



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

ACTIVITY REPORT 2012

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 strangers, responding to the message of the Bible, which insists on the dignity of every human being. CCME aims at promoting an inclusive policy at European and national level for migrants, refugees and minority ethnic groups.

CCME is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches, Councils of Churches and diaconal agencies in presently 19 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, and in promoting integration and anti-discrimination. CCME is currently in the process of integration with the Conference of European Churches.

CCME OBJECTIVES

In particular, the objectives of CCME are:

- to monitor European and national migration, refugee and anti-discrimination 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.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

European asylum and migration policy

Since 1999, with the Amsterdam Treaty, the European Union has competence on a wide range of issues related to refugees' and migrants' concerns. The Council of Tampere in October 1999 determined an ambitious work programme of harmonisation in the area of asylum and migration: the first round of harmonisation in this area with directives and regulations had been decided by the end of 2005, and by the end of 2006 the adopted directives should have been transposed into national legislation by EU Member States.

As the guardian of EU treaties and EU legislation, the European Commission had, albeit with strong limitations, started a review of the transposition of EU asylum and migration law into national law in 2007-8.

In 2008/2009, the European Commission submitted proposals for a recast of the directives related to asylum (directives on qualification, reception conditions and asylum procedures) as well as the Dublin II and Eurodac regulation. These proposals, commonly referred to as the "asylum package", have been subject to controversial discussions between Member States and the European

Parliament since 2009. As a consequence, amended proposals so-called “recasts of the recasts” were published in summer 2011, while the goal (established by the “Stockholm Programme”) remained to have completed this second round of harmonisation by 2012.

In 2012, the newly-established European Asylum Support Office, EASO, made first thematic moves, both in practical work in assisting Member States, particularly Greece, and in processes, e.g. Country of Origin Information or the Common European Asylum Curriculum.

Context 2012:

Syrian refugee crisis, asylum applicants from Western Balkans and asylum systems in crisis in Europe

In the area of migration the year 2012 was strongly influenced by events on the doorsteps of Europe and their (perceived) impact on Europe.

The continuing civil strife in Syria has led to steadily increasing displacement, both in the immediate vicinity of Syria, but also towards EU member states. In this context CCME in a coalition with other civil society organisations has in November 2012 launched an appeal for a humanitarian response to the situation in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

In several countries, among them those with a very dynamic migrant labour market, employment has been coming under particular pressure. In almost all European countries austerity measures have been introduced, with Southern European countries being particularly hard-hit.

In addition, a significant number of citizens of western Balkan countries, many from minority ethnic background, were seeking asylum in EU Member States.

Both trends have led to an increase in asylum applications in most EU countries. In some countries this increase was accompanied by new debates on “bogus asylum seekers”.

Throughout the year, political debate and media attention focused on the crisis in the asylum system in Greece, and increasingly in other member states. In several EU member states, reception conditions and procedures were criticised as being massively deficient.

The most striking and shocking aspect of the situation in 2012 was again the continuing reality of hundreds of persons dying on their way to Europe. There were also more reports on would-be refugees being turned back at the EU external borders, thus not being able to reach the protection they would have deserved, and even allegations were made of border guards observing sinking of vessels carrying persons without acting.

....and continued impact of the economic crisis on migration

The year 2012 was still characterised by the consequences of the economic crisis.



Migrants and local population relying on church soup kitchen, Greece

On the one hand, the economic crisis in several countries massively influenced and destabilised financial markets, on the other it had impacts on the “real” economy with several countries remaining in recession. There are still

few reliable and sufficiently detailed studies on the impact of these developments on migration and migrants. However, it can be said that the general climate around migration has become even more hostile than before and that migratory movements to Europe, but also within Europe have decreased, in some cases coming to a complete halt. Among those still migrating, an increasing number is completely destitute.

ACTIVITIES 2012

1. Europe's role in refugee protection in the 21st century

The development of a truly Common European Asylum System and efforts to strengthen refugee resettlement to the EU remained the two areas of engagement for CCME. The ambitious goal to have completed the Common European Asylum System by 2012 was despite continuous efforts not achieved:

While agreement had been reached between Council and Parliament concerning the recast "qualification directive" (directive 2011/95/EU) already in 2011, discussions on other dossiers in the area of asylum remained highly controversial. The Commission's 2011 proposals recasting the asylum procedure and reception conditions directive were the subject of intense debate between the Council and European Parliament.

