



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

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# CCME Activity report 2019

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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Rue Joseph II 174 - BE-1000 Brussels - Belgium  
Tel. +32 2 234 68 00 - Fax +32 2 231 14 13 - E-mail: [info@ccme.be](mailto:info@ccme.be) - [www.ccme.eu](http://www.ccme.eu)

## 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:

### 2019 – new actors, old messages

The year 2019 was yet another year in which migration to and within Europe was one of the main political issues controversially discussed. Discussions took a lot of space both nationally and Europe-wide, particularly in the EU. Once again, this happened against the background of overall drastically reduced numbers of arrivals. One of the focus areas was the situation on the Greek islands where the increased number of arrivals and the arrangements of the EU Turkey deal led to dramatic overcrowding and devastating conditions in the refugee reception facilities.

Another major discussion was the policy already adopted in 2018 by the then extreme right Italian Minister of Interior to block and legally prosecute any attempt of private search and rescue vessels to disembarked rescued persons in Italian harbours. While this policy led to several confrontations with search and rescue organisations, it has to be noted that the number of (potential) arrivals in Italy was rather small, especially when compared to Greece or Cyprus.

The discussions on the practical impact of European and national policies on asylum and migration were accompanied by a major standstill in the development of further EU policies. Legislative work largely came to a halt as European Parliament elections in May 2019 meant that the old Parliament had little more than two months in early 2019 to complete work. The appointment of a new European Commission following the EP election, which carried on through late summer and autumn, also led to policy makers and staff of the Commission keeping a low profile.

CCME had used the month prior to the EP election to raise awareness of the upcoming election and highlighted the issues at stake. Under the title “EUROPE – IT´S OUR FUTURE”, CCME and CEC shared essential information on the importance and issues of the EP by way of a multilingual pamphlet as well as a series of YouTube videos, including one featuring CCME´s moderator.

The strong electoral performance of political forces and parties strongly arguing against migrants, often propagating messages of hate, in

many European countries had generated major concerns prior to the European Parliament elections. While such parties indeed saw their electoral success improved, their results were far from what some of them had hoped for. In the newly elected European Parliament, the strongest anti-migration parties failed to form one political group, thus further limiting their influence. The European Parliament with 58% of its members elected for the first time and increased divergence of national and EU wide political groups and parties has become rather difficult to predict. CCME has engaged actively with old and new MEPs on the issues of asylum, migration and anti-discrimination. CCME was in particular proactive in encouraging

MEPs to ask detailed pertinent questions to the candidates for position in the new European Commission. Many MEPs took up these questions during the European Commission hearings. This resulted in a number of promising commitments by the new Commissioners.

The appointment and later confirmation of a new president and members of the European Commission signalled the difficulties of building majorities in the new EP and in the relations between the EP and Member States.

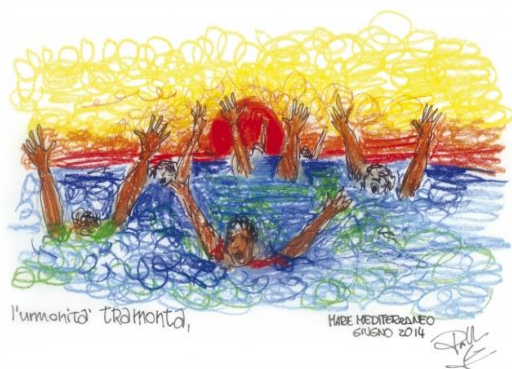
While overall debates on asylum and migration had somewhat calmed down compared to previous years, persons on the move and their intentions continued to be portrayed as problems.

### CCME 2019

The CCME work in 2019 was guided by the CCME work programme 2017-2020 and its thematic priorities.

### Safe passage

A subject of ongoing deep concern for CCME was the continued series of shipwrecks of refugee boats in the Mediterranean. CCME once again led on the efforts of European churches to



commemorate those who have died on the European external borders – an initiative taken up more and more across Europe. As in every year CCME (and CEC) suggested commemoration in June 2019 around World Refugee day.

A strong focus was the work on Search and Rescue (SAR), which had initially not been a core part of this work area. However, events in 2019 confirmed that SAR is clearly anchored and needed in the comprehensive approach to safe passage. Against the background of many cases of standoffs around the disembarkation of persons rescued at sea, CCME with the partners ACTAlliance and CEC formulated a call to Justice and Home Affairs ministers to facilitate and allow for SAR (see <https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-07-16-Letter-to-EU-JHA-Ministers-on-search-and-rescue-and-fair-responsibility-sharing.pdf>). CCME was able to share efforts by its members in the area, most prominently the German initiative to buy a search and rescue boat which resulted in the United4rescue coalition.



