



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

ACTIVITY REPORT 2016

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 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 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.

CONTEXT

2016: the year after the refugee "crisis"

The year 2016 was a year of changes in European refugee and migration policy. 2015 had been determined by the high numbers of refugees and migrants arriving, in particular at the Southern shores of the EU. It had also brought to light the massive divergence of opinion and lack of agreement between EU member states on migration and refugee policy.

While the political divisions maintained throughout the year, the number of arrivals into Europe sharply dropped.

EU Turkey deal

In March 2016 the European Union member states and Turkey agreed on a deal under which asylum applicants arriving in the EU from Turkey could be sent back in exchange for the resettlement of refugees already present in Turkey. The so-called "one in, one out" deal would be one element, borders

would also be more strongly patrolled by Turkey. As a result the number of arrivals from Turkey dropped sharply. While arrivals via North Africa rose again, the total number of arrivals in the EU remained significantly lower than in 2015.

Change in decision making



EU Commission
Vice-President Frans Timmermans

The EU-Turkey deal signalled a general shift in the inter- and intra-institutional arrangements in the EU. The arrangement was largely driven and finally agreed upon by the EU member states with Turkey and did not involve the European Parliament and only on the fringes the European Commission. Inside the European Commission, the participation of Vice President Timmermans and External Affairs Representative Mogherini at events concerning migration signalled a shift of responsibility according to some observers away from the Commissioner for and Directorate General for Migration and Home affairs.

Externalisation

While the EU-Turkey deal was unique in its impact, a general tendency could be observed to externalise responsibility. The implementation of the Valetta action plan and the emergency trust fund for Africa (both agreed at the Valetta EU summit with African states in December 2015) aimed at making African states responsible for stopping migratory movements from Africa. The Valetta action plan, aiming at the whole of Africa, is complemented by several regional cooperation mechanisms with the EU such as the Rabat process or the Khartoum process.

The European Commission's Communication of June 2016 on a new Partnership Framework with third countries underlined the tendency to widen the externalisation of EU asylum and migration policy into a general trend.



Valetta summit "family photo"

Breach of EU law by Member States

Throughout 2016 many EU member states regularly did not meet their obligations under the asylum acquis and the Council decisions for relocation and resettlement, complemented by an unwillingness or inability of the European Commission to hold them to account. Most striking cases included completely inadequate reception

conditions in many member states but also mere access to an asylum procedure. This lack of implementation also extended to fairly recent decisions such as the decision of the emergency relocation of 160.000 refugees taken in September 2015 – by the end of 2016 only a few thousand persons had been relocated.

New round of legislation on asylum

In the second quarter of 2016, the European Commission proposed a revision of the legislation for the common European asylum system including the Dublin regulation - allegedly as a response to the refugee arrivals in 2015. Rather than looking at mistakes made in implementing the existing legislation, which had only been agreed by 2012-2013, the tendency of the proposals was a general curbing down on refugees' rights and a logic of trying to exclude them from asylum procedures by way of so-called admissibility checks.

Although the European Commission had requested the EU institutions to speedily agree, by the end of 2016 only the revised mandate for the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex was adopted, which had been proposed earlier.

Increased fragility of the EU

Disagreement became more and more a reality in the EU in 2016 – not only in the area of migration. The so-called Brexit vote in June 2016 was interpreted by a considerable number of politicians and media as showing the dissatisfaction with the EU. This was enhanced by the election successes of populist right wing parties in other EU member states, among them founding states of the EU.

Fragility and fear

Many of the populist campaigns in Europe were built around a widely perceived fear. This fear was in particular nurtured by terrorist attacks such as in Paris in November 2015 or Brussels in March 2016 as well as other incidents elsewhere. While refugees were only marginally involved in these acts, these criminal acts contributed to an atmosphere of distrust towards newly arrived. Fear of others, other cultures, religion, but also fear of change, more or less rational, has increasingly determined policy decisions.

CCME ACTIVITIES in 2016

I. Safe Passage

A major focus of CCME's work in 2016 was related to the "Safe Passage" project. The project combines monitoring of the situation at the external EU borders with advocacy for safe and regular pathways to and through Europe. While monitoring was undertaken by partners in Spain, Italy and Greece, the advocacy was mainly undertaken on an EU level. Support was received from churches throughout Europe.



The aim: SAFE PASSAGE across Europe's border

Dublin regulation

CCME started its annual activities on advocacy early in the year with the first seminar on a reform of the Dublin regulation in February. The seminar proved to set an important tone for the subsequent lobbying by civil society organisations on the European Commission's proposal a few months later. In particular, it enabled a very close cooperation with the European Parliament's rapporteur on the dossier, who specifically met with Christian organisations to discuss the dossier on several occasions.

Resettlement

An equally proactive approach was taken in various meetings with European Commission officials on the proposal for a resettlement framework, tabled by the Commission in summer. Also on this dossier CCME engaged in intensive contacts with the respective EP rapporteur. A joint NGO statement on the EU framework was released in November at a hearing of the European Parliament.