Proposals to amend the Dublin II regulation remained equally controversial. At the same time decisions of European and national courts as well as governmental position are still banning transfers of asylum seekers to Greece under this "Dublin" system, as there are clear signs that no adequate asylum system was in place in Greece. A number of additional countries came under closer scrutiny for the performance of their asylum systems.

In cooperation with its members and other European Christian organisations, CCME has constantly lobbied through contacts with both EP and member states. Central points of intervention were the concerns about the excessive provisions in the texts allowing for the detention of asylum seekers, the effective right to a fair procedure and an individual hearing. The rights of minors in the asylum procedure, particularly when unaccompanied, were also an issue of concern. CCME also voiced concerns about the impact of the Dublin system on asylum applicants, particularly on their chance of receiving a fair and timely hearing and assessment of their case.

An important new actor, the European Asylum Support Office EASO, gained prominence in 2012: EASO was not only supporting Greece in the build-up of its struggling asylum system, but also putting in place a series of important trainings and further developing the European Asylum Curriculum and coordinating exchange of Country of Origin Information. CCME participated in the second consultative forum of the European Asylum Support Office in December, at the resettlement expert group in October and gave informal input to EASO on several occasions.



Torsten Moritz (right) in discussion with MEP Tavares (left) and Director General Manservigi (DG HOME)

CCME contributed to the discussions on inner-EU solidarity for the reception of refugees and asylum-seekers, among

others at an event organised by MEPs on a possible “European distribution key” for asylum applicants. Due to the critical situation in Greece, also the option of relocation is further explored.



UNHCR resettlement working group meeting Melbourne

On initiative of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, CCME participated in a colloquy on the issue of religious converts in asylum procedures held at the beginning of 2012 in the Netherlands. Based on the recommendations at this colloquy, CCME continued discussion with interested MEPs and the European Asylum Support Office. As this is a concern in several member churches, CCME hopes that an exchange on this topic can be realised in 2013; plans for a conference had unfortunately to be postponed.

An area in which CCME was able to set part of the agenda was refugee resettlement. The dossier had received more attention in 2012, and still was equally controversial: plans for amending the European Refugee Fund so that it would offer extra financial incentives to new resettlement countries and to those resettling refugees from a number of common EU priority regions had to be agreed between the European Parliament and the EU Council.

Through contacts in the EP and Council CCME helped to unblock the stalemate,

which finally led to the adoption of a compromise. CCME together with many others welcomed this decision on the way towards a European Refugee Resettlement Programme. At the same time, CCME’s advocacy for more resettlement places in the EU continued.

The CCME ExCom adopted a position paper in March 2012 calling for better quality resettlement to the EU with higher quotas – aiming for 20.000 places annually shared by the EU member states by 2020. The paper under the heading “20.000 by 2020” received widespread attention. Other organisations joined the main demands of the position paper and the paper therefore became the heart of a “20.000 by 2020” campaign.



CCME gave expert advice at many events on asylum, among others, the 13th European asylum law conference in Warsaw in October and during the Global Week focusing on migration in November in Gothenburg, Sweden..

CCME continued to represent CEC in the European Council of Refugees and Exiles ECRE and participated in the annual general meeting as well as in the directors’ meetings. CCME continued to chair the ECRE core group on resettlement.

CCME gave input at the UNHCR working group on resettlement which was meeting in Melbourne in February and a specific internal planning meeting organised in Geneva in June. In addition the Annual Tripartite Consultations were used for further networking.

In the field of advocacy, the highly debated issue of family reunification of non EU nationals was high on the EU agenda. A number of decisions of European courts as well as reports on the implementation of the existing directive had already indicated in previous years the need for some consolidation of member states' practice. At the same time, several governments tried to gather support for more restrictive EU legislation.



