



Churches' Commission for
Migrants in Europe

Activity Report

2022

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'S OBJECTIVES

In particular, the objectives of CCME are:

01.

To monitor European and national migration, refugee and anti-discrimination policy, to inform the churches about these policies.

02.

To support and serve the churches in their advocacy.

03.

To challenge the European institutions to act in accordance with human rights and international obligations.

04.

To strengthen on a global, European, national and regional level the cooperation of churches, NGOs and others in this field.

05.

To support and challenge churches to include migrants (churches, groups or individuals) in the communion of churches.

06.

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.

2022 – UNPRECEDENTED DEVELOPMENTS AND MORE OF THE SAME

The year 2022 was to a large extent characterised by the largest refugee movement in Europe since the second World War. The Russian aggression on Ukraine forced millions to flee the country in addition to those who were internally displaced. The countries of the European Union within a few weeks unanimously activated the Temporary Protection Directive – a step which CCME had called for immediately after the war had started.

Most of the estimated 7 million who had at the peak of this refugee movement been displaced westwards found initial reception in neighbouring countries. A progressively increasing number moved further westwards, others moved back to Ukraine.

The arrival of big numbers of displaced people, often in countries with almost no experience and infrastructure for refugee reception, worked rather swiftly thanks to an enormous volunteer engagement of individuals, the Ukrainian diaspora and civil society organisations, not least churches. While several safety concerns were important in the first weeks and sustainability questions appeared after a while, the reception of Ukrainians showed a widespread compassion in Europe for these refugees.

In contrast to that the treatment of non-Ukrainians and ethnic minorities fleeing Ukraine or undocumented migrants kept in detention in Ukraine often gave serious reasons for concern.

2022 – UNPRECEDENTED DEVELOPMENTS AND MORE OF THE SAME

CCME has shared these concerns with the European Commission but also the EU´s Fundamental Rights Agencies and the EU´s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

In addition, most of those fleeing other, ongoing conflicts received a far less open reception – both in policy and practice. The number of 966.000 asylum requests in the EU in 2022 signalled the urgent need of many fleeing other conflicts. The media coverage on Ukrainian refugees as “people like us” and “real refugees” was a further indicator of the discriminatory treatment.



Refugee support at Hungarian-Ukrainian border provided by the Reformed church

2022 – UNPRECEDENTED DEVELOPMENTS AND MORE OF THE SAME

Like in previous years, events around the arrivals (of non-Ukrainians) at the EU's external borders were orchestrated and portrayed as large-scale “crisis” around migration.

This was once again the case at the Southern and South Eastern European sea shores, also at the EU's Eastern borders. Once again, the most vulnerable, namely those on the move and poor local resident populations were paying the price for the politicisation. Efforts to keep newly arrived outside the EU at almost any price led to continued brutality, pushbacks and deaths at the borders.

The major debate of EU institutions focussed on decrying the “instrumentalization” of refugees and migrants by neighbouring countries such as Belarus or Morocco . The fact that EU member states were at the same time violating existing EU legislation on access to an asylum procedure or minimum material reception conditions went largely unchallenged.

Similarly, the shockingly widespread practice of “pushbacks” at the external border, often with excessive brutality only led to minimal reactions of the EU institutions. The very clear criticism of such practices by the Council of Europe, in particular its human rights commissioner, went largely unnoticed.

2022 – UNPRECEDENTED DEVELOPMENTS AND MORE OF THE SAME

The major policy developments in 2022 still mainly made reference to the European Commission’s proposal for a “pact” on asylum and migration of 2020. It was astonishing to see how little the fact that the EU was coping unexpectedly well with the biggest refugee displacement in its history was influencing discussions on these proposals of 2020 – which notably included the proposal of abolishing the temporary protection directive which now was turning out to be most useful.

While it had already in late 2020 become clear that the well-known difference in opinion between different member states would make an agreement on the different proposals in the “pact” as a whole very unlikely, there were some signs of a potential compromise in 2022.

