



Conference of European Churches



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

GENSEC-2025-054 / CCME 025/008

Member Churches and
organisations of the Churches'
Commission for Migrants in
Europe and the Conference of
European Churches

24 April 2025

World Refugee Day: Call to commemorate refugees who lost their lives at European borders

Esteemed church leaders, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends,

In this period after Easter filled with hope and light intended for all humankind, we continue to be deeply saddened that the suffering, hopelessness and death, continues for thousands of our brothers and sister on the outer borders of the European Union and wider Europe.

Considering this reality, and continuing with tradition from past years, we appeal to the churches across Europe to commemorate around World Refugee Day (20 June 2025) the persons who lost their lives at the different borders – may it be at the Eastern borders, on route to the Canary islands, in the (English) Channel, the Mediterranean or elsewhere. We encourage churches to hold dedicated services, prayers and vigils on **22 June 2025**. For some, commemorations on other dates or occasions in the year have become a tradition.

Our appeal is made in times when the war in Ukraine rages on. The direct consequences of the Ukraine war continue and force people to flee. While the displacement from Ukraine is still a terrible reminder of the horror of the war and long-term perspectives are unclear, reception of those fleeing from Ukraine, not least by churches, has set several impressive, good examples. The facilitated entry of Ukrainians into the EU and other European countries has shown that borders do not have to be deadly for those who are fleeing.

Recently adopted or proposed legislation on EU level and elsewhere however continues the logic of closing borders and denying legal access to Europe for many in need of protection – a development we see with great concern, as it will force many more to seek risky pathways into safety and protection. This situation is aggravated by humanitarian support activities, including search and rescue activities are often being criminalised – with churches, NGOs or migrants themselves being affected.

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You will find a short factsheet attached. We are also offering a collection of resources – these different liturgical elements, prayers, reflections and information texts can be used as worship materials or intercessions during a service or an information event. The material which was initially produced together with the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, supported by the Evangelical Church in Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesian Oberlausitz and the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) has in late 2024 been completely overhauled and updated by CCME's intern Tim Widmeyer – thanks to input from churches from across Europe.

The 142 pages resource booklet is in English but also includes some material in 4 additional languages. It can be downloaded from https://ccme.eu/storage/app/media/Commemorative%20materials%20collection_as%2025%2002%2024_compressed.pdf and freely used as long as CCME (and in many cases the original source) are mentioned. Our thanks go to all those who contributed to the collection.

As churches' organisations and Christians, our calling is to be witnesses and servants of the Resurrection, as well as to be promoters of new life in justice and peace for all, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religion. We know that we are part of a global fellowship of Christians in remembering together those affected in their respective regions, and in reflecting on the causes of their displacement.

Let us remember the documented, as well as the undocumented, who died at the European borders; let us share our sorrow in prayer.

We would be grateful if you could inform us at info@ccme.be about your activities and share any resources you have developed.

With our best wishes and greetings,



Rev Frank Dieter Fischbach
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches



Dr Torsten Moritz
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FACTSHEET:

The following facts and figures describe the context behind the joint CEC and CCME call to the churches to commemorate persons seeking safety who lost their lives at European borders, including responses from churches on the situation, together with useful links.

- Around 2,500 persons lost their lives in 2024 in and on the borders of the Mediterranean alone, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)¹