



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

Caritas Europa

CCME

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

COMECE

Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community

ICMC

International Catholic Migration Commission

Justice and Peace

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

JRS

Jesuit Refugee Service Europe

QCEA

Quaker Council for European Affairs

Brussels, 28 May 2001

CHURCHES: EU MUST WELCOME IMMIGRANTS, PROTECT PEOPLE IN DANGER

Seven Christian organisations today are issuing statements welcoming the European Commission's plans to create legal channels for labour migration, and underlining the fundamental importance of making Europe a "welcoming society" with a humane, transparent and coherent immigration policy. The comments are made in the course of a detailed response to EU plans for a harmonized policy on asylum and immigration, set out in two Communications by the European Commission last November.

Respect the dignity of undocumented migrants

The EU must also deal with the question of undocumented migrants currently living on its territory, according to the church organisations. "A person who exercises his or her right to search for better living conditions should not be considered as a criminal simply for doing so" say the churches, calling on EU States to help irregular migrants, who are often deprived of the most basic human rights, and hugely vulnerable to exploitation. "Human dignity is fundamental and has to be respected regardless of whether someone has documents or not. The churches stand for this in society and call on the EU to do so as well".

Include accession countries in the migration debate

In relation to the countries of central and eastern Europe hoping to join the EU, the organisations point out that the possible East-West migration within the enlarged Union is often exaggerated in the debate on the enlargement of the EU. Accession countries are facing their own problems of demographic decline, and must be included as widely as possible in the process of planning for immigration.

Provide legal access for people seeking protection

Most fundamental of all, say the churches, it is vital that those who are forced to flee their countries under threat of persecution have access to a country where they can apply for asylum. The church organisations warn that measures taken to prevent irregular migration, such as fines for airlines that carry undocumented passengers, create a real risk that people will be sent back into situations of danger. No one should risk being punished for helping someone to escape to a place of safety.

Improve quality of decision-making

The seven organisations echo the Commission's call for rapid high-quality decision-making in asylum cases, and note their concern that current flaws in the procedures are a significant factor why asylum systems often fail to recognise the very people they were designed to help. "The principle of refugee protection is non-negotiable", underline the Churches. "Quite simply, no one may ever be sent back into a situation where he or she will be persecuted".