The French presidency in the first half of 2022 had reached a symbolic agreement on a voluntary solidarity scheme between member states, albeit of a very limited scale. In addition, representatives of the Council and the European Parliament in September signed a joint “roadmap” committing to finding agreement on the pact dossiers until the end of term of both the current European Parliament and Commission in early/mid 2024. A certain pressure to “agree on something” could be observed in the European Parliament.

Policy debates on EU level were underpinned by several worrying national election results bringing governments led by or depended on the extreme right to power in countries like Italy or Sweden.

CHURCHES ' CONTEXT IN EUROPE

In the overall above-mentioned context, churches played a particular role. In many countries, churches were or have in 2022 become the backbone of refugee support and reception across Europe. This was true for countries in which churches had already been active over the year in protecting refugees, but even more in countries where churches had no or very limited involvement in refugee protection previously.



CCME
delegation
meeting
Presiding
Bishop of
Hungarian
Reformed
Church,
Zoltan Balogh

CHURCHES ' CONTEXT IN EUROPE

CCME in this context played an active role in connecting churches on all different levels in their response to displacement from Ukraine.

This included both dealing with churches and their humanitarian agencies wanting to help with experience and resources and those badly needing them.

It was in that context remarkable that several churches which had so far not or only marginally engaged with refugee issues could be mobilised, including millions of volunteers coming from among their members.

CCME has from day one of the Ukraine war highlighted the need for a long-term commitment to all refugee groups, underpinned by a backbone of professionals in addition to volunteers and solid safeguarding measures.

These concerns remained valid as fatigue and exhaustion of staff and volunteers in refugee support became more and more apparent as the year went on - with state support to these activities remaining limited.

A particular context for churches was once again the observation that churches were able to involve people from different backgrounds and political affiliation in their activities. CCME has therefore consciously had a focus to advocate with the political centre-right in the EU institutions (while not engaging with fascist groups).

Often CCME is the only civil society organisation present in meetings of/with the centre right, as NGOs have either not been invited or not been interested to engage in these sometimes difficult discussions.

CCME IN 2022

CCME's work in 2022 was guided by the CCME work programme 2021-2023, agreed by the General Assembly in October 2021, and its thematic priorities.

Obviously, the context of COVID-19 still meant that traditional patterns of the work of CCME needed to be changed, with physical meetings being difficult for at least the first months of the year – both among members or ExCom, but also with EU policy makers or civil society in Brussels.

While telecommunication made it possible to 'stay in touch', the opportunities provided by more informal encounters and direct interaction were missed in both networking and advocacy.

An additional challenge has begun to emerge with EU institutions also in the long run switching to remote work – a situation perpetuating the loss of opportunities for informal encounter.

Promoting alternatives to the current system of deaths at the borders of Europe through SAFE PASSAGEs remained a priority of CCME. In view of the ongoing tragedies at inner-European borders most notably the English channel, the dimension of SAFE PASSAGEs to and through Europe gained new importance.

The work of CCME and others had in late 2019 led to the highest ever pledge of resettlement places (30.000) by the EU and its member states. Unfortunately, many of those ready to depart were stopped from leaving due to the travel restrictions throughout most of 2020-21 and departures also in 2022 only very slowly resumed. Many other cases were not processed.

Like the previous year, CCME joined forces with other organisations insisting that resettlement activities need to be taken up by the EU and its member states as an expression of solidarity with refugees globally and refugee hosting states. An advocacy-letter campaign prior to the EU's annual pledging of resettlement places in autumn 2022 was despite the coordination with national members of CCME and the other organisations of limited success. The general reaction of governments was to underline the challenges associated with the reception of refugee groups from Ukraine and elsewhere, thus ruling out to increase resettlement pledges.

It was against the background of only 16.000 resettlement places pledged (plus 13.000 humanitarian admissions) only a small consolation that European Parliament and Council reached agreement on the EU resettlement framework – as the impact of the framework will largely depend on the number of places pledged by the EU member states.

