



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

beyond borders

since 1964

CCME GA 2020-2

CCME ACTIVITY REPORT 2017 - 2020

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe – Commission des Églises auprès des Migrants en Europe
Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

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CCME's MISSION AND MANDATE

"CCME is an ecumenical organisation that serves the churches in their commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level. In the fulfilment of this mandate it is responding to the message of the Bible which insists on the dignity of every human being and to the understanding of unity as devoid of any distinction between strangers and natives." (CCME Mission Statement)

CCME is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME members are Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal Churches, Councils of Churches and diaconal agencies in presently 18 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in advocacy for migrants', refugees' and minority concerns and rights with European institutions.

CCME OBJECTIVES

In particular, the objectives of CCME are:

- to monitor European and national migration, refugee and antidiscrimination policy, to inform the churches about these policies;
- to support and serve the churches in their advocacy;
- to challenge the European institutions to act in accordance with human rights and international obligations; to strengthen on a global, European, national and regional level the cooperation of churches, NGOs and others in this field;

- to support and challenge churches to include migrants (churches, groups or individuals) in the communion of churches;
- to address fears in societies around migration and facilitate churches' initiatives on finding ways to peaceful living together.

Working instruments of CCME are conferences, seminars, studies, information and communication, working groups and thematic ad hoc meetings.

Context: European asylum and migration policy and the political background to the work of CCME

Following the fairly big movement of people into Europe in 2015/16, subsequent years have seen relatively few new refugee arrivals in Europe. Yet migration to and within Europe has continued to be a major and controversial issue in the EU.

Although initial responses to the significant arrival of refugees in Europe were heartening, especially among churches, the lack of solidarity across EU Member States has led to deep political divisions between countries and increasing hostility towards migrants. The era often termed "refugee crisis" was far more about a "solidarity crisis" or an "EU political crisis".

At EU policy level, efforts to reform the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) were launched by policy proposals of the European Commission from 2016, largely aimed at reducing asylum in Europe. Progress was constrained by fundamentally different priorities of the Member States and between the Council and European Parliament. A particular stumbling block was the reform of the Dublin Regulation (no agreement could be reached), which forces persons in need of protection to make their asylum claim at point of entry, so 'burdening' the Southern and Eastern European countries.

The strong electoral performance of right-wing political parties opposed to migration, and a lack of solidarity among states, resulted in considerable attention being given to discussions on how Europe could better 'protect' its external borders and more effectively return irregular non-EU citizens.

The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 was promoted as a blueprint in attempts to externalise responsibility for refugee protection to third countries. FRONTEX was strengthened to help secure borders and partners in third countries, such as the Libyan Coast Guard, were funded to return people picked up at sea en route to Europe. More recently, pushbacks at the external land borders in the Balkans and at the EU's eastern border have also become increasingly prevalent and violent. Even the decision of Greece to officially suspend access to asylum only received very limited protest from EU institutions.

Yet migrants continued to make desperate journeys to seek sanctuary in Europe. The hotspots on the Greek islands became a highly contentious issue due to dramatic overcrowding and devastating conditions in these refugee reception facilities. Search and rescue was seriously curtailed in the Mediterranean Sea. The EU ceased maritime patrols of the Operation Sophia mission and seizure of NGO boats seeking to rescue migrants at sea were coupled with a move towards the criminalisation of solidarity.

Harsh decisions of governments of Member States on the EU's external borders have partly been justified by the assessment that these Member States are largely left alone in the reception of those arriving at the EU's external borders.

At EU level, a focus on externalisation of borders and return was evident in the recast of the Return Directive (2018) and increasing attempts to make EU

development cooperation conditional on third countries working on curbing migration and allowing readmission of migrants.

Disembarkation also became a key issue as a number of Mediterranean countries blatantly refused to meet their international obligations in denying access to boat refugees and disembarkation of rescued people. A more fragmented approach, rather than an EU coordinated response, ensued resulting in certain Member States working together, such as the "coalition of the willing" agreeing on a mechanism to distribute people rescued at sea.