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Dialogue on Faith and Protection, December 2012

Together with the World Council of Churches delegation, CCME took part in the UNHCR Dialogue on Faith and Protection in December 2012. The recognition of the role of faith in refugees' lives as well as the role of religious organisations in providing protection and assistance is an important building stone for improving the cooperation between various faith-based organisations, and with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

2. Human Dignity in the process of labour migration

Economic developments in 2012 signalled a major impact of the financial crisis on labour markets as well as labour migration and the rights of labour migrants. In this context CCME highlighted the unalienable human rights of any migrant, highlighting the needs of those in destitution.

In November 2011, the European Commission had launched a green paper consultation asking for proposals on its further actions, among them a possible renegotiation of the directive. CCME sought to promote family-friendly and human-rights driven practices in the debate, i.a. at the hearing combined with the Integration Forum of the Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission on family reunification in May 2012. Joint comments issued with other Christian organisations appeared in March 2012, a joint position paper with civil society organisations was launched in April, prior to the public hearing around the green paper.



Panel at European Integration Forum on the Right to Family Reunification, 31 May - 1 June 2012

CCME monitored debates on EU legislation concerning seasonal workers and intra-corporate transferees, albeit keeping a low profile in the debate.

Irregular migration

CCME continued to stress the more positive parts of the return directive and in this context attended several informal reunions, highlighting various aspects of the directive. In addition, CCME participated in the European workshop of the International Detention Coalition in



To remember those who died at the border, their relatives and supporters inaugurated this small fountain in the village of Provatonas in the Evros region, Greece, in August 2011

Athens, Greece, in November, which was an excellent occasion to look into alternatives to detention and promote the campaign to end children’s detention, a campaign CCME had signed on to earlier. The location also provided opportunities to meet Greek CCME members as well as authorities seeking to set up a reception and asylum system.

The meetings underlined that the system was still not functional, leaving large numbers of refugees on the streets of the Greek islands and cities.

The day of intercession and commemoration of persons who have lost their lives at the EU external borders was held for the third time across Europe in June 2012, a collection of material for worship had again been prepared by CCME and German partners. In 2012 this came against the background of rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against push-back operations, in particular in the Mediterranean, as well as increasing political discussions on who was responsible for the deaths in the Mediterranean.



Following the changes of the FRONTEX regulation and the obligation to set up a fundamental rights framework for FRONTEX, a consultative forum on fundamental rights was set up. CCME was selected as one of nine civil society organisations on the FRONTEX consultative forum on human rights, which was officially launched in October 2012. While the efforts by the FRONTEX Secretariat towards a fundamental rights approach are commendable, the lack of clarity of competences between FRONTEX and Member States border authorities may impede accountability of this agency, which is at the same time acquiring more competences. Also in 2012, several incidents raised concern about European border operations, particularly with regard to rescue at sea. The question of responsibility has been highlighted by an inquiry and subsequent report of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Committee in one case where authorities of several states and FRONTEX had knowledge

about a wrecked ship, but not one came to rescue.

3. Countering contemporary forms of slavery, in particular trafficking in human beings

The debates on the newly adopted EU directive against trafficking in human beings continued in 2012, in particular as the UN agencies had published a guide for national implementation of the directive.

Many of the points which CCME had put forward during negotiations had at least partly been included in the directive and were highlighted by the UN agencies. CCME therefore has argued for a good and complete transposition of the directive into national legislation.

In this spirit CCME commented on the EU anti-trafficking strategy together with other civil society groups. CCME held that a thoroughly implemented EU



directive would provide the best anti-trafficking strategy for the EU.

A hearing held by CCME in partnership with the COMP.ACT coalition in the European Parliament proved to be a good opportunity to connect policy and practice.

In other developments, CCME concluded its participation in the MIRROR project (coordinated by the Spanish NGO Accem) on civil society capacity in

identifying and combatting labour trafficking. The policy paper on identification and referral of persons trafficked for labour, which CCME drafted in the context of the MIRROR project received broad attention in policy debates. CCME also received very positive feedback on video clips on labour trafficking, which the MIRROR project had developed with the slogan "open your eyes" and which had been presented among others on YouTube in March.

