

# NEWSLETTER

European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC)

## EDITORIAL

GUY SELDESLAGH, SECRETARY GENERAL

This year has been truly peculiar. Who would have said at the beginning of 2020 that a new, previously unknown virus would infect more than 16 million citizens and kill more than 400,000 in the 29 member countries and regions of the CCEC?

This hardship has driven us back to the urgency of solidarity and service to pupils and families in order to ensure the continuity of learning and educational care for all young people.

Faced with this difficulty, and despite the range of measures that hinder our possibility to celebrate together, we hope that this season and this Christmas celebration may bring us peace and hope.



We wish you a year 2021, full of fraternity, which will allow us to resume the course of our lives, and will strengthen the wealth that we have to offer to our pupils and students, without leaving anyone along the roadside.



European Committee for Catholic Education

Comité Européen pour l'Enseignement Catholique

A.I.S.B.L.

Europees Comité voor het Katholiek Onderwijs

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Guy Selderslagh

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## CEEC ACTIVITIES

### EXECUTIVE BOARD AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Last September, the members of the Executive Board met virtually in order to prepare the CEEC General Assembly meeting. The latter took place on Friday 20 November virtually, given the unstable health situation. These meetings enabled members to meet, inform each other and exchange views.

During this meeting, our Secretary General, Guy Selderslagh invited Father Boutros Azar, Secretary General of the Catholic Schools in Lebanon and Regional Secretary of the MENA-OIEC Zone. The latter spoke about the difficult situation in which the Catholic Schools in Lebanon find themselves as a result of the economic, political and health crisis which is striking the country deeply. We return to his poignant testimony later in our newsletter.

### OUR ACTIONS

#### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN EUROPE AND THE CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC

Un second questionnaire est en cours d'élaboration. Plus d'informations seront transmises bientôt. Last June, the CEEC organised two webinars (in English and French) to present and exchange on the results of its survey "How does the Catholic school in Europe deal with the Covid 19 crisis? The results of this survey and the exchanges were gathered in a publication, available from the CEEC [secretariat](#). A second questionnaire is currently being prepared. More information will be sent soon. During a [virtual seminar](#) organised by OIEC, OIDEL and GPEN, the results of the survey were also presented (only available in French).

#### TRAINING IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Since September 2019, the CEEC members have been working on a new theme which aims to study, complement and/or extend the experiences, tools or projects developed by our secretariats to our community of teachers and headteachers. Members are therefore invited to answer a questionnaire and present their responses, in order to reflect on how Catholic education prepares, works and collaborates with specific organisations (training centres, etc.) in terms of initial or in-service training of teachers and headteachers.

"Education bears within itself a seed of hope: the hope of peace and justice; the hope of beauty and goodness; the hope of social harmony."

