online workshop about the Global Compact on Refugees

During the pandemic, QCEA brought people together to discuss how human rights are experienced in practice.

For example, QCEA held its first **intergenerational meeting on human rights and migration**. Attended by representatives from institutions, youth, faith-based and human rights organisations and with a parity of professionals with lived experiences of migration, the event was the opportunity for participants to retrace the **evolution of migration policy and discourse** from the 80's onwards. From the rich discussion came calls to end the instrumentalisation of migration for political, the need for systemic change based on the reexamination of economic models and the dismantlement of colonial frameworks. Participants particularly enjoyed the opportunity for collaboration across generation and the insights policymakers with lived experience of migration can bring to EU migration policies and advocacy.

Autumn Course - Radical Empathy for Professionals: QCEA and Project Wisdom ran a course over several weeks for policymakers and NGO professionals to explore how to use empathy not only as a tool to establish common ground and build bridges towards a shared purpose but also as a means to manage **difficult conversations** and gain awareness of how power imbalances and oppressive behaviours can be reproduced even by those working on social justice and equality. Despite the online format, participants felt that the pilot course offered the opportunity to

“step out of the daily rush to learn how to prepare for professional situations as well as personal lives” and “the workshop was crucial to **put the human and soul back** in the increasingly professionalised fields of peacebuilding and human rights.”

We continued to meet governments and European policymakers throughout 2020. Many of our meetings focused on **fundamental inequalities further exposed by the COVID-19**. To bring this work to wider audiences we published interviews with MEPs Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament's DROI Subcommittee on human rights issues and Dietmar Koster to discuss the **impact of COVID-19** on EU human rights and migration policies. The discussions touched on the need for watchfulness so that the **restrictions placed on some freedoms in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic do not become permanent**; the challenge of obtaining reliable information on the conditions of migrants at EU borders and the importance of global solidarity in order to build a post-pandemic world where human rights do not come second to economic interests and where justice for people who migrate to Europe is non-negotiable. Both MEPs also stressed the importance of civil society organisation such as ours in demanding higher standards from politics and policies.

A full account of our human rights work in 2020 will be published in our **Annual Report**, following the QCEA General Assembly meeting in March.

"Refugees are a gift, not a problem!"

On 9 February, QCEA hosted a workshop together with the Jewish refugee organisation HIAS Europe, Islamic Relief Worldwide, and the Lutheran World Federation discussing the Global Compact on Refugees and the role of faith-based organisations in the protection of people seeking sanctuary.

The event was a success with more than 200 people attending the online workshop. In the two panels we heard from a diverse group of speakers from faith-based organisations, governments, and EU bodies.

One of the key messages of the event were that

the EU and its work with people seeking sanctuary is highly dependant on initiatives of faith-based organisations. It was also highlighted by EU officials that faith groups are usually the first responders in situations of need and often act earlier than EU programmes can.

Especially memorable were the remarks of Karin Johansson, a nun from Sweden who hosts people on the move in her convent since decades. Her inspiring reminder that the people we welcome are a gift and not a problem and need freedom and love will be remembered by attenders of the event.



British
Friends
of QCEA

Re-launch of British Friends of QCEA

British Friends of Quaker Council for European Affairs is re-launching its work of publicising and fundraising to support the activities of QCEA at this crucial time for all the nations of Europe, including the UK. This event will engage British Friends in understanding the continuing importance of QCEA in bringing Quaker concerns to the fore and enabling quiet diplomacy between European governments through which understanding can be shared and trust built between leaders and policy makers away from the spotlight of European institutions.

Saturday 20 March
10:30 – 12:00am GMT
by Zoom video-conferencing

We have three **keynote speakers** on the following topics:

Jeremy Lester, *Clerk of QCEA - QCEA priorities post Covid*

Jude Kirton-Darling, *Deputy General Secretary of industriAll Europe - Relationship Building and Partnership in a post Brexit Europe*

Craig Comstock, *Member of QCEA Executive Committee - QCEA funding*

To **register** for the British Friends of QCEA re-launch event please complete the registration form here [click here](#) or email a.jameson2@outlook.com.

Class – privilege and me

by Paul Holdsworth,
Quakers in Belgium and Luxemburg

Quaker concern for equality

As Quakers, we seek out and respond to the Divine spark in everyone.

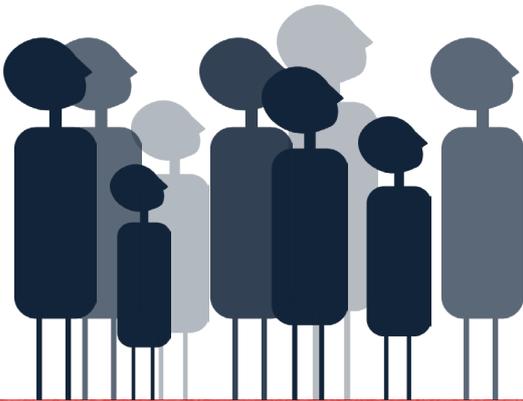
We understand that every human being is an equal part of a sacred whole.

