



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

ACTIVITY REPORT 2015

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, and in promoting integration and anti-discrimination.

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.



Support for refugees in Hungary, photo: Paul Jeffrey

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 concluded 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.

In 2013, the second phase of harmonisation in the area of asylum had been completed with the adoption of a new Dublin regulation and the directives on asylum procedures and reception conditions, in addition to the amended qualification directive.

The European Asylum Support Office, EASO, continued to make further thematic moves in 2015, both in practical work in assisting Member States, particularly Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria, and in processes, e.g. Country of Origin Information or the Common European Asylum Curriculum.

Context 2015: The European "refugee crisis"

The year 2015 was in many ways characterized by the most remarkable migratory movements in Europe for decades. The first half of the year saw a significant number of boat arrivals in the South of Italy, mainly arriving from Libya where the civil war had practically dissolved border control. The arrival of many boats was accompanied by the tragic loss of thousands of lives due to a high number of capsizing boats. The reception system in Italy was put under considerable strain. Throughout the year some 153.000 persons arrived in Italy by boat.

As of spring 2015, the main focus shifted from Italy to Southeast Europe. An increasing number of persons was entering Greece from Turkey, in majority via the Greek islands close to Turkey. From Greece the majority went on to cross different states in South East Europe to make it to other destinations, particularly in Germany or Scandinavia. The relatively high number of new

arrivals motivated several governments to close their borders at certain times – usually to the protest of neighbouring countries. The migrants, in their vast majority refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, became thus even more vulnerable than they had been before. All in all around a million persons are estimated to have arrived through Greece.



Campaigning against death at sea

The agenda of the European Union was due to this migratory movement largely determined by discussions how to deal with the relatively high number of arrivals, bringing forward decisions on the "EU Migration Agenda". A number of short-term and long term measures were agreed, among them for the first time a mechanism for EU-wide relocation of asylum applicants and a proposed quota for resettlement. In majority the measures were however oriented towards curbing migration. Many of the policy measures were only half-heartedly or not at all implemented.

The movement of bigger groups of migrants throughout the EU encouraged several countries to close their borders for the usual border-free travel as foreseen under Schengen rules. It is currently uncertain if this situation will continue beyond 2015.

The importance of the refugee movements in 2015 influenced CCME's work substantially, beyond plans foreseen in the work programme.

ACTIVITIES 2015

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

The activities in this area were to a large degree influenced by the arrival of many persons in need of international protection in Europe. In a number of public statements CCME underlined the set of rights which refugees have, and the need to respect minimum standards for their reception. CCME published a number of appeals on the refugee situation together with other actors such as the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance EU and Eurodiaconia, and in addition gave input to statements of other actors such as ACT Europe, the Lutheran World Federation or the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. Thanks to these activities, positions of ecumenical actors had a similar tone and content, thus assuring the coherence of ecumenical positioning.

CCME together with CEC for the sixth year in a row prepared material and called for a day of intercession and commemoration for persons who have lost their lives on the way to Europe. The call has been taken up by many churches at different times



President of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Bishop Angaelos, visiting Idomeni/Greece leading delegation from UK churches

appropriate to their traditions.

CCME participated in an ecumenical solidarity visit to Hungary at the end of September and contributed to the WCC/EKD sponsored church summit on the refugee crisis in Munich in October. The issue of refugee protection was also high on the agenda of the German Kirchentag – CCME had been instrumental in preparing a series of panel debates and events for this meeting of laity in June 2015 in Stuttgart.

CCME continued its safe passage project. A major conference was held in February 2015, partly in the Italian senate, with the theme "Death at sea – there are alternatives". The project considerably influenced discussions on humanitarian visas – particularly in the context of the new Schengen visa code. Various information events were organised which raised the public awareness about the situation at the Southern external borders of the EU. The issue of solidarity with the Mediterranean EU member states was highlighted in this context.