THESE RES

Throughout the year, CCME highlighted the need for safe and predictable disembarkation arrangements for persons rescued at sea – among the ongoing scandalisation of the issue and the role of civil society.

Once again, the call was threefold: insisting on the swift and dignified disembarkation of those rescued, calling on national authorities coordinating search and rescue to react to distress calls and insisting that rescued persons are disembarked in a safe place and not deflected or pushed back e.g., to Libya.

CCME continued to underline that the need for search and rescue by private vessels only arise as a result of insufficient efforts of states to meet their international obligations in this area.

CCME maintained its coordinating and networking role in churches' initiatives on Safe Passage.

Activities of an increasing number of CCME members, and discussions on EU policy level, drew a new focus on the role of private (or 'community') sponsorship in safe passage.

Most notably, an event on 14th and 15th October in Warsaw provided an opportunity to discuss a number of pertinent issues.

Not only did the event address possibly different approaches to community sponsorship in different corners of Europe, but it also looked at activities in the protection and reception of Ukrainians and Afghans in many European countries, which had in many ways replicated activities known from community sponsorship.

These “sponsorship on the go” activities in many ways mobilising entirely new groups in sponsorship were seen as both a risk and an opportunity for sponsorship as such. While they certainly provided good experiences in avoiding bureaucratic procedures, risks due to no/limited safeguarding and vetting procedures were identified.

The particular context of the Ukraine war had also led to unclarities about the extent and duration of the sponsors’ engagement. Once again the event underlined the specific role of churches as an actor with broad reach, also among audiences traditionally not involved in refugee support.

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 across Europe.

As in every year CCME (and CEC) suggested commemoration in June 2022 on or around World Refugee Day.

RESETTLEMENT



Commemoration service ,
Holy Trinity Lutheran
Church Warsaw

CCME initiated a process among its members to react to proposals of the European Commission in the area of labour migration, notably recasts of the Single Permit directive and the Long-Term Residence directive.

While legal and safe labour migration is among the demands of CCME since the beginning of SAFE PASSAGE, it has so far been less developed and detailed than the work on safe passages into international protection.

Last not least, the arrival and border crossing of Ukrainians in a relatively organised and safe way demonstrated many of the advantages of legal entry and safe passage. Among the misery of displacement from Ukraine at least no one died due to border crossing attempts from Ukraine into the EU.

It was in that context important to occasionally recall the message of the 2021 General Assembly of CCME. Under the title “Together we can save a million vulnerable humans in Europe again!” the message underlined the willingness by actors on the ground to welcome – in contrast to the position often articulated by national governments and the EU.

The message had received widespread attention among churches across Europe, but was often seen as too ambitious. Less than 6 months after it was adopted in October 2021, the EU alone was protecting some 5 million vulnerable humans...

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE PROTECTION, SOLIDARITY, AND BORDERS

As outlined above, both political and epidemiological factors contributed to widespread violations on the basic rights of access to asylum and non-refoulement, particularly at the external borders.

CCME has, despite the limitations of direct communication opportunities, advocated with officials of the European Commission and members of the European Parliament to defend these minimum standards of international and EU law. CCME continued to try to mobilise members against policy proposals which would allow EU member states not to apply EU asylum laws in cases of so-called “instrumentalization” of refugees and migrants by third countries. In the same spirit, CCME continued to advocate against the plans in the EU asylum and migration “pact” which would lead to a further externalisation and undermining of existing norms on asylum in the EU.

CCME has in cooperation with members and partners organised delegation visits to Italy (including Lampedusa) in May 2022 and to the Greek island of Kos in June 2022. Both exposed the harsh reality of deaths at sea as well as the practices to push asylum seeking persons back to third countries

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE PROTECTION, SOLIDARITY, AND BORDERS

The visit to the Polish-Belarusian border during the European Asylum Conference in Warsaw in October contributed to the overall impression, also highlighting the issues of more and more external borders of the EU being equipped with fences/walls to keep asylum seekers and migrants out.