A new project on labour trafficking, the FINE TUNE project started its work under the auspices of the International Trade Union Confederation with CCME as one of the lead partners.

CCME continued its involvement in the steering group of COATNET, a platform against trafficking, mainly with Roman Catholic organisations, as well as the COMP.ACT project on compensation of trafficked persons (see above).

The network of Christian organisations working on trafficking was maintained through advice or event participation, e.g. at the Romanian partners anti-trafficking day event in October.



OSCE anti-trafficking seminar Baku

CCME continued its advice for the network of partners in the CIS region, which had been established in 2007. The useful institutional contact with the

OSCE was further developed with CCME participating in the expert alliance of the OSCE special rapporteur against trafficking as well as giving evidence at a meeting of the OSCE mission in Baku.

4. Uniting in Diversity: Migration as an opportunity and a challenge for the unity of the church

The work of CCME in this area was still largely based on the results of the MIRACLE project. CCME attended several conferences and meetings and circulated the publications further. In Sweden, a training of “ambassadors” for the relations with migrants was developed for the parish level.

The discussion on the Christian unity dimension of migration was once again one of the focus areas of the World Council of Churches’ Global Ecumenical Network on Migration meeting in Manila in November 2012. The working group developing a Theological Statement on Migration for the World Council of Churches met again with the GEM and has continued its work on the statement: “Who is my neighbour?” CCME’s moderator participated in this work. Migrants’ rights, the contract worker system of the Philippines, and borders were themes of the Manila meeting.

CCME was involved in further shaping activities of the ACCEPT Pluralism project. The project looks into concepts of tolerance and acceptance in European societies, the public discourse around it and developed recommendations particularly for schools and policy makers. In 2012 CCME’s role was more advisory, but participated also in national dissemination events in Berlin/Germany, Amsterdam/the Netherlands, London/UK and Milano/Italy.



As the project is discussing tolerance and pluralism in Europe, CCME could enrich the debates by more practice-oriented insights as well as with cross-references on existing practitioners’ material/resources. The CCME ExCom met in Nicosia partly parallel to an ACCEPT project meeting and joined the project partners for a public conference. In autumn preparations for the final European conference were undertaken by CCME identifying issues of interest for the European level out of the wealth of the research in 15 countries.



ACCEPT Pluralism Project Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, September 2012

5. Churches as witness to inclusive communities in Europe

Work on anti-discrimination focussed on efforts to address the exclusion of Roma. A joint mapping of activities of churches for and with Roma was undertaken in

cooperation with Eurodiaconia and the compilation received great interest. A more systematic second edition was published towards the end of the year.

The CCME Roma news-list was maintained. Plans for visits of member churches have been followed up with some member churches. CCME participated in the meetings of the European Commission on following up to the national Roma integration strategies which had to be submitted by EU member states by the end of 2011.

While some progress in the areas of access to education, housing and health services may be registered, some programmes still remain in the declaratory phase. The notions of reconciliation and working against stereotypes of Roma in Europe will require more efforts.



Plans for a conference on Roma by the Hungarian Reformed Church had to be rescheduled. However, information exchanges have been maintained.

CCME had actively participated in the consultations on the new structure of the European Network against Racism (ENAR) which was adopted in June at the ENAR general assembly. The moderator represented CCME on this occasion. Following these decisions, the ExCom decided in September to (re-) apply for membership in the renewed ENAR.

Concerns about the rise of racism in Greece, particularly the increasingly wide support in the Greek society, but also the sometimes open cooperation with or tacit approval by the police in physical attacks on migrants have been a major issue of concern. CCME participated in meetings in Athens and Brussels to discuss this, and has brought this concern to the

attention of churches in Europe at various meetings across Europe. Exchange of information with the Church of Greece and the KSPM-Ecumenical Refugee Program has been intense throughout the second half of 2012 and continues with efforts to highlight the plight of migrants and refugees as well as the people in Greece, and find ways of showing meaningful solidarity.