Several solidarity visits of churches to Italy, Greece, and Hungary were facilitated by CCME. This way the churches in these countries could be supported in their difficult task and solidarity was expressed towards refugees in these countries.

CCME continued to inform and advise members about the European asylum legislation and its

impact on national legislation. A particular area of interest was the so-called "Dublin III" regulation, which determines which member state is responsible for dealing with an asylum request and which came under renewed criticism in 2015. CCME participated and gave input in various events on "alternatives to Dublin". Together with the other members of the group of Christian organisations, CCME commented on the proposed amendment concerning unaccompanied children, highlighting the protection needs of children.

The issue of safe and legal pathways into Europe was addressed also in a broader advocacy context. The question of resettlement played a particularly prominent role in this. CCME co-hosted, together with EKD and Diakonie Germany a discussion on this topic with the Director General of the European Commission's DG HOME in November, bringing good experience from Germany and Hungary into the debate. CCME also contributed to an exchange on integration questions related to resettlement organised by ECRE and ICMC.

CCME continued to represent CEC in the activities of ECRE, among them the study process on a new vision for protection in Europe.

In 2015, CCME participated in an expert meeting of the European Asylum Support Office EASO on an updated Afghanistan country of origin report and in the annual consultative forum. On these occasions CCME was represented by members from the Netherlands and Switzerland respectively.

WCC Communication helped to produce videos for CCME comments on the refugee situation in Europe in September 2015, which was very helpful. The videos were used at various events across Europe.

2. Human dignity in the process of labour migration

CCME continued to follow the intensive debate on freedom of movement and associated rights of EU nationals. A training was jointly organised with Eurodiaconia in January, which provided for a good opportunity to influence European Commission officials.

A meeting of the CALL network – Church Action on Labour and Life – offered an opportunity to CCME to further continue this debate.

Irregular migration

CCME observed the evaluation of the return directive and infringement procedures by the European Commission. An important aspect remains the mandatory monitoring of forced removals, according to the Frontex code of conduct for joint return operations a condition also for Frontex coordinated return flights. Another aspect of advocacy on irregular migration was the promotion of alternatives to migrants' detention. CCME gave input on a study process analysing the exception for humanitarian grounds in the EU's directive on facilitation of illegal entry and residence.

CCME continued its involvement in the consultative forum on fundamental rights to the EU border agency FRONTEX. At the beginning of the year, a focus group meeting was held between consultative forum members who had participated in visits to Frontex operations in Greece and Bulgaria in 2013 and to Italy and Bulgaria in 2014, with members of the national authorities present in the Management Board and the Frontex staff. As a result, some of the training modules were adjusted and fundamental rights issues more systematically included in deployment briefings of the agency. The Annual Report of the Consultative Forum can be found: <http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Partners/>

[Consultative Forum files/Frontex Consultative Forum annual report 2015.pdf](#).

Regular contacts were kept with the European Parliament's LIBE secretariat in view of the EP's own initiative report on the "Situation in the Mediterranean and the Need for a Holistic Approach to Migration".

CCME participated in a meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of migrants, François Crepeau in preparation of his report on the situation in Europe to be presented in June. CCME participated in a 2-day consultation on migrants' rights organised by the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Brussels.

A joint call with CEC and WCC for the ratification of the UN convention on the rights of all migrants and their family members was published on December 18 on the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the convention.

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

CCME continued its partnership with ITUC in the project FINE TUNE, which looked at various aspects of labour trafficking. In 2015, the project in particular addressed the issue of gender and labour trafficking. Three sets of Question & Answer sheets on labour trafficking were published. CCME was responsible for hosting the 2nd EU Forum on labour trafficking in Brussels in May, which brought together actors from all EU institutions and civil society.

CCME was also able to contribute to popularising and discussing the study on extreme labour exploitation presented by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), in particular by hosting a side event to the official presentation of the study.

CCME continued its lobbying with member states for the correct

transposition of the EU anti trafficking directive. Thanks to a pro bono work agreement with the law firm Dechert CCME could examine in detail the transposition of the directive.