In 2019, legislative work on asylum and migration largely came to a halt as European Parliament elections took place in May and the appointment of a new European Commission was only ratified late in the year.

2020 began with much speculation about the Commission's new Pact on Asylum and Migration, which is expected to be finally launched in September and is feared to be disturbingly focused on borders, detention and deportation. However, the year will be remembered for COVID-19, which brought Europe (and the world) to a standstill and had a massive impact on the rights of refugees and migrants. It will, in the near future, require a re-evaluation of migration issues in the light of the need for frontline and seasonal migrant workers and a global recession, which will inevitably lead to greater displacement of people.

Activities:

In the aforementioned political context, the CCME Work Programme 2018 -2020 "The hope in which we stand" guided the work of CCME:

1) Safe Passage:

CCME has consistently advocated for safe and legal passage for persons seeking

international protection at European borders. This has involved engagement with both churches and European institutions. Of persistent concern to CCME is the ongoing loss of life in attempted crossings of the Mediterranean Sea. Each year in June around World Refugee Day CCME, in partnership with CEC, has called on churches to commemorate those who have died on their way to seeking safety in Europe. CCME provided up-to-date information and directed to worship material.

Together with members, CCME's advocacy on safe passage to Europe has included promoting resettlement, humanitarian visa, larger family reunification, and complementary pathways. In the ongoing negotiations on the EU Resettlement Framework, CCME underlined the refugee protection aspect, as opposed to migration control, and the need for resettlement to be a durable solution. CCME's work contributed to the EU committing to 30,000 resettlement places for 2020 at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

CCME was also involved in several activities developing other safe passages (or "complementary pathways"), among them different models of private sponsorship by Christian communities and humanitarian corridors undertaken by churches. In 2019 in Rome (October) and Brussels (December), CCME supported its member churches in Italy and France in their advocacy of the EU Parliament for a broader European scheme of Humanitarian Corridors.

A major success of CCME advocacy was achieved in the area of humanitarian visa. Together with other Christian organisations, CCME helped to ensure the majority with which the European Parliament in December 2018 supported the report asking the European Commission to propose legislation for an EU Humanitarian Visa.

An increasing focus of CCME's work has become Search and Rescue (SAR). Events in 2019 confirmed that SAR is clearly needed in a comprehensive approach to safe passage. Against the political background of numerous stand-offs around the disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, CCME with its partners ACT Alliance EU and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) formulated a call to Justice and Home Affairs Ministers to facilitate search and rescue and fair sharing of responsibility. CCME was able to point to efforts by its members in the area, most prominently the German initiative to buy a search and rescue boat, which resulted in the United4rescue coalition and the launch of the Sea-Watch 4 in August 2020. CCME's role in the issue was evident in the moderation of discussions on SAR at the colloquium 'For a new start in European asylum and migration policy' in Berlin in November 2019.

CCME and its members called on Nordic and Baltic countries to get involved in European disembarkation and relocation arrangements. In the joint letter CCME argued that a "boat-by-boat" approach in the Mediterranean did not provide predictability on where boats carrying rescued passengers can dock. The letter also suggested reforms in the Dublin III Regulation, urging shared responsibility between European states in preventing humanitarian crises, appreciating the Malta Declaration, and reminding governments to act in cooperative solidarity.

In another joint letter in late 2019 CCME, together with CEC, called upon the new leaders of the European Commission, Parliament and Council to "Exercise solidarity, share responsibility, and show leadership". The call asked for a more realistic and open policy in refugee protection and political leadership in addressing hostile narratives on migration.

It made clear the commitment of CCME and partners to the issue of relocation and resettlement as part of the EU wide approach to asylum policies.

CCME continued its work on the Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights of the EU border agency FRONTEX. Members of the Forum insisted on improving the human right impact of FRONTEX operations. Following a process of reflection on the merits of this engagement, CCME's membership of the Forum was reconfirmed for the mandate 2020-2022.