THE WORDS OF POPE FRANCIS IN THE CONCLUSION OF JOSÉ MARÍA ALVIRA PRESIDENT OF THE CEEC

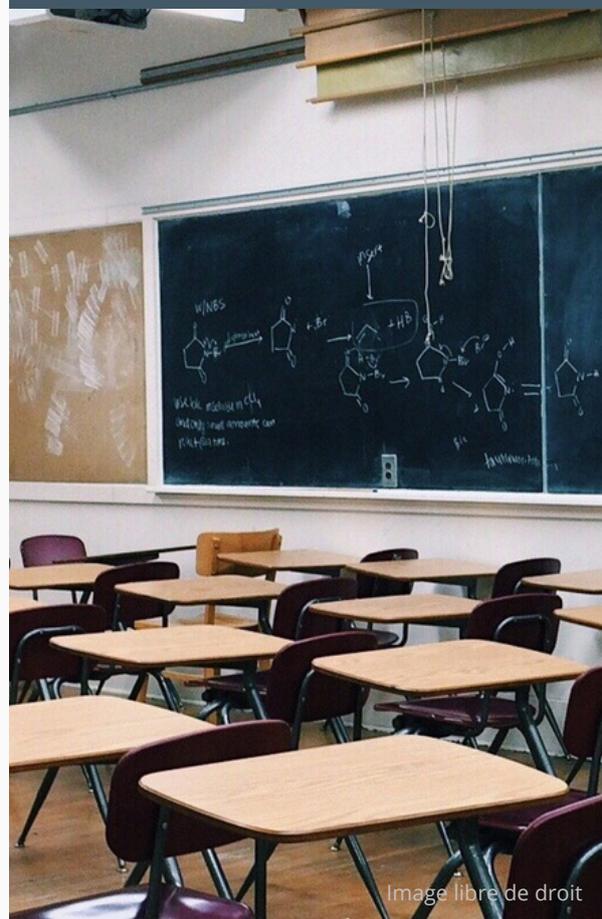


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## NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS: IN EUROPE

### BELGIUM (FLANDERS)

Since November, secondary schools have been switching to hybrid education as Belgium is partially reconfined. According to epidemiologists, if strict measures are followed, schools are not the driving force behind the rise in infected cases. In addition to the health measures, there is a project ongoing to develop new attainment targets. However, the Catholic Education of Flanders warns that these objectives threaten the freedom and quality of education. The targets are too numerous to enable pupils to acquire them in depth within the time limits of the lessons. They hinder the freedom of teachers and schools which are no longer able to develop their own approach and pedagogical project.

### GREECE

Following the coronavirus crisis, Greek Catholic schools suffered heavy financial losses. As public schools, they had to partially reimburse school fees to parents (for periods when classes were not held), and also had to guarantee the salaries of the teachers, who continued to work during the lockdown. After the holidays, several measures were put in place: extensive testing in schools, training for teachers, wearing masks everywhere and for everyone... Despite the respect of these measures, cases of contamination increased. The state decided to close schools, shops, restaurants, etc. again in order to protect the health system and hospitals.

During the General Assembly, a round table discussion was organised and members were invited to give a report on the situation in their countries, particularly following the coronavirus crisis. The following is a summary of the interventions.

### HUNGARY

After a complete school closure during the lockdown in March, the measures in force in schools have been adapted for the start of the 2020 school year. Indeed, the government has ordered schools to be opened but infected classes by the virus to be immediately placed under quarantine. In addition, a new National Core Curriculum (NAT) was introduced. School textbooks will be made available to schools in September 2021. Finally, vocational education has been separated from the public education system. Together with higher education, it has been transferred to the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, in order to make training more practice-oriented and more adapted to new professions.

### POLAND

Between September and November, the percentage of people infected by coronavirus was steadily increasing. The government therefore imposed new restrictions, including on the education system, and gradually made compulsory the use of distance education: from secondary school students (aged 15-19) to primary school students (aged 6-10) and students aged 10-15. Only children aged 2 to 6 continue to attend classes. Finally, the majority of pupils and teachers agree that school-based courses are more convenient than digital or hybrid education.



## SCOTLAND

Following the Covid 19 crisis, the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) has been working with its diocesan offices to support and create blended learning materials for Religious Education in digital or hybrid teaching. In addition, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of 'Laudato Si', the SCES has launched the 'Laudato Si' Schools Scotland' programme which encourages schools to integrate ecological education (more information [here](#)). Finally, the SCES is currently examining how best to highlight the teaching of the Church in relation to anti-racism in schools. Any member of the CEEC who would like to do so is invited to share their reflections to help address this issue.

## PORTUGAL

The health crisis has also impacted Catholic schools in Portugal, but they have continued to carry out one of their main missions: care for the person (students, parents, etc.). In this context of hybrid or distance teaching, Catholic schools must ensure that families have equal access to learning and that the person is given integral training. It is important that Catholic schools in Europe do not lose this mission that defines our identity.