Intense contacts were held with the World Community of Reformed Churches in view of its European anti trafficking consultation in October. The meeting underlined the need for good cooperation of all church actors in the fight against trafficking.

Various meetings were held with churches from across Europe to advise them on possible anti-trafficking activities.

CCME was re-elected onto the steering group of the COATNET, an anti-trafficking platform mainly of Roman Catholic organisations.

Contacts were maintained with the OSCE Special rapporteur on trafficking.

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

CCME continued its cooperation with the Community of Protestant Churches to work on migrant churches. CCME represented the expert group which submitted a proposal to the CPCE Council in October 2015 to start an explorative dialogue with various migrant churches. This proposal was accepted.

The process to finalise the publication of the new study on "mapping migration" took more time than expected. In this study CCME publishes information on migration in the different countries in Europe, but also collected and collated information on churches addressing migration in their own work. It is hoped that the study will become a reference for churches when working on migration.

The project DIMECCE (Defining and Identifying Middle Eastern Christians Communities in Europe) came to an end

in 2015. CCME participated in the project conference in St. Andrews University, and hosted a presentation of the project results for an audience of EU institutions in July 2015. The nuanced approach and presentation of results were widely appreciated. The booklet with results of the study received great attention and support from the CCME membership.



GETI 2017 – the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute will be held for Europe parallel to the next Kirchentag in Berlin 2017. CCME participated in some of the preparatory groups and work.



Berlin, May 19 – June 1, 2017

CCME participated in the preparatory group for the German Mission Yearbook with the theme “Zuflucht Europa – Refuge Europe” published early 2016, to which many persons from the CCME network contributed articles.

5. Churches as witness to inclusive communities in Europe

CCME participated in efforts lead by the European Network against Racism ENAR to address anti-migrant propaganda. The CCME Roma news-list continued to be a tool of sharing information. Cooperation was maintained with the European Roma Information Office ERIO and the group of civil society organisations engaged with the EU Roma Inclusion Platform. At the 2015 Platform meeting, anti-gypsyism was highlighted as a major obstacle to Roma inclusion in European societies.

Together with CEC, CCME issued a statement “Remembering the Roma

genocide of World War II, Porajmos on 2 August 2015, dedicated by the European Parliament as Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

CCME was partner of the European Commission, CEC and COMECE in organising the dialogue meeting on migrant integration in November. The notion of integration as a two-way process was underlined.

CCME was part of the discussion for a new format of the European Migration Forum, previously European Integration Forum, and participated in the forum in January 2015.

6. Migration and development

CCME published an updated version of the factsheets on the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). These were shared with ecumenical partners at the meeting “Churches Witnessing With Migrants” prior to the 2015 GFMD in Istanbul in October. They received good feedback from church actors, which often found the GFMD process fairly intransparent. CCME actively gave input to the GFMD itself.

CCME also participated in the pre-meetings to the EU-Africa summit in Valetta, coordinating with the All Africa Conference of Churches representation to the African Union.

Active participation was maintained in the ACT Alliance (Action of churches Together) Community of Practice on Migration and Development.

7. Monitoring transposition of EU law and jurisprudence

With a new Commission being in place at the end of 2014, CCME joined and organised meetings with the cabinet of the Commissioner on Migration and Home Affairs as of January 2015. The year 2015 demonstrated that transposition of EU asylum legislation had been insufficient in many member states. The European Commission underlined that it wanted to put greater emphasis on the monitoring and enforcement of the existing legislation, and to develop a proposal for an EU Migration Agenda by July 2015. Due to the perceived and real pressures visible by March, the Commission decided to speed up the process and tabled proposals as of May. Due to the time pressures, unfortunately consultations with civil society suffered.

CCME supported this monitoring by sharing observations about transposition on a regular basis with European Commission officials, both in the thematic teams of the Commission and in the cabinet of the Migration and Home Affairs Commissioner. Information from civil society remains important for the European Commission to independently assess the situation in member states.