The role of CCME in debates on SAR was further underlined by CCME moderating the discussions on SAR at the colloquium “For a new start in European asylum and migration policy” in Berlin in November.

CCME continued to reach out to the different democratic parties in Europe on the issue of SAR. Some efforts were fruitful and led to real debate, e.g. the input an event by the Christian-Democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Athens. Others were not crowned with success, unfortunately including the planned European Parliament motion in favour of search and rescue, which was in October rejected with a two votes majority, largely due to politicised debate between the different political groups.

Later in 2019, CCME together with CEC called upon the new leaders of the European Commission, Parliament and Council to change policy directions to “Exercise solidarity, share responsibility, show leadership”. The call asked for a more realistic and open policy in refugee protection and political leadership in addressing hostile narratives on migration.

The later appeal reconfirmed the commitment of CCME and partners to the issue of relocation and resettlement as part of an EU wide approach to asylum policies. The issue had again become very important, particularly for Greece with an increased number of arrivals on Greek islands in 2019, but also for Cyprus with a high number of refugees being recognised on the very confined space of an island. The need for global solidarity through resettlement became even more urgent as the ceiling of admissions to the traditional main resettlement country USA hit all-time lows under the Trump administration.

A very prominent initiative in the area of safe passage are the plans for a

European scheme of Humanitarian Corridors, based on the experiences with national programmes in Belgium, France and Italy. Events in Rome in October and in the EP in Brussels in December were good opportunities for CCME to express support and wider European perspectives on the initiative.



Humanitarian corridors hearing EP Brussels Dec. 2019

### **Europe and International Refugee Protection**

The focus in this area moved away from efforts to advocate on the Common European Asylum System. This was the result of a practically complete deadlock on the negotiations in this area due to fundamental difference between the actors but also due to the institutional changes in 2019.

CCME, however, focused on the increasingly evident mistakes and



gaps in the existing EU asylum policy and practice.

A major issue of concern was the number of deaths at the external borders of the EU as well as the push backs of persons requesting international protection at the borders. While the total number trying to cross the Mediterranean was small compared to previous years, the likelihood of dying while trying to cross the Mediterranean had increased dramatically. CCME continued to highlight the scandal of the loss of life as a result of the lack of safe alternatives.

The issue of the consequences of externalisation of refugee protection to the EU's border continued to attract CCME's attention. The most visible expression of this was the ongoing scandal of dehumanising conditions on the Greek islands created by the implementation of the EU Turkey deal.

CCME continued to play a very crucial role in criticising the model of the EU Turkey deal – in a time where many were claiming that this arrangement

was a huge success and should be the blueprint for similar arrangements with countries outside the EU. CCME in cooperation with members was able to support a number of initiatives on Greek islands, the Greek mainland and elsewhere.



MOZAIK support Centre Lesbos

The issue of push back at the external borders became more and more visible, both in the Mediterranean but also at land borders, be it in the Balkans or the EU's Eastern border. While the push backs alone are reason for concern, CCME was very disturbed by repeated reports of excessive use of force, even direct violence used by border forces and those helping them.<sup>1</sup> CCME also actively contributed to civil society advocacy on the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees – in particular in

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe: Doc. 14909 of 08 June 2019: report Pushback

policies and practice in Council of Europe member States (rapporteur Tineke Strik)

relation to the positioning of EU Member States at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December 2019. Unfortunately the EU commitment, apart from pledging 30.000 resettlement places, mainly focused on protection outside the EU. At the same time, CCME through the ACT Community of Practice contributed to the ecumenical advocacy efforts on protection at an international level. A meeting of CCME's General Secretary and the WCC General Secretary with the UN High Commissioner Grandi and his staff in May was an additional opportunity to articulate ecumenical positions on protection.



CCME and WCC GS meeting UN Refugee High Commissioner Grandi

CCME continued the networking and advice among churches' refugee supporting organisations and networks across Europe.

### **Europe and International Migration**

The work in the broader context of migration was very much influenced by attempts in policy and practice to

show politicians being "tough on migration". A central project in this area, already launched in 2018 is the recast of the EU return directive. Although labelled "directive of shame" by critics at the time of its adoption, the current directive had in connection with related case law an effect of guaranteeing minimum standards in the field of return. Citing the relatively low number of returns among those without residence status in the EU, the European Commission in its communication repeatedly failed to analyse the very important reasons why many of them cannot effectively return. This contributed to the alarmist tone of the debate on return, coupled with the repeated message that returns would be increased – despite strong evidence that this is totally unfeasible.