## UNITED KINGDOM

The coronavirus epidemic has brought with it many challenges, particularly that of distance learning. On the other hand, the crisis has strengthened the ties with the government, showing the important role of the Service for Catholic Education (SCE) in England and Wales. At the same time, a new programme is being developed in Wales. Unfortunately, it represents a serious threat to Catholic education. In addition to internal changes, the Welsh government has decided to remove the right of parents to withdraw their children's right to religious and sex education from their children's education. This decision undermined the delicate balance that existed, because although very few families chose this option, they had the opportunity and freedom to do so. Several actions and demonstrations to find a solution are currently being held.

**"In spite of the adverse conditions, our schools have continued to ensure the integral development of the person, with this care for students, teachers, families... This is what makes us different and what defines us."**

DEACON FERNANDO  
MAGALHÃES DA CUNHA  
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CATHOLIC  
SCHOOLS OF PORTUGAL



Source: Colloque du CEEC - 14 & 15 mars 2018



## NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS: INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

### OIEC

As part of Pope Francis' launch of the Global Education Pact, the International Office of Catholic Education has published a book entitled "Luces para el camino, Pacto Educativo Global". This [book](#) was produced in collaboration with SM and Brother Juan Antonio. Furthermore, the OIEC has just joined the GRACE network (Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education) to respond to one of its missions which is to promote research on the contribution of the Catholic school in the educational field. To this end, from November onwards, a webinar on a specific theme and led by a panel of researchers and university experts will be provided. In collaboration with FIUC, OMAEC and UMEC, OIEC has also launched a [new website](#) with resources for Catholic educators around the world.

In addition, the OIEC and the GPEN (Global Pedagogical Network) have set up a reflection group with the aim of publishing a common text to enable Catholic and Protestant schools to work better together, particularly within international organisations. Furthermore, a second report entitled Global Report on Catholic Education 2021 is being prepared with the help of Quentin Wodon, an economist at the World Bank.

Finally, the OIEC is also working on a new project "Planet OIEC", in collaboration with The Magazine, publisher in Spain. This digital platform will offer resources for English language teachers and their students at a very moderate cost and adapted to the specific character of Catholic schools. It is inspired by Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti, among others, and will be a means of developing the spirit of the Global Education Pact. A webinar was held on 25 November to present this ambitious project.

### OIDEL

The coronavirus crisis has had an impact on ongoing activities in international bodies. The progress of some projects has been slowed down, but several actions have still been launched, including: the manifesto "Europe must not forget independent education and educational pluralism" published last May, co-signed by more than 50 organisations, including CEEC and several of its members, and which was sent to the European Parliament. More recently, the OIDEL launched a first action to denounce problematic points of a new Spanish law that threatens Catholic Education. The aim is to take this petition to the European Parliament. The OIDEL is also working with the United Nations and UNESCO. Several themes are addressed: the major role of parents and non-governmental schools for Education during the crisis, the contribution to the report on education as a cultural right, the contribution to the 2020-2021 report on the future of education.

### COUNCIL OF EUROPE

In October, the NGO conference organised a virtual meeting during which the Secretary General underlined her intention to support the NGO conference by giving it a real place in the Council of Europe bodies. This was encouraging, particularly with regard to the reform of the NGO conference, a major issue whose discussions were postponed to December. Moreover, during a meeting at the Holy See mission, the members worked on a document "Towards a more inclusive society" and on the organisation of a study day in the form of a round table discussion which would bring together representatives of Christian NGOs and some Council of Europe stakeholders. Finally, the Catholic NGOs recently had a meeting with Cardinal Parolin who gave his views on the situation in Lebanon and encouraged NGOs to help Catholic schools in Lebanon.



## CALLS AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

### CALL FOR SOLIDARITY FROM THE LEBANESE CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Summary of Father Boutros Azar's intervention at the CEEC GA of 20 November 2020.

#### A FINANCIAL, POLITICAL AND HEALTH CRISIS

On August 4, 2020, a terrible explosion devastated a quarter of the capital, Beirut, causing many casualties and injuries, as well as the partial destruction of the architectural and cultural heritage. The country was also hit hard by a deep economic and monetary crisis, worsened by the coronavirus epidemic. Catholic schools have not been spared: around fifty schools have been affected by the explosion at various levels. The total cost of repairing the damage has been estimated at over \$12,500,000 and this figure is likely to be revised upwards.