The proposals of the European Commission for an EU resettlement framework gave reasons for concern as they seemed to link resettlement from third countries to migration dissuasion efforts in these countries. CCME therefore in coalition with others highlighted the importance of resettlement as a protection tool.

CCME gave input at the global hearing on private sponsorship for resettlement, hosted by UNHCR and the Canadian government in Ottawa in December.



The European Parliament : ally in the struggle for SAFE PASSAGE

The advocacy for more resettlement led to some more EU member states engaging with resettlement. In a letter of March 2016 CCME in cooperation with CEC and WCC encouraged members to advocate for more resettlement – particularly in view of the “pledging conference” for Syria.

Humanitarian visa

The discussions on the Schengen Visa Code presented a good opportunity to argue for the widening of possibilities to introduce humanitarian visa. CCME, in cooperation with other Christian organisations, advocated intensely for an inclusion of humanitarian visa in the visa code. CCME had a series of meetings with the EP's rapporteur and shadow-rapporteurs on the issue. The LIBE Committee of the EP voted in favour of introducing European Humanitarian Visas into the Visa code in March. As there is strong resistance from several member states to introduce such a visa, the dossier is currently stuck. CCME has worked with a number of its members to break the resistance with advocacy on national level.

Several court decisions in Belgium ruled in favour of humanitarian visa to be issued

to Syrian refugees, which were then referred to the European Court of Justice.

Countering externalisation

The general tendency to externalise responsibility for refugee protection to countries outside the EU could be noticed both in the proposals for the revision of the Common European Asylum System as well as in contacts with third countries, particularly the Turkey statement of the European Council in March 2016 and the Afghanistan Way Forward Statement of October 2016. CCME continued to argue for a strong role of European countries and against externalisation. The good cooperation with development organisations such as Action of Churches Together (ACT) Europe was very valuable in this area.

Have no fear

The issue of fear was taken up in a joint event with the Conference of European Churches, the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in June. Conference participants analysed the sources of fear from refugees and migrants, reported about the strategic use of fear by the political right, and examined ways of addressing fear. The theme has and will continue to guide reflections of CCME.



"Have no fear" event

The issue was also addressed in the joint "dialogue meeting" of CCME; CEC and COMECE with the theme "Migration: Mapping and addressing fear", hosted by the European Commission in October.

Partnership consultations and visits

An increasingly important part of the work in 2016 was facilitating or contributing to consultations of members and partners as many of them were reviewing their work or building up partnerships. Several exchange and fact finding visits between churches in North/West Europe and those in Central and Southern Europe were organised or initiated by CCME. It was encouraging to see how members/partners expressed the importance of CCME for their work and their networking. Visits have become a central part of expressing solidarity between churches and with refugees, particularly to those refugee ministries under strain.



CCME ExCom Solidarity visit to Church of Greece

2. Refugee Protection

In the area of refugee protection, CCME and the Christian group were busy influencing the proposed overhaul of the Common European Asylum System. The group published comments on the asylum proposals of the European Commission as well as the proposal for a new Dublin regulation. Activities were mainly focussed on winning the European Parliament's support, as member states and European Commission were following the idea to "make the EU less attractive" – thus blatantly ignoring the reasons why people are leaving their home countries/regions.

Dublin and hotspots

CCME had set the tone of civil society responses to the Dublin proposals by organising an event on Dublin in February 2016. The event also addressed the reality of the dysfunctional hotspots, demanding more swift treatment of cases. A joint Christian group comment on Dublin came out in autumn 2016, arguing for a preference based matching system as guiding principle for determining the member state responsible for treating an asylum application.

Slovak presidency meetings

CCME regularly met with the Slovak EU Presidency, particularly trying to soften the approach of Slovakia and allies to refugee relocation. CCME also encouraged a bridge-building function of Slovakia in this question and addressed questions on the negotiation of the "asylum package".

Refugee protection issues featured prominently in the meeting of CEC and the Catholic Bishops Conferences' COMECE with the Slovakian EU Presidency.

EASO consultations

CCME contributed to various consultations and thematic workshops of the European Asylum Support Office. The issue of conversions in the asylum procedure was highlighted.

ECRE vision group

CCME gave consistent input to the working group of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) on visions of the future European Asylum System, highlighting the issue of safe and legal access to asylum.



Remembering those who died on the way to Europe

3. Labour Migration

Legal pathways for labour migration

CCME in the context of the work on safe passage pleaded also for a realistic approach to legal migration into Europe. This approach would recognise the need for labour migration into jobs of different levels of qualification. It would also guarantee decent standards for labour migrants, irrespective of their qualification levels.

CCME and global partners in this spirit contributed to the deliberations of the UN High Level summit on the large movements of refugees and migrants, especially joining ranks with Church World Service in a preparatory event in New York and meetings in Washington. A joint statement with ecumenical partners was published under the headline "...And No One Shall Make Them Afraid" (Micah 4:4): UN High Level Summit Must Deliver on Protection and Rights of the Uprooted". These inputs among others contributed to the idea of developing a UN Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration.