6. Migration and development

CCME and Christian partner organisations have been actively involved in the discussions on migration and development. CCME's member Diakonisches Werk and the German Protestant development organisation Bread for the World had initiated a task force relating to questions of migration and development, in particular on circular migration. The task force concluded its paper on "Guidelines for labour migration and development" in spring 2012 and Bread for the World, Diakonie and CCME presented them in November to an interested public in Brussels. The guidelines were also distributed at the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Mauritius in November 2012.

Discussions on CCME's involvement in the Forum 2014 in Sweden and the UN High Level dialogue on Migration and Development in 2013 are on-going.

CCME participated also in a consultation organised by the World Council of Churches on Climate induced displacement in May in preparation of UN conferences in June. WCC brought together experts and organisations working in regions already heavily affected by climate change. Thus the issue has received wider attention. Responses by the international community however, are still far from providing solutions.

Monitoring transposition of EU law and jurisprudence

CCME has been monitoring and advising member churches in the process of transposition of EU legislation into national legislation, particularly in the area of a Common European Asylum System. Preparations for the evaluation of the return directive have also started in 2012 with first interviews. CCME continued to contribute to informal evaluations by the European Commission, but also NGO partners particularly on the effects of the so-called "Dublin" regulation, the transposition of the Asylum Procedures Directive as well as the "Qualification" directive determining the status and rights of refugees and persons otherwise in need of protection. The assessment of transposition on the ground, which some CCME members had undertaken, as well as experiences from the field were brought to the attention of the EU institutions and contributed to the work of other actors, e.g. UNHCR.



CCME joined informal efforts to motivate the EU institutions to hold respective EU member states accountable for the correct implementation of EU and

international refugee law – an area for which the European Commission has signalled increased interest for the time after the adoption of the Common European Asylum System.

An increasingly important part in the process of harmonising EU legislation in practice consists in the monitoring of the EU's Court of Justice jurisprudence in the area of asylum and migration. CCME benefits from the legal network inside ECRE which does a substantial part of this. Also UNHCR is following the jurisprudence in detail.

Networking: creating synergies, enabling mutual learning

CCME cooperates with other European NGOs in the European NGO platform on asylum and migration and continues to be co-chair of the platform. In 2012, members of the platform of NGOs continued to organise briefings for members of the European Parliament in view of their activities, e.g. on border control, asylum and resettlement issues, removals and detention conditions, but also migration questions in a broader perspective. The platform had intense sub-group meetings on asylum and migration, family reunification and on the future Asylum and Migration Fund 2014-2020 replacing the current funding instruments of the European Commission. Members also met with staff of the European Commission for background meetings and briefings e.g. on asylum and migration issues and particular country situations.

CCME maintains regular exchange and cooperation with the offices of the Church and Society Commission of CEC, Eurodiaconia, APRODEV and the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, as well as the various offices of national churches, which are represented in Brussels.

As mentioned above, the “Group of Christian organisations” in the asylum and migration field comprising Caritas Europa, CCME, COMECE, Eurodiaconia, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), the Jesuit Refugee Service-Europe and the Quaker Council for European Affairs continued to exchange regularly and cooperated, particularly with the joint comments to the consultation on family reunification.

As Eurodiaconia had expressed a wish to be more active in the area of migration, cooperation has been strengthened, with Eurodiaconia looking more at diaconal and social issues and CCME addressing a legal and policy framework. Cooperation was intensified in the area of Roma inclusion as well as intra-EU mobility.

CCME continued its contacts and cooperation with international organisations, first and foremost the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR – particularly in view of resettlement; but also with other international organisations with a migration-related mandate, such as the International Labour Organisation ILO and international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration IOM.

Council of Europe

Contacts with the Council of Europe Parliamentary Committee on Migration were maintained and information regularly shared. The reports have been very useful. On some occasions meetings with the Human Rights Commission of the Council of Europe led to fruitful exchange. CCME was present at one of the Committee meetings in 2012.

On request of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, CCME as partner of the Church and Society Commission of CEC participated in advice and preparations for a complaint under the Social Charter

of the Council of Europe for not providing shelter for rejected asylum applicants. The dossier will be handed over in 2013.

Visits

An important part of CCME’s work is to provide information services on the European migration agenda and related issues for Churches, church-related groups/agencies and civil society at large.