At the same time, jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice influences the interpretation of EU law. CCME shared relevant judgements with its membership.

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. The platform had intense sub-group meetings on asylum and migration, Members prepared joint input into the consultation on future asylum and migration policies. They also met with staff of the European

Commission for background meetings and briefings e.g. on asylum and migration issues, reform of the Dublin system and refugee resettlement. Together with the Social Platform and the Human Rights organisations network, the platform participated in regular debriefings of the embassies holding the EU Presidency after Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings, in 2015 with the Latvian and Luxembourg Permanent Representations.

CCME maintains regular exchange and cooperation with the offices of the CEC, Eurodiaconia, ACT Alliance EU 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 on advocacy. While this cooperation sometimes costs considerable energy and time, it enhances the impact of the joint Christian witness and advocacy on migration in Europe.

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. CCME participated in the first Eurodiaconia migration network meeting.

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 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. Meetings with the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe led to fruitful exchange, and he participated in a panel on "The rights to leave a country" at the Kirchentag in Stuttgart.

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.

In 2015, groups and representatives of Churches and civil society organisations from across Europe visited CCME. In addition to sharing its own information, CCME contributed to several dozen academic researches, and regularly briefed journalists. In view of the high media interest in 2015, interviews and requests for articles or background information increased a lot.

CEC-CCME Cooperation

Following the decisions of the CEC governing board and CCME Executive Committee for a new agreement of cooperation, this cooperation was practiced throughout 2015. Information was shared between the two organisations regularly. CCME took part in the meeting organised by CEC and COMECE with the Luxembourg

Presidency, advised on public statements of the governing board, and joint letters, also with WCC, were sent to member



churches and organisations of both organisations. Joint letters to heads of government addressing the refugee situation in Europe ahead of meetings of the European Council were written together with other ecumenical organisations in Brussels. CCME participated in the meetings of the governing board in June and November.

CCME internal

The ExCom of CCME met twice in 2015: in April 2015 in Madrid/Spain and in October 2015 in Timisoara/Romania, combined with a conference jointly organised by AIDROM in partnership with the Orthodox Metropoly of Banat under the theme "European Christian Churches responding to the migration phenomenon".

The **financial situation** has improved due to generous support from member churches which has allowed CCME to follow the many tasks. The year was closed with a positive result of 8.925,70 EUR. The programme activities of CCME closed with a positive result of 16.716,85 EUR, and the share in the owners' association contributed a loss of 7.791,15 EUR. The result is used to decrease the deficit accumulated in the past two years.

In addition to the financial contributions, member and other churches have

organised so many events in which CCME could contribute which are not expressed in the financial report. CCME is indeed grateful for the support and engagement of churches all over Europe.

The **secretariat** is comprised of three permanent staff: General Secretary Doris Peschke, Executive Secretary Torsten Moritz and Office Manager Emmanuel Kabalisa. The accountant of CEC Charlotte Vanderborcht works for CCME 5 hours per week. They were supported by the interns Carla Philips and Nils Baudisch, who contributed in manifold ways to the work of CCME.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Cooperation and support from CCME members has been outstanding in 2015! Despite the many challenges, churches have responded in a remarkable and common way to support each other, meet each other and seek to understand each other.

The world is facing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, as the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres has underlined. "Of course, this has an impact on Europe, yet the real challenges are still to come", we wrote in last year's report. Indeed, in 2015, many people and churches across Europe were touched by this new and challenging situation. Yet, we still need to build the bridges, provide safe passage in order to avoid that so many people lose their lives.

Welcoming refugees and migrants, meeting the other, making space for the other, sharing, this is done by many churches at various levels. Sharing these experiences, giving signs of hope, still has to become the starting point for a different political approach to responding to refugees and migrants arriving in Europe.

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."**



Photo: Paul Jeffrey, 2015