

20 October 2015

Safe Passages to and through Europe – Strengthen protection and support for refugees in Europe

Statement by the CCME Executive Committee

The CCME Executive Committee took note of the current situation regarding refugee protection in Europe at its meeting in Timisoara /Romania 16-18 October 2015. During a conference organised by CCME member AIDROM in cooperation with the Romanian Orthodox Metropoly of Banat, the ExCom discussed how “European Churches (are) responding to the migration phenomenon”.

The Executive Committee expresses concern about the safety of refugees on their way to and through Europe: During the meeting information was received on further shipwrecks in the Aegean Sea where several persons lost their lives, while an Afghan migrant has been shot dead by Bulgarian border guards. New legislation in Hungary foresees that asylum applicants will be sent back to “safe third countries” like Serbia, and “illegal” border crossing will be severely penalised. More fences lead however to more cumbersome and risky routes through Europe. In this context, CCME ExCom reiterates the urgent call to European governments to allow **safe passage to and through Europe**.

With winter approaching fast land passages for refugees will become harsh. The CCME Executive Committee therefore reiterates the call of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles ECRE that “European countries must ensure adequate reception conditions and treat people in need of protection with dignity and respect.”

The CCME ExCom welcomes the recent decisions by the EU Ministers Council and European Council to allocate additional funding to the refugee camps in neighbouring countries to Syria hosting the vast majority of Syrian refugees outside the country; and hopes that this time funding will be sufficient, and fast to ensure decent conditions.

The CCME ExCom appreciates plans of the European Union for refugee relocation as an expression of responsibility sharing for refugee protection. However, a relocation system should duly take into account refugees’ family links, needs, potentials and, wherever possible, aspirations and match these with the pledges by European countries. It is important to establish where and why refugees wish to go to a certain destination, when decisions are taken. A matching approach will also make integration more sustainable.

The CCME ExCom requests the EU institutions to complete the Common European Asylum System with a decision on the Mutual Recognition of the Protection Status throughout the Union, to facilitate refugees’ mobility without risking their protection status. Such a proposal would be in line with the promise of an approximation of rights with those of EU citizens, and CCME ExCom regards this as an important element allowing persons recognised to be in need of international protection to regain self-determination over their lives.

The CCME ExCom noted that exaggerated and unsubstantiated numbers are currently used in discussions on refugee arrivals and reception. Double and triple registrations of refugees in different countries are simply summed up or figures of one-day arrivals multiplied thus giving an unrealistic overall figure of arrivals in the whole of Europe. Meeting the actual challenges of refugee reception are not helped by spreading unnecessary fears. It requires improved cooperation between all actors. The CCME ExCom therefore urges politicians and media to seek to use factual numbers and to engage in a responsible, non-alarmist discourse on the challenges of refugee protection.

The CCME ExCom took note of and expresses gratitude for the many church initiatives providing assistance in so many different ways to refugees in recent months. With regard to the increasingly polarised discourse, CCME ExCom underlines the need for continued engagement in refugee support. Therefore, the CCME Executive Committee appeals to churches in Europe to support local communities in reception, as well as to strengthen the work of their refugee and migrant ministries on both national and European levels.