The draft text of the directive is full of punitive measures but doesn't address any of the many obstacles why returns are often not carried out. CCME has joined forces with other actors to influence the European Parliament and the Council to refuse this punitive, irrational and ideological approach. The study of the ex-ante impact



assessment unit of the European Parliament came to similar conclusions stating: “there is no clear evidence supporting the Commission’s claim that its proposal would lead to more effective returns of irregular migrants”. CCME had with other Christian organisations highlighted its concerns in joint comments of 7<sup>th</sup> February. These comments formed the basis of engaging with the newly elected MEPs acting as rapporteurs for the European Parliament, which is co-legislator in the legislative process.



Tineke Strik, Return directive rapporteur for the EP

CCME continued its work on the consultative forum on fundamental rights of the EU border agency FRONTEX. On various levels, the consultative forum insisted on improving the human rights impact of FRONTEX operations. CCME’s membership in the forum was upon prior application in December reconfirmed for the mandate 2020-22.

CCME pro-actively contributed to an gave input on the European Commission’s “fitness check” on legal migration, looking at both existing legislation and future needs. CCME once again underlined the RIGHT to family reunification and argued for rights based labour migration policy for jobs across different levels of qualification.

In recognition of the fact that migration has an important intercontinental component, CCME continued its intercontinental work. Relations with the All Africa Conference of Churches were strengthened. As first steps, an exchange on realities of assessments and responses within and between and Europe and Africa was agreed. Meetings in Brussels, Lagos and Nairobi contributed to this exchange and revealed common beliefs but also important differences in analysing migration. The fellowship of WCC members and contacts complemented the global context of cooperation.

### Upholding the Dignity of Persons, addressing discrimination

Activities in this area included the ongoing involvement in the EU Roma

inclusion platform, to which CCME gave input. It was agreed however that CCME would withdraw from the area of purely socio-diaconal work and related advocacy on Roma issues, as this had often been a duplication of the work of Eurodiaconia. The CCME focus on work with Roma as an issue of unity of the church, often involving aspects of guilt and ideally reconciliation, will guide the next step. This includes a conference “Justice for Roma and Sinti – a challenge for churches” which will be held in March 2020, but for which preparations began in 2019.

The CEC summer school on human rights and seminar on populism were once again good fora for sharing CCME concerns in the two thematic areas of freedom of religion and populism. The specific issues and problems confronting both migrant Christians and non-Christian migrants in properly exercising their faith in Europe could be highlighted along with grave concerns about populist forces directly and confrontationally targeting migrants in their public campaigns through hate speech and hate crime.

CCME continued its involvement with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), supporting ENAR efforts for broader coalition building in the area of anti-racism.

### Uniting in Diversity

Work on Uniting in Diversity, which had traditionally been an area of uniting in diversity between different Christian churches, increasingly grew to include aspects of inter-religious collaboration.

The activities of the multi-state sponsored dialogue centre KAAICID as well as the activities of the Church of Sweden’s project “A world of neighbours” were occasions for useful inter-faith networking.



A “World of Neighbours” pre-summit Malmö

In the more traditional work on “uniting in diversity”, CCME and some members continued collaboration with the Community of Protestant Churches, looking at connections and

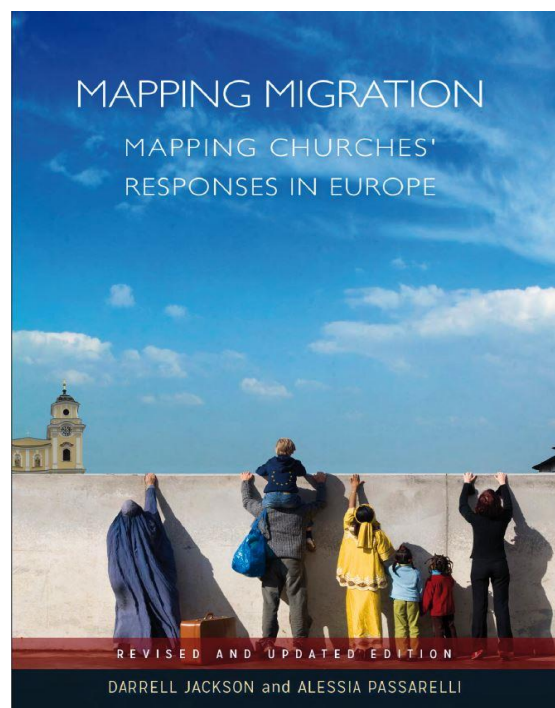
relations of traditional European and migrant led churches. CCME was reappointed to the CPCE group on “migrant churches and church fellowship”.