In addition to the focus on refugee protection issues, CCME maintained that a realistic, rights-based labour migration policy for the EU would be one of the major elements of safe passage to the EU, thus reducing smuggling and irregular migration. It would also be in the interests of the EU and its citizens to regulate this area, which is currently characterised by a brutal survival of the fittest and exploitation.

While CCME had some success in its advocacy, many of its demands were not taken up in a climate where elections seem to be lost by those "soft" on migration. A more long-term strategy on mobilising positive voices is needed. This was also shown by the failure of the European Citizens' Initiative "Welcoming Europe", which CCME had supported.

2) Europe and International Refugee Protection:

CCME's efforts in the years 2017-2020 focused on the Common European Asylum System, playing a role in the exchange among non-governmental actors on the reform of the Dublin system and proactively working with the EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament. Plans to increasingly externalise the responsibility for refugee

protection to third countries were vehemently publicly criticised by CCME.

CCME similarly engaged in heightening awareness and critique of the ongoing scandal of dehumanising conditions on the Greek islands created by the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal.

In cooperation with members, CCME was able to support a number of initiatives on Greek islands and the Greek mainland. It also highlighted the increasing number of refugees hosted by Cyprus.

A major event in October 2018 was the 15th European Asylum Conference, co-organised by CCME and Diakonie Germany in Greece. About 150 participants met on the Aegean island, Chios, and in Athens to examine the refugee situation and effects of the EU-Turkey deal. The final declaration of the conference strongly criticised the practice of keeping newly arrived refugees in deplorable conditions on the Greek islands and identified the responsibility of political actors, both in Greece and EU wide.

Addressing a specific asylum concern, CCME in partnership with COMECE (Roman Catholic Bishop Conferences in the EU) hosted a consultation in May 2018 looking at the implications of conversions to Christianity in the asylum procedure. Experts from across Europe reported on the often highly unsatisfactory situation and gave insights into the processes of churches trying to improve knowledge and practice of asylum authorities.

CCME also actively contributed to civil society advocacy on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees – especially in relation to the positioning of EU Member States at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December 2019 at which the EU pledged 30,000 resettlement places.

Through the ACT Community of Practice CCME contributed to the ecumenical advocacy efforts on refugee protection at an international level. A meeting of CCME's General Secretary and the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, and his staff in May 2019 was a further opportunity to articulate ecumenical positions on protection.

3) Europe and International Migration:

A key example of politicians being "tough on migration" was the launch in 2018 of the recast of the EU Return Directive. The draft text is full of punitive measures and does not address the many obstacles hampering the return of irregular migrants. CCME joined forces with other actors to influence the European Parliament and Council to refuse this harsh, irrational and ideological approach. The group of Christian organisations, including CCME, highlighted its concerns in a critique paper of the recast submitted in February 2019. These comments formed the basis of engaging with the newly elected MEPs acting as rapporteurs for the European Parliament, which is co-legislator in the legislative process.

As with the UN Compact on Refugees, CCME engaged with the process towards a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Once again, coalition building on an EU level was coupled with contributing to UN related efforts through ACT Alliance.

Addressing the disturbing reality of trafficking, CCME continued its involvement in the TRACKS project, which focused on the needs of trafficked persons in the asylum procedure. The final project event in Brussels in January 2018 presented the concerns and best practice responses. Further EU funding was secured and CCME now contributes to the follow-up TRIPS project, which looks at

integration of beneficiaries of international protection who have been trafficked.

In recognition that migration has an important intercontinental component, CCME continued its networking work across the world. Relations with the All Africa Conference of Churches were strengthened. Meetings in Brussels, Lagos and Nairobi contributed to an exchange on migration within and between Europe and Africa and revealed common beliefs but also important differences in analysing migration. CCME continues to serve on the refugee and immigration programme advisory board of the USA's Church World Service. Partnership with both the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church is visible in mutual support.

Relations with the WCC remain important, as highlighted by General Secretary visits to the WCC over the years. The departure and vacancy of the responsible desk officer and CCME Executive Committee member in 2019 left a number of projects unfinished, but relations have been strongly reinvigorated with the arrival of her successor.