Poland-
Belarus
border
fence

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE PROTECTION, SOLIDARITY, AND BORDERS

The European Asylum conference 17-21 October in Warsaw in general was an important event for assessing the troubling climate around refugee protection in Europe, in particular around the question of access to territory and the procedures. The event was once again co-organised by Diakonie Deutschland and CCME, this time in cooperation with the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Poland. It provided excellent opportunities for persons in European churches working on asylum to network, including with civil society partners.

At the same time, discussions also underlined the massive mobilisation in Poland and other countries in the region in solidarity with those fleeing Ukraine.

Last, not least the question of double standard in the treatment of Ukrainian refugees and other refugee groups were once again highlighted at the Warsaw event. CCME had already in April facilitated a European church-leaders' statement "As you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me. – Matthew 25:40 – ALL refugees welcome" calling for equal treatment of the different refugee groups.

This was in summer echoed in a joint appeal of CCME and some 23 other civil society to the European Commission and EU member states: "broadening the Ukraine refugee response: the EU and Member States must commit to the protection of all refugees and properly support civil society under pressure".

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE PROTECTION, SOLIDARITY, AND BORDERS

An issue concerning a relatively small number of asylum applicants but of high importance for churches and Christian communities in Europe is the issue of conversion of asylum seekers to Christianity.

It has been receiving increased attention in recent years. In a number of European countries, the issue of conversion to Christianity by asylum seekers has raised pastoral, theological, missiological, legal as well as ethical questions and dilemmas for churches. Often conversions in the asylum procedures are seen very differently by churches and asylum authorities and subsequently courts. Conflicts about the exact role and competence at this “borderline” between state and church have arisen. A number of cases have received strong attention from the media.

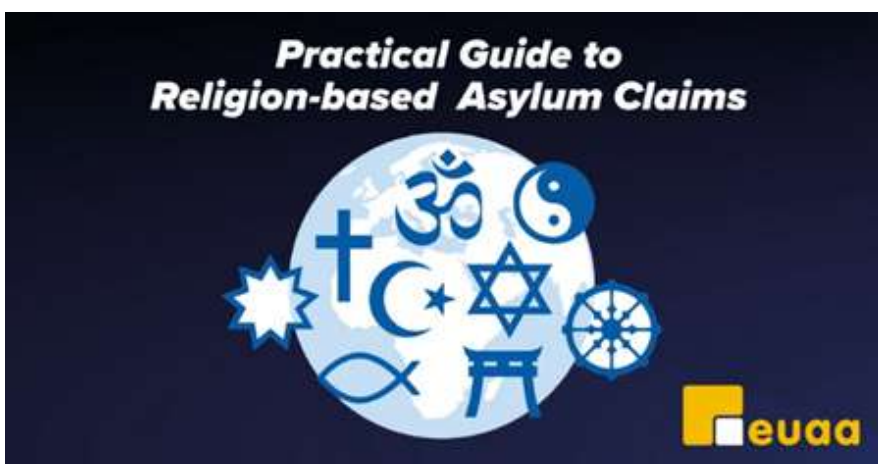
The event “Conversion in the asylum procedure – new developments and old challenges”, which CCME organised from 18th to 20th January 2022, therefore addressed recent developments in jurisprudence and asylum authorities, reflected on the opportunities and challenges for churches and aimed to showcase best practice of churches on the issue. In an interdisciplinary approach, theological as well as sociological, legal and socio-political aspects were examined in an exchange among and between churches, with state authorities, judges and academia. It was also important to hear from persons with personal experience of converting and being questioned about the credibility of their conversion.

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE PROTECTION, SOLIDARITY, AND BORDERS

Given the ecumenical dimension of the issue, it was a privilege that the Conference of European Churches, the EU´s Roman Catholic Bishop Conferences COMECE and the European Evangelical Alliance EEA joined the preparations of the three-day online event.