Often CCME is invited to present the work of Churches in Europe on migration and related questions, both in Brussels and through visiting churches across Europe. The meeting of the ExCom in October provided an excellent chance for outreach to CCME’s most recent member organisation, the Church of Cyprus, as well as giving input to the Cypriot EU Presidency.

In 2012, groups and representatives of Churches and civil society organisations from across Europe visited CCME. In addition, CCME contributed to several dozens of academic researches, and in addition to sharing its own information regularly briefed journalists.

CEC-CCME INTEGRATION

CCME continued to contribute to the debates on the restructuring of CEC through written communication and responses in the consultation process on the proposal of the Revision Working Group published early 2012. CCME has also continued to work like the other CEC Commissions by reporting to the Presidium and Central Committee. CCME has closely cooperated in preparing and presenting CEC work priorities and budget for 2012 and 2013 in the new format as well as clarifying the presentation for the financial report 2011. As the preparation for the CEC Assembly 2013 intensifies, reports had to be submitted already in 2012. In addition, of

course, questions on future scenarios for CEC and CCME were raised and discussed at various meetings throughout 2012 looking into diverse aspects of the possible future set-up.

The CCME General Secretary has cooperated in the Staff Management Team of CEC throughout the year.

Plans for a joint consultation with CEC Mission partners by the Commission Churches in Dialogue with CCME had unfortunately to be postponed, partially as the Director of this Commission unfortunately left CEC in August.

CCME internal

The ExCom of CCME met twice in 2012: in Hannover (DE) in March and in Nicosia (CY) in October.



CCME ExCom meeting with Cypriot Minister of Interior Eleni Mavrou, Nicosia

The meeting in Hannover was an excellent opportunity for meetings with representatives of the Protestant Church in Germany EKD, while the meeting in Cyprus allowed for contacts with the Church of Cyprus as well as the Cypriot government.

The **financial situation** for 2012 has been stable with regard to membership fees. However, as some members had to reduce their contribution substantially, the aim of increasing the income from membership could not be realised, although some members have indeed increased their contribution. The result of the year is a modest surplus of 2.217,71 EUR for the operations, however due to a loss of 6.146,60 EUR of the Ecumenical

Center the result of the year is slightly negative. (see Financial Report 2012 for details).

The **secretariat** is comprised of three permanent staff: General Secretary Doris Peschke, Executive Secretary Torsten Moritz and Office Manager Emmanuel Kabalisa. Emmanuel Kabalisa had reduced his working time in 2012, and CCME had granted additional time off for him to pursue further studies. During 2012, the team was temporarily strengthened by Jonathan Wiksten from Sweden and Jill Kirwan from Ireland, who undertook an internship in spring and autumn 2012 respectively. The team is once per week assisted by an accountant Charlotte Vander Borght.

As renovations of the Ecumenical Center could finally start in March 2012, all staff had to move their offices twice in the course of the year, and to endure noise and dust of the works. While this has certainly been a challenging time, progress could be seen month by month, and everyone looks forward to the completion in summer 2013.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

2012 has provided huge challenges for Europe and more particularly, the countries most hit by the financial and economic crisis in the South and East of the continent. Unemployment and fear of the future, unfortunately, are not conducive to creating welcoming societies for new-comers. Thus, the crisis is a challenge to governments, but even more for the people who have to make their living, and to those, who are afraid they might also be affected. More than ever it becomes clear that migrants, at the moment the majority of intra-EU migrants, contribute qualifications and skills to host societies, while at the same time they are supporting their families in their home countries. We can see how migration is, indeed, constantly

changing: the patterns and routes are changing, societies are changing, and new challenges are arising.

In this complex and challenging time, churches and church-related agencies play a key-role in welcoming migrants and speak out against blaming migrants for flaws in societies. Notions and concepts of solidarity, in Christian terminology caring for the ones in need,

for the neighbour, are put in practice by so many persons, and yet, these good examples find it hard to reach the policy level. As difficult as it may currently be, it would be even more necessary and timely if **together we could strengthen our witness and commitment to strangers, responding to the message of the Bible, which insists on the dignity of every human being.**

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,
but citizens with the saints and also
members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19)