A number of events by member churches offering international perspectives on migration were supported by CCME, such as the Consultation on European Churches responding to migration organised by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate in Bucharest in May 2018 or the parameters of international work on migration hosted by Diakonie Germany in April 2018.

CCME was involved in both the preparatory process and actual CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad in May/June 2018. The assembly sub-theme of hospitality and the assembly day devoted to the issue were the basis for broad witness and reflection on issues round migration. CCME co-facilitated three different workshops: Refugee protection – a task of the churches;

Ecclesiology in times of migration; and Interreligious work in the face of migration in Europe. Assembly participants were also given a booklet produced by CCME about migration and asylum in Europe featuring good practices and policy recommendations aimed at Safe Passage for refugees and migrants.

Towards the end of 2018 CCME facilitated the drafting and signing of a 'Christmas Statement' by 30 church leaders from across Europe and different denominations. The statement, calling for respect and compassion for migrants and refugees, contained theological reflections on migration and displacement together with policy positions of European churches. It was presented to Mairead McGuinness MEP, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, and translated into almost 20 languages.

4) Upholding the Dignity of Persons, addressing discrimination:

Building on the refugeesreporting.eu project, CCME continued its work on portrayal of refugees and migrants in the media and increasingly got involved in activities against hate speech. CCME gave input at various gatherings addressing hate speech, such as the WCC-Vatican meeting on racism in Rome in September 2018 and the WSCF (World Student Christian Federation) Europe staff and officers meeting in Palermo in May 2018.

The CEC summer schools on human rights (2017 to 2020) and conference on populism (2019) were once again good fora for sharing CCME concerns in the thematic areas of freedom of religion and populism. The problems confronting both migrant Christians and non-Christian migrants in properly exercising their faith in Europe could be highlighted along with grave concern about populist forces confrontationally targeting migrants in their public campaigns. In 2020 the

impact of the Coronavirus lockdown on migrant communities was an issue.

CCME followed efforts on overcoming statelessness, but has not been able to significantly change the context in the most affected European countries

CCME continued its involvement with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), supporting ENAR efforts for broader coalition building in the area of anti-racism and its challenging of institutional racism in European institutions. A specific input was provided to the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) - ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) forum in 2018 addressing discrimination of persons of African descent.

Activities in addressing discrimination also included CCME involvement in the EU Roma inclusion platform. Over time it was agreed, however, that CCME would withdraw from the area of purely socio-diaconal work and related advocacy on Roma issues as this tended to be a duplication of the work of Eurodiaconia. Instead, the focus of CCME's work with Roma became the practice of the church, often involving exclusion, guilt and the need for reconciliation. This resulted in a conference 'Justice for Roma and Sinti – a challenge for churches' in Budapest in March 2020.

In cooperation with the Reformed Church in Hungary, CCME organised this event hosting Roma and Sinti from within churches and representatives from churches and faith based organisations engaged with Roma across Europe. It became clear that an already existing network of persons (many of them Roma/Sinti themselves) and churches (mainly from Central/South East Europe and an Evangelical/Pentecostal background) is a solid basis for future cooperation. CCME is, therefore, unlikely

to be the driving force behind exchange but rather could add a broader ecumenical dimension to existing networking and support efforts to make justice for Roma/Sinti within the church an issue going beyond charitable work.

5) Uniting in Diversity:

CCME and some members continued the collaboration with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), looking at connections of traditional and migrant and minority ethnic churches. CCME was reappointed to the CPCE group on 'migrant churches and church fellowship'.

Uniting in Diversity was highlighted at a meeting of ecumenical officers and secretaries for theology of CEC member churches at a CEC meeting in Finland in September 2019. CCME contributed to the discussion on migration as an ecclesiological opportunity in Europe.

In co-operation with CEC and member church representatives, CCME began preparations for a conference 'Uniting in Diversity – Migration changing churches in Europe'. Academics, traditional and migrant church leaders engaged in intercultural ministry are taking forward this work. The conference, due to take place in April 2020, has been rescheduled for October 2020 at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven. It will be preceded by an online event looking at the impact of COVID-19 on migrant churches.