Finding of the event were widely communicated, in particular to the EU asylum agency EUAA, which was working on a practical guide for asylum authorities on how to interview applicants with religion based claims. These were also reiterated in a delegation visit to the EUAA in November. The guide was published in December and includes a whole chapter on the issue of conversion – which takes up many of the consideration brought forward by CCME, its members and partners at the event in January. While the guide is not binding law, there is strong hope that it will become a central reference point for interviews with converted persons in the asylum procedure.

CCME was reappointed member of the Consultative Forum of the EUAA.



Logo of
the EUAA
guide

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS, ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION

The CCME's work in this area was very much guided by the insistence on equal rights for all refugees and migrants. The very differential treatment of Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians for CCME was a reason to ask if the distinctions were at least partly based on racial prejudice and discrimination.

A central message of CCME on asylum, but also search and rescue, has been the need for solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees at the borders of Europe, but also those countries shouldering most responsibility for their reception. As it had been observed at the Southern EU borders, events at the Eastern border again have shown that it was often the populations marginalised in their own countries shouldering major responsibility at the external borders.

CCME has continued to highlight the pressing situation in these countries, some of them well known, like Greece or Italy, but also less publicised cases like Cyprus. A short General Secretary visit to Cyprus in November as well as the visits in Italy and Greece underlined this aspect once again. The awareness raising was connected to the demand for a binding system of responsibility sharing within the EU.

CCME also underlined how plans to keep asylum seekers at the EU's borders and create a legal fiction that they have not entered EU territory – as foreseen in the “pact” - would exacerbate the situation of those arriving and those receiving them.

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS, ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION

CCME continued its work in the Consultative Forum (CF) on fundamental rights of the EU border agency FRONTEX. On various levels, the CF insisted on improving the human rights impact of FRONTEX operations and pushed for the investigation of alleged human rights violations at the EU's external border.

While the impact of the Consultative Forum was often questioned, the resignation of the old FRONTEX Director might open several new opportunities for the CF to maximise impact.

The displacement from Ukraine also impacted the work on “uniting in diversity”. While the work of CCME in the past had been predominantly focussing on the situation of Protestant churches and movement, the arrival of a population with an Orthodox majority background in countries with only small Orthodox presence or different liturgical language initiated a series of interesting developments.

These have been reflected upon in the event “ecclesial hospitality for Ukrainian refugees” 21-22 October in Warsaw, held in cooperation with the faculty of Humanities and Theology of Lund University.

A fruitful cooperation had already started at the event “The many altars of the North. Challenges and opportunities arising from Christian migration and minorities in Northern Europe”, 27-28 January 2022 in which Lund University had gathered researchers and churches presenting a variety of studies on migration changing the ecclesial reality in Nordic countries.

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 continued to serve on the CPCE group on “migrant churches and church fellowship”, and in particular invigorate the working groups contact with “migrant churches”.

CCME continued to raise the question as to what increasingly post-denominational expressions of migrants´ Protestantism in Europe means for traditional Protestantism.

INTERREGIONAL WORK

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 still impacted by COVID, but planning for the joint Africa Europe Ecumenical Forum on Migration started in 2022 (the event will be held 15-19 March 2023 in Hamburg).

Cooperation with the Presbyterian Church USA and the different bodies of the United Methodist Church were also developed further.

INTERREGIONAL WORK

The fellowship of WCC members and contacts complemented the global context of cooperation. Contacts have been further revitalised and the CCME General Secretary together with the WCC Central Committee Moderator lead the Pilgrim Team Visit to Italy (see below).

CCME was one of the facilitators of one of the “ecumenical conversations” at WCC General Assembly in September 2022 in Karlsruhe/Germany. CCME also contributed to one hearing and a bible study in the framework programme of the assembly.



WCC
Pilgrim
Team visit
on
Lampedusa

Throughout the year, the direct contacts and services for members were once again a very important but largely invisible aspect of CCME´s work.