We seek to change the systems and attitudes that deny this truth and foster inequality.

But some inequalities have become 'normal', making them hard to 'see'.

Social privilege is a special, unearned advantage that is available only to a particular group of people; it benefits them or is detrimental to others.

Some of us enjoy privileges because we come from a particular social class.



Privileged, moi?

Try this: how would you answer these questions?



The schools I went to as a child had up-to-date textbooks, computers, a high standard of teaching and few disruptive kids.

Yes No



As a child, my friends' parents allowed my friends to play and sleep over at my house.



When I was growing up, it was expected that I would go to university; it wasn't seen as a foolish dream.



I can visit a doctor just for a "check-up."



If I get ill, I can seek medical care immediately and not just "hope it goes away."



I buy what I need and want without worry.



I have the freedom to waste.



I have the time, education, and opportunity to enhance my inner life and my personal growth, to go to therapy, retreats, and workshops.



For me, having a house, a healthy family, and a good career isn't a dream; it's just a plan.



I usually have services provided by highly qualified people, or know how to access them.



When I watch TV or read the papers, I can see people of my own class represented well, realistically.



My elected representatives share a similar background with me.



I can talk with my mouth full and not have people attribute this to the uncivilized nature of my social class/cultural/ethnic background.



If I choose to wear second-hand clothing, it won't be attributed to my social class, and may even be considered stylish.



How did you score?

If you scored lots of Yeses, it's likely that you are benefitting from privileges based upon your social class. Read on!

What is privilege?

Privilege is a special, unearned advantage or entitlement that is available only to a particular group of people, and which benefits them or is detrimental to others.

Groups can be advantaged - or oppressed - based on their age, appearance, education level, (disability, ethnic or racial category, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or social class. All these variables are connected in subtle ways. Every person has a unique set of privileges and disadvantages. Privilege in one area may be mitigated by disadvantages in others; for example, in the UK white working-class males have the privilege afforded by their skin colour, but are among the most underprivileged socio-economic groups.

Often, the groups that benefit from privilege are unaware of it. It's like the wind: when you walk into the wind you have to struggle for each step you take; but when you walk with the wind, you don't feel the wind at all, but you still move faster than you would otherwise. The wind is social privilege: if it flows with you, it propels you forward with little effort of your own.

These 'privileges' are not 'luxuries', but are often basic human rights; for example, privileged people may have easier access to adequate food and shelter, which are actually basic human rights. So 'privileges' are of two kinds: "spared injustice" and "unjust enrichment".

Classism

Like racism, classism is a form of oppression and prejudice. It happens when someone is treated better or worse because of their social class.

Classism is:

- differential treatment based on social class;
- the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups;
- the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class.

Classism is all around us:

- individually, through prejudicial behaviours and attitudes, e.g. making sweeping generalizations such as "poor people are lazy"; or when a middle- or higher-class person acts in a way that is arrogant, superior, or entitled; or when s/he is considered smarter because more articulate than a working-class or poor person;
- culturally, through norms and values that support and perpetuate these systems and behaviours that

are considered more cultured;

People on the higher end of the class spectrum, and institutions, get to define what behaviour is "normal" or "acceptable"; and cultured;

- institutionally, through policies and practices, e.g. policies that benefit the 'upper classes' at the expense of the 'lower classes', leading to income and wealth inequality.

Classism is institutionalised in the economy. Social discrimination is based on a system of production, allocation and consumption that is structured by the elite to serve their class interests at the expense of everyone else. It becomes accepted as 'normal' and people - even the working class who suffer from it - accept it into their belief system, thereby unwittingly perpetuating it.

But surely there's no classism here?

Fear, anxiety, denial, and defensiveness surround the issue of class, as they do issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical disability. We avoid talking about class, in order to protect the myths that uphold classism, like:

- ✘ "There are no classes in a democratic society."
- ✘ "We deserve all our success" (implying that others "deserve" their lack of success).
- ✘ "We would never prejudge people based on their occupation, income, education, home ownership, or the way they speak or dress."
- ✘ We pretend that we don't feel uncomfortable and guilty around those whose status we perceive to be lower, or whose choices we disapprove of.

Our classism, like other oppressions, affects us negatively.

We hurt others when we exclude, devalue, ridicule, or ignore them.

We diminish our own lives by diminishing the diversity in our lives, including the friends and mentors we might have found, the understandings we might have reached, the spiritual discoveries we might have made in a truly diverse religious community.

As in all areas of exclusion, we need to ask ourselves: who are we hurting? what are we missing? why do we feel so awkward when we meet someone who is different from 'the norm'?



What is class, exactly?

A class is a large group of people who share a similar economic and/or social position. Your class is your relative rank in society measured by things like your income, wealth, property ownership, education, status, and/or economic and political power.

Objectively, class depends on how much access we have to financial and social resources and decision-making. People at the top end of the economic class spectrum mostly hold a dominant position in society and benefit from the class system; most people at the bottom end are subordinate and have limited access to the material benefits of our society.