Feeding into the conference will be the data of CCME's Mapping Migration study. Following research gathered from member churches, CCME will publish a third edition of 'Mapping Migration' reflecting how migration has changed the ecclesial landscape of Europe and churches' efforts on 'Being Church Together'.

Work on Uniting in Diversity has also grown to include aspects of inter-religious collaboration. The activities of Religions for Peace, the multi-state sponsored dialogue centre KAAICID as well as the activities of the Church of Sweden's project 'A World of Neighbours' were occasions for useful inter-faith networking.

CCME has once again been able to deliver important programmes, to network broadly and to advocate for and among churches in Europe in the period 2017-2020. As in previous terms, important aspects of work foreseen in the work programme were not or only partly implemented, as the available resources did not remotely correspond with the foreseen amount of work.

A reflection would seem useful to see, in the future, if a more realistic programme development, including priority setting and matching of work programme and resources, would better serve CCME, its members and the persons for and with whom CCME works.

Networking and partnerships:

Central to CCME's work is the networking and advice-sharing among churches' refugee support organisations and civil society groups across Europe. CCME cooperates with other NGOs in the European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM) and continues to be co-chair of the platform. Through the years CCME has contributed to the exchange of information and joint input on asylum and migration policies. CCME has also participated in briefings and lobbying of MEPs, and was proactive in encouraging MEPs to ask pertinent questions to the candidates for position during the European Commission hearings in 2019.

The Christian Group on Migration, comprising Caritas Europa, CCME, COMECE, Don Bosco International, EKD, Eurodiaconia, ICMC, Jesuit Refugee Service-Europe, St Egidio and the Quaker Council for European Affairs, continued to exchange regularly and cooperated on advocacy, so enhancing the impact of Christian witness.

CCME's cooperation with CEC was evident in many joint statements and contribution to activities. In the month prior to the European Parliament elections in May 2019, CCME and CEC highlighted the issues at stake through a multilingual pamphlet and YouTube videos under the title 'Europe: it's our Future'. CCME also gave input on migration issues to the joint submission of CEC and COMECE to each rotating EU Presidency.

A new CCME-CEC agreement of cooperation was signed in November 2017. In this context CCME participated in the meetings of the CEC Governing Board and CCME staff attended the CEC Collegium. CEC continues to appoint one member to the CCME Executive Committee (ExCom). CEC's Governing Board and CCME's ExCom met in November 2019 and planning is under way for partly joint General Assemblies of CEC and CCME in 2023. CEC makes a substantial financial contribution towards the work undertaken on its behalf and for its members by CCME.

CCME members exchanged information and, depending on focus area, developed strategies together on search and rescue, humanitarian corridors, relocation and/or trafficking. In November 2019 a number of CCME's membership met in Berlin to share their work, identify points of cooperation and reflect on CCME's role in influencing EU asylum and migration policies. This exchange was repeated, albeit in a shorter meeting online, during the pandemic lockdown.

An important part of CCME's work is to provide information on the European migration agenda and related issues to churches, church-related agencies and civil society groups. As a result, CCME has frequently been invited to present the work of churches in Europe on migration and asylum and has received many visits of groups and queries from researchers and journalists. CCME has also enabled links between CCME members and partners, encouraging visits of solidarity and fact-finding.

CCME internal:

2018 was a year of internal staff change for CCME. After 19 years of faithful service the General Secretary Ms Doris Peschke announced she would be leaving CCME. Her contribution to CCME and the ecumenical movement in Europe was celebrated at a reception in Brussels in June, at the CEC General Assembly in May and by CCME's ExCom at its meeting in September 2018.