The question of uniting in diversity in an ecumenical context was highlighted by a meeting of Ecumenical officers of CEC member churches to which CCME contributed. CCME also started preparations for the conference “Uniting in Diversity – Migration changing churches in Europe”. Promising cooperation with some academic actors developed in this field and the event will now be hosted in the Protestant Theological Faculty in Leuven.

The process towards this conference was closely connected to the work on publishing a third edition of the “Mapping Migration” study, which will strongly focus on the efforts of churches in Europe in “uniting in diversity”. Unfortunately, plans for a WCC sponsored event on intercultural ministry in England with strong links to CCME and its members did not materialise due to staff changes in WCC.

### CCME internal

2019 was a year of current stability and further challenges for CCME. The ExCom had its second full working year in office. It met twice in 2019 – in Brussels in May and November.



“Mapping Migration” 2016 edition

The November meeting was the occasion for the ExCom to hold a meeting back to back with the governing board of CEC, as the cooperation agreement signed in 2017 had foreseen. While a number of aspects can certainly be improved at the next joint meeting, two joint sessions on ongoing CCME work as well as the results of the CEC sponsored consultation on populism

along with informal encounters were important to broaden mutual knowledge.



CCME ExCom and CEC GB meeting

A number of issues provided organisational challenges. The vacancy in the position of CEC General Secretary for more than half a year, sick leave and staff changes among CEC colleagues who were also part time working for CCME have put significant additional work load on CCME staff. A ransom-related cyber-attack together with a dysfunctional backup on the joint CCME CEC server in May has resulted in major data loss, adding difficulties. This experience has however motivated CCME and CEC to more proactively address IT security as well as various fields of contracts and cooperation with third parties, e.g. service providers.

A more proactive approach has also been taken to CCME's articles of association. The need for new articles

has arisen from the adoption of a new legal code covering associations like CCME under Belgian legislation. It has entered into force 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019. This new code made a number of changes necessary in addition to those which already would have been necessary before. A task force established by the ExCom has throughout 2019 worked on a draft text – in cooperation with ExCom itself. The draft was sent in February 2020 to CCME members and is expected to be discussed, possibly amended and adopted in at the General assembly 2020. The ExCom has for this reason called an extraordinary General Assembly, interlinked with the usual ordinary General Assembly.

A big part of CCME's membership met from 26 to 27 November in Berlin at the premises of CCME's member Diakonie Deutschland. The short meeting was an occasion for CCME members to introduce their diverse respective activities and priorities to each other, in particular those where a Cross-European cooperation would be of added value. The meeting was also a good occasion to hear about the possible directions of EU and global



asylum and migration policies and reflect what CCME's role should be in influencing them.

Last, but not least, CCME's former treasurer and consultant Goos Minderman offered some reflections how the various expectations of members towards CCME could, within a context of limited resources, be prioritised. This work will be informing the process towards the CCME General Assembly in June 2020 (see above).

Participants felt that the event was useful and could, if kept as a flexible working tool, be repeated in coming years.

The secretariat consists of three permanent staff: Dr Torsten Moritz, General Secretary, Ms Shari Brown as Executive Secretary and Mr Emmanuel Kabalisa as Office Manager (and Data protection officer). Jean Pierre Habimana continued to serve as long term Global Mission Fellow until summer while various interns supported CCME on a more short-term basis.



CCME ExCom May 2019

The financial situation has been almost balanced in 2019. The year closed with a negative result of - 1.809,70 EUR for the programme activities<sup>2</sup>. Funding and fundraising remain challenging, as major parts of income are related to project funding. Fundraising and accounting/reporting take up large amounts of time, which cannot be used for networking or advocacy.

Project planning and implementation in 2019 was made almost impossible for large parts of the year, as CCME only received sufficient confirmation of funding pledges in late autumn. While CCME has gone ahead with work on safe passage, the work on Roma/Sinti Justice as well as Uniting in Diversity was seriously delayed.

<sup>2</sup> The part ownership of the Ecumenical Centre added a minus of 9.550,96 EUR) so the total deficit was 11.360,66 EUR.

CCME will, despite these challenges, hopefully continue to be an instrument for European churches and agencies to network, express solidarity, love and hope and to influence European policy. The deep fellowship of members, friends, volunteers and staff continued to be an indispensable resource. This is together with the biblical leitmotiv of CCME's work expressed in the habit of more and more members referring to the "CCME family".

We 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)**