

Religious Minorities Offer Social Capital But Face Discrimination

Religious

minorities have much to offer society, but they often struggle against various forms of discrimination, according to a joint report published Feb. 4 by the Conference of European Churches ([CEC](#)) and GlobalEthics.net.

“While CEC is convinced that minorities bring an added value to societies, sometimes governments do not see that, but treat them as threat to national security,” the report said. “Quite often, state officials lack religious literacy and have not yet developed a deeper understanding of the benefits that can spring from creating space for religious minorities to flourish.”

In many places

across Europe and beyond, religious minorities face expressions of hostility from religious majorities and governments in the form of social ostracism, restrictions on religious expression, confiscation or demolition of property and lack of legal status.

The report

compiles and adapts reports and discussions that were part of a conference titled “Religious Minorities as Part of Culturally Diverse Societies,” held in Croatia in October 2016.

A legal

framework for religious minorities is provided, along with three reflections on religious equality, including one from Tony Peck, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation ([EBF](#)).

Baptists “believe

in the essential separation of church and state, though not a separation from a full engagement with society,” he said.

Citing Thomas

Helwys’ plea in 1612 for religious freedom that was “inclusive of all the known religious groups of the time,” Peck noted “this conviction that the state should allow religious freedom for all has become part of the DNA of Baptists.”

Nevertheless, “Baptists

themselves have been subject to pressure, discrimination and even persecution in their history and this would be true of the beginning of most European Baptist Unions,” he explained. “The difficulties we sometime encounter with religious freedom are often a combination of issues to do with relating to the state and to majority or state churches.”

Concluding the publication

are five case studies from Austria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Spain, which provide insights into ongoing challenges facing religious minorities and constructive practices for promoting and protecting religious liberty for all.

The report,

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“Religious Diversity in Europe and the Rights of Religious Minorities,” was edited by Elizabeta Kitanovic, executive secretary for human rights at CEC, and Patrick Roger Schnabel, head of the church development service of the Protestant Church Berlin-Brandenburg-Upper Lusatia ([EKBO](#)), and is available [here](#).