The secretariat often provides advice, contacts or reflection to help member develop their own work.

This in 2022 once again began to include visiting members to give input at their events e.g. at the meeting of Nordic and Baltic members and contacts. Such events are always a good opportunity to inform about the work of CCME.

Making members´ work known on EU level was another role of CCME – most importantly the joint statement of German churches SHAPING MIGRATION IN A HUMAN WAY was in November presented by CCME in cooperation with the EKD´s Brussels office and the German Catholic Bishop´s conference.

CCME also showcased the report to the synod of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland on the EU external borders, to which CCME contributes.

CCME news continued to be shared with the modest means at CCME´s disposal – a website, a Facebook page, LinkedIn but also media channels of partners like WCC or in direct contacts with members such as the bi-annual member´s letter. The Facebook page and Instagram feature occasional video of the General Secretary addressing events and internal issues of CCME or current policy developments.

CCME continued contacts with CEC. The CEC governing board had unilaterally decided to terminate essential aspects of the cooperation agreement which CEC and CCME had concluded in 2018 not least the funding of a staff position.

While CCME would have preferred to continue to implement the existing agreement, it acknowledged the CEC decision. Negotiations resulted in an amended new agreement, in which CEC and CCME commit to a clear separation of mandates and governance structure and the aspects where CCME worked for CEC and CEC financially supported CCME are being “phased out” until 2024.

As a result, the financial feasibility of CCME is in danger at the moment. Members will have to decide if they will adequately resource an organisation working with them and for them or see no future for the work of CCME.

Signals from CCME members have been positive in tone but need to be translated into commitments.

Members gathered in June for a “virtual” General Assembly in order to officially adopt the accounts for the previous year and the budget for the next year – as required under Belgian law.

The ExCom resumed its presential meetings, gathering in Athens in May and Brussels in November.

The secretariat saw staff changes again: Ms Yasmine Rishmawi in July started as Executive Secretary for advocacy and fundraising. Ms Deborah Romano, who had in 2021 started as an intern and been responsible for several event reports, had from April to June 2022 filled this position ad interim. She between July and December continued to work at CCME, mainly trying to identify with CCME members how CCME could better communicate despite its limited means. Ms Christina Rugurika continued to serve as office administrator and ExCom in November decided to prolong the mandate of General Secretary Dr Torsten Moritz until June 2027, CCME had in April concluded a consultancy contract with the Center for the Study of Religion in Contemporary Society THEOXENIA (Belgrade), and its Dr Andrej Jeftic for work in the area of Theology & Migration. The United Methodist Church has as of September seconded Rev Kirk Sims with a 30% position to the CCME Team. Working out of Prague, he is working on “Uniting in Diversity “ with a focus on Central/Eastern Europe. An external accountancy company assures accurate and transparent book-keeping.

The internship of Ms Catherine Hewitt provided CCME with excellent support – mainly around the events on Community sponsorship and the European Asylum Conference, but also in compiling a study on the EU’s externalisation of asylum and migration policies.



ExCom meeting with the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece H.B. Hieronymos II

The financial situation has been almost balanced in 2022. The year closed with a result of -367,33 EUR for the programme activities[1] (1.832,67 EUR profit of non real estate activities after appropriation) . Funding and fundraising remain challenging, as major parts of income are related to project/event funding, which was still highly problematic when events couldn't go ahead in the first months of 2022 due to COVID-19. Fundraising and accounting/reporting take up large amounts of time, which cannot be used for networking or advocacy. Despite these challenges, CCME will 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. CCME's work and fellowship has been referred to by more and more members the "CCME family" across this difficult year – a positive sign.

[1] CCME's part ownership of the Ecumenical Centre added a plus of 4.333,57 EUR

Thanks go to all those who have helped CCME and its mission in these difficult times – ExCom), advisors, volunteers, participants, members, funding partners and many more....

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.”



Churches' Commission for
Migrants in Europe

“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)