Subjectively, class is about how we feel and experience the world: what social rank do we experience in our daily life? For example, an industrial worker might earn as much as a college professor but might identify as working class because of their family history, the lower status accorded to their job, or the limited amount of control they have at work.

Our felt experience often varies depending on whether we are looking “up” or “down” the class continuum.

We experience class very differently depending on our race, gender and ethnic backgrounds.

Our class identity affects us not only in economic terms, but also influences how we feel about ourselves and others. How we believe we are perceived by others often affects how we perceive ourselves.

For much of the 20th century, there were thought to be broadly three classes: upper, middle and lower. But in the last few years, in some countries, polarisation between the top 10% and the bottom 10% has increased: the very rich have got richer, the very poor have got poorer, and inequality has significantly increased.

Now there is a small wealthy urban elite who have benefitted from the recent economic transformation, having acquired significantly more wealth, power and privilege, and are able to frame the political landscape. For example, in one UK company, a delivery person earns in one year what the company chief executive earns in one day.

In many countries, the same changes in the economy created a group of chronically unemployed or underemployed people, who are excluded from the economy, and often from society: they are sometimes called an underclass.

A large group of people do work, but do not earn a living wage, and experience severe economic, social and political disadvantage: sometimes referred to as the precariat.

Class matters.

The fact that class exists reflects unequal access to rights, resources, and power in society.

It has a strong effect on an individual’s access to education, the quality of that education, and how high a level one can reach, and it affects health and life expectancy.

It also affects whom one knows socially, and the extent to which they can provide advantageous economic and employment opportunities, political participation and power.

It is often argued that these huge differences can simply be explained by the fact that some people work harder or are naturally more intelligent than others.

This is false.

Individual effort, creativity and intelligence do matter. But they do not justify such huge inequality. Those at the top, those with most power, wealth and influence have largely benefitted from significant advantages that they have not earned, but simply inherited.

Is this the kind of society we want to live in?

What is the EU doing?

The European Commission supports Member States’ policies on social inclusion and social protection. Its Europe 2020 strategy aims to “lift 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion.” The Commission says that it supports countries’ efforts to address their social challenges through the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and Social Investment Package as well EU funds like the European Social Fund.

However, the challenge of classism is seldom mentioned in EU documents.

There is also evidence that differences between social classes have been “accentuated by the process of European construction.” Poverty and precariousness are more widespread in south and east Europe; here, privatisation and foreign investment have benefitted a new managerial elite who now ‘live in gated communities’; the gap between them and the working classes is growing. Few if any EU policies specifically favour the working class; for example, Erasmus “favours socially advantaged students”, and the Common Agricultural Policy has advantaged big, commercial farming over small family farms. [Hugrée et al. 2020]

Quakers and classism

As Quakers, we seek to find that of God in everyone. Our experience is that the Inward Light is available equally to everyone. We are against all forms of discrimination. The Quaker faith invites us to speak truth to power in love, and challenge those who treat people badly.

But we all live within an unfair system, and it is easy to overlook exclusion and the impact of power dynamics in our own lives.

Inequality is a human problem with human solutions. To make equality a reality, we must choose different ways of being. When we explore and address inequalities, we can become stronger, more loving communities, and better equipped to do the work of social change.

Middle class people tend to think that ours is the 'default' position and that our values are the right values.

Advices and Queries

"Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs?"

Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws.

Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life.

Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear.

Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?"

[Britain Yearly Meeting, Advices and Queries 33.]

Unless we challenge ourselves, we risk replicating injustice by default.

- We may be aware of issues like race and gender; are we well-informed about class?
- We may accept that others are at a disadvantage; can we also see the corollary: that we ourselves are advantaged, privileged?
- We may say that we will work against disadvantage; are we willing to decrease our own advantage and privilege?

Is classism on the agenda in your country?

Much of the evidence about class and privilege comes from English-speaking countries. What's the situation in your country? Your Quaker Meeting? QCEA would like to hear from you!

Further reading

- About Class <https://classism.org/about-class/>
- Arizona State University, Social Class Privilege: <https://tinyurl.com/y7rqtpgm>
- Britain Yearly Meeting: 'Diversity and Inclusion' Report to Meeting for Sufferings 04 07 2019
- Four things Quakers are learning about inclusion and diversity: <https://tinyurl.com/y9swb56t>
- Frediani, J: Classism Workshop, 1996, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston.
- Huguée C., Penissat E., and Spire A.: Social Class in Europe: New Inequalities in the Old World. 2020. London. Verso.
- Kimmel, Michael S: 'Privilege: a reader'. 2018. London. Routledge.
- McKnight A, Duque M, and Rucci M: 'Creating more equal societies – what works? LSE Evidence Review'; 2016. London School of Economics.
- Savage, M, et al: Social Class in the 21st century. 2015. London. Pelican.
- United Nations, World Social report.



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.**



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Quaker house Brussels celebrating the ban on nuclear weapons coming into force on 22 January 2021.



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:**

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