The Secretariat consists of three permanent staff. Dr Torsten Moritz, formerly CCME Executive Secretary, was appointed as the new General Secretary from August 2018. The ExCom also appointed Ms Shari Brown as new Executive Secretary from October 2018. In 2019 Mr Emmanuel Kabalisa, Office Manager of CCME, took on the additional responsibility of Data Protection Manager for CCME and CEC. Jean Pierre Habimana served as a long term Global Mission Fellow until June 2019, while various interns supported CCME on a short term basis. Following the departure of a long-term part time accountant employed mainly by CEC, CCME sought to continue a joint accountancy arrangement with CEC. As CEC prioritised the need for financial management in the post and offered a higher salary, CCME has now

made arrangements with an external accounting firm.

The following people, representing CCME's membership, were elected at the 2017 General Assembly to serve on the ExCom: Mr Lemma Desta (Moderator), Apostle Adejare Oyewole (Treasurer), Ms Efthalia Pappa (Vice-Moderator), Ms Dora Kanizsai-Nagy (Vice-Moderator), Mr David Bradwell, Rev Sabine Dressler and Ms Dana Gavril. The substitutes were Ms Talvikki Ahonen and Fr Cristian Popescu. Ms Seforosa Carroll (formerly Revd Dr Katalina Tahaafe-Williams) is the WCC representative and Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani (formerly Mr Andreas Henriksen Aarflot) is the CEC representative.

They convened in 2017 following the General Assembly and then met twice yearly in 2018 and 2019. Meeting together in 2020 was disrupted by the pandemic lockdown but regular online meetings have taken place to ensure progress, especially in decision-making on the procedure of a General Assembly and Extraordinary General Assembly.

It was noted with regret that the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Slovak Republic in April 2020 informed that it had already in June 2017 decided to terminate its membership in CCME, as it no longer has migration-related programmes. Office and ExCom continue to explore options for a future membership in the Slovak Republic.

The financial situation has been almost balanced most years (see financial report). Funding and fundraising remain very challenging, however, as major parts of the income are related to project funding. CCME begins every year with the need for fundraising in the range of 100,000 EUR, around 30% of the total annual budget. This, on the one hand, leads to major uncertainties in planning CCME activities. On the other hand, a very substantial

amount of the work of the CCME Secretariat is devoted to assuring the financial viability of CCME – it is clear that the time spent on this cannot be used for networking, advocacy and other activities at the heart of CCME's mandate. At the time of writing this report, it is uncertain if any additional CCME event can take place in 2020 and if funds raised for these events can be used in any way by CCME in 2020.

Project implementation in 2019 was particularly difficult as CCME only received confirmation of funding pledges late in the year. While CCME went ahead with work on Safe Passage, the work on Roma/Sinti Justice and Uniting in Diversity was seriously delayed.

A ransom related cyber-attack together with a dysfunctional backup on the joint CCME/CEC server in May 2019 resulted in major data loss. This experience, however, motivated CCME and CEC to proactively address IT security as well as review contracts and cooperation with third parties, and formalise contractual arrangements to reduce the vulnerability of CCME as an organisation. Similar efforts have and are being made for the owners' association of the Ecumenical Centre, which CCME and CEC co-own.

CCME has also made efforts to revise its Articles of Association. The need for new articles had been further increased by the adoption of a new legal code covering associations like CCME under Belgian legislation. A task force established by the ExCom, including honorary legal advisers Mr Andreas Henriksen Aarflot and Mr Patrick Schnabel, worked on a draft text. The text takes up changes in Belgian law, but also seeks to address problematic aspects of the existing articles of association. It was reviewed by the ExCom and then sent to CCME members with the intention of adopting a final version of Articles of Association at the Extraordinary General Assembly.

ExCom and staff have collaboratively drafted CCME staff regulations and made substantial progress on this in recent months.

CCME is grateful to all its members who provide financial support and inspiration in their enactment of the welcoming of the stranger. In turn, CCME hopefully continues to be an instrument for European churches and agencies to network, express solidarity, and influence European policy for the good. The fellowship of members, partners, volunteers and staff expressed as “CCME family” is an indispensable resource. However, the organisation needs to become financially more viable and also clearer in prioritising work.

Let us together work and pray that we can strengthen our “commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level.”
