SUMMARY FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The role of religion has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking on renewed significance in many societies, including those experiencing secularisation. Religious practice and interest in spirituality has increased globally, and faith leaders have been identified as 'key workers' in many countries, in recognition of their important roles in burying the dead, comforting the grieving, and ministering to the sick. While some religious groups have opposed lockdown restrictions or vaccines, others have worked with governments and NGOs to promote resilience and inclusion. Building on initial findings from single-country contexts, we compare the changing role of majority and minority religions in 'the global north': Canada, Germany, Ireland/Northern Ireland (UK), and Poland. We are asking how various religions are contributing to the building of more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable societies. We conduct surveys, interviews, and analyses of media material and content produced by the Churches. Deploying survey analysis, qualitative text analysis, and text mining techniques, we comparatively analyse majority (Christian) and minority (Islam and others) religions' roles in three key areas: 1) Constructing discourses around health, illness and science, including promoting the observance (or not) of lockdown restrictions and public health measures like vaccines; 2) Lobbying and liaising with governments and policymakers, including how religious and inter-religious groups have contributed to debates emerging from the pandemic, and 3) Incorporating digital innovations such as blended online/in-person approaches to religious practice, and how this is impacting equality and inclusion within religious groups (urban/rural, age and people with disabilities). Ultimately, the study will draw general conclusions about factors that affect how religious actors frame issues of health, illness and science, how relationships between religion and the state are transformed in the context of the pandemic, and whether or how religious adaptations to the digital world have taken account of inclusion and other ethical issues.