Refugee Community sponsorship and churches: **CCME's conference highlights** *opportunities and challenges*

On 2-3 December, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, in cooperation with Diakonie Deutschland (Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung e.V.), held an event in Berlin on the subject of "*Community sponsorship and churches: between opportunities and challenges*". The two-day conference brought together, in a hybrid format, representatives of churches and faith-based organisations, senior migration experts and practitioners from academia, civil society, national authorities, to discuss the current state of refugee community sponsorship in Europe, and the role churches and other faith-based organisations can play in promoting and developing initiatives for safe pathways to Europe. In community sponsorship private actors such as churches share part of the responsibility for welcoming and integrating refugees. While sponsorship is relatively new in Europe churches in Canada have overdecades sponsored thousands of refugees per year.

Dr. Nikolas Feith Tan, senior researcher at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, delivered the keynote address, providing a conceptual overview of community sponsorship and a tentative typology of existing European schemes. Highlighting a number of common characteristics and suggesting a set of potential core principles, he also emphasized the difficulty of having a single European model of community sponsorship.

The opening session was followed by presentations on different European networks by representatives of three European networks, some faith-based, other secular. The speakers emphasized the importance of coordinating existing complementary pathways by fostering the exchange of best practices, and noted that improvement was needed in the areas of network building, mobilizing support and fundraising.

The event also provided participants with an opportunity to present different regional approaches to community sponsorship in Europe and to discuss the different institutional, socio-cultural, and political contexts in which they operate. Testimonies from participants from churches and partners actively working in the field showed how different regional contexts (Nordic, Southern European, and German) evince different characteristics and challenges and require different approaches to the implementation of community sponsorship programmes:

The discussions were complemented by an update on efforts undertaken by his church and the NGO United4Rescue to support and carry out search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean Sea. A second more interactive day of discussion focussed on further mobilising churches for sponsorship,

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as well as potential pitfalls when private actors take over responsibilities normally held by the state. Participating churches agreed on potential follow up and a framework for advocacy on sponsorship with European institutions.

The conference proceeding will together with theological reflections on sponsorship be published by CCME in the next months, for more contact: info@ccme.be

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