Undocumented migration and borders

CCME continued its active involvement in the FRONTEX consultative forum on fundamental rights. Making human rights a reality for all FRONTEX operations remains a challenge.

The day to remember those who died on the way to Europe was commemorated across Europe, making use of the CCME resource material.

4. Anti-Trafficking in Human Beings

CCME advocated for upholding the differentiation between smuggling and trafficking for example at the Dutch Presidency conference on smuggling in January 2016.

CCME collected members' ideas and on this basis provided input to the new EU anti trafficking strategy through a position paper. The strategy in the opinion of CEC/CCME member should best be centred around the full and correct implementation of the anti-trafficking directive – reality shows that implementation in member states still is incomplete.

CCME continued its work on the steering committee of the Ecumenical COATNET network, which serves as an exchange platform for Christian anti trafficking initiatives. Furthermore, CCME facilitated many operational contacts between organisations working against trafficking in European churches.



TRACKS
IDENTIFICATION OF
TRAFFICKED ASYLUM SEEKERS'
SPECIAL NEEDS

CCME participated in the EU wide TRACKS project which looks at ways to improve the protection of trafficked persons who find themselves in the

asylum procedures, including Dublin procedures.

5. Uniting in Diversity

The major event in the area of Uniting in diversity was the consultation “Being Church in Europe Today: Migration and Ecclesiology”, a cooperation event with CEC and the Danish Lutheran church. It brought together 30 participants from a diversity of church backgrounds in December. Together they addressed pressing challenges including how the gospel is read and understood in increasingly multicultural contexts, how Christianity relates to other faith communities, and how migration impacts the understanding of ministry, membership, and sacrament.



Being Church together:
Waldensian church Palermo

CCME continued to contribute to the work of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) working group on migrant churches.

6. Churches as witness to Inclusive Communities

As mentioned above, CCME provide a platform of exchange between churches on the increasing xenophobic incidents and strategies against them. CCME presented at the launch of a report on racism in the context of migration, commissioned by the European Network Against Racism

In June 2016 CCME joined the Alliance against Antigypsyism, a coalition of organisations that promote equality of rights for Roma, and to better counter antigypsyism which is a major obstacle to Roma inclusion. The Alliance counts more seventy members from across Europe and its reference paper was launched on 5th July 2016 to stir the debate about the nature and implications of antigypsyism.

CCME partnered with CEC in carrying out the conference “Religious Minorities as Part of Culturally Diverse Societies” in Zagreb in October.

7. Migration and development

CCME provided input to the High level summit on migration, drawing on the experiences of its work with development actors in Europe.

In addition, CCME was involved in the steering group of the event Churches Witnessing with Migrants which took place prior to the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Dhaka/Bangladesh.

A further ongoing forum for discussing the issue of migration and development was the Community of Practice of Action of Churches Together (ACT). CCME facilitated the incorporation of ACT’s EU

office into the work of the Christian group on asylum and migration issues thus strengthening joint advocacy actions. CCME also participated in the meetings of the ACT Alliance EU and the ACT Alliance Europe Forum in Belgrade.

CCME continued to be the liaison and coordination organisation among church actors active in the field of asylum and migration in Europe, coordinating the public messaging of global and regional actors from different denominational families on current asylum and migration questions.

The regular visit to members and input to visiting delegations was a substantial part of CCME's work in 2016.

CCME internal

The CCME ExCom met twice in 2016 – in Brussels and in Athens/Greece. The secretariat consists of three permanent staff: Ms Doris Peschke, General Secretary; Dr Torsten Moritz, Executive Secretary and Mr Emmanuel Kabalisa, Office Manager. Valuable support was received by the Global Mission Fellow, Nicodemus Tigbe Doe, sent by the Global Board of Ministries of the United Methodist Church, and intern Martin Lichte. Both contributed immensely to the work of CCME.

Cooperation with the secretariat of CEC flourished as a number of cooperation events in 2016 show. Collegial exchange is regular and CCME attends the meeting of the CEC collegium. CCME contributed with pleasure to the installation service of

the new CEC General Secretary. The CEC Governing Board in June 2016 adopted a public issues statement "A Europe that protects and welcomes".

The financial situation has improved in 2016. The year was closed with a positive result of 28,453.70 EUR.

The programme activities of CCME closed with a positive balance of 40,600.67 EUR, and the share in the owners' association of the Ecumenical Center contributed a loss of 12,146.97 EUR.

However, funding and fundraising remain challenging, as more than half of the income is related to project funding.

Human resources still remain stretched and additional staff would help to correspond to the growing challenges.

Concluding remarks

The year 2016 has signalled the growing challenges in upholding refugees' and migrants' rights in the European policy debate. At the same time, the continued commitment of churches in Europe to these rights and the dignity of refugees and migrants was more visible than ever.

CCME will continue to be an instrument for European churches and agencies to network, express solidarity and to influence European policy.

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."

*"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)*