Even before the tragic explosion on 4 August, the financial situation of private education, especially the partially state-subsidised semi-free schools, was disastrous. As for Catholic schools, they received only one-third of the tuition fees due, with repercussions on the financing of teaching staff, among other things. Overall, the national currency lost more than 80% of its value against the dollar.

According to the economist Henri Dakhos, the Catholic School will be impacted in the short and medium term on several levels: (1) the drop in the number of pupils attending school, (2) the inability of families to pay school fees, (3) the inability of schools to provide teaching and educational materials, (4) the inability of families to buy school supplies, (5) the inability to offer pupils cultural activities, (6) the digital inequality, which is currently highly developed with online or hybrid teaching.

#### TRAUMA, SUPPORT AND HOPE

Beirutans, adults, children, parents, teachers, educators, have all been affected and weakened by the harbour disaster. Lebanon is now in a post-traumatic stage which represents a real challenge in the short and long term for those involved in education. Father Boutros explains "Our bodies are unharmed, internally we feel broken, overwhelmed, bruised", but encourages us to continue "to watch, hope and bear witness". It is necessary to support each other and to join forces. Finally, Father Boutros expresses his gratitude to the countries and associations that have already shown their support, including the OIEC, the Secretariat of the Catholic Schools of France, and the French Confederation of Former Pupils. He concludes: "together we will go further".

#### FIGURES

Population: 4 million inhabitants

Christians: 35% of the population

Students in school: 1,069,627, 70% in private education and 30% in public education.

Catholic schools: 329 (representing 188,000 pupils)

Source: sgec-l.org



#### LEBANON ALLIANCE

Through its historical fraternal relations with the Lebanese Catholic Education, the French Catholic Education has launched a support action "Alliance Liban" in response to the call of the Lebanese Catholic schools and its secretariat. This operation has three main lines of action: to help the schools, to develop partnerships between French and Lebanese schools, and to help the general secretariat of the Lebanese Catholic Schools. More information about this action is available [here](#).

# CALLS AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

## NEW APPOINTMENTS AND DEPARTURES

Last June, Mr. Gjermund Høgh retired and was replaced by Mrs. Anne-Rigmor Stock Evje to represent the Catholic schools in Norway. More recently, we welcomed Mr Norbert Simon to our General Assembly, who succeeds Professor András Gianone, representative of Catholic education in Hungary at the CEEC. Finally, Sister Khrystofora Bushtyn announced her departure in December after 9 years as head of the Education Commission of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. We will therefore soon welcome her successor, the Reverend Father Petro Maiba. In this way, we would like once again to thank Gjermund, András and Sister Khrystofora for their presence, participation and support within the CEEC, and wish them a warm start in their new life and professional projects. THANK YOU. We also congratulate and welcome Pedro Huerta Nuño, the new General Secretary of Escuelas Católicas, who succeeds José María Alvira as the representative of Spanish Catholic schools among our members.



Source: alfayomega.es

The CEEC secretariat  
sends you its best wishes and wishes you a  
happy new year 2021.

## CALENDAR

**February 10, 2021:** CEEC Executive Board meeting.

**February 2021 :** Seminar organised by OIDEL, probably in the form of a webinar. Dates to be confirmed.

**16-17 April 2021:** Meeting of the CEEC General Assembly. More information to be provided.

**22-23 October 2021:** CEEC General Assembly meeting in Athens. More information to be provided.

**March-April 2022:** CEEC General Assembly meeting. Dates to be confirmed.

**19 to 21 October 2022:** OIEC Congress in Marseilles around the Mare Nostrum, cradle of humanity, crossroads of civilisations and symbol of the dysfunctions of the world.

**October-November 2022:** CEEC General Assembly meeting. Dates to be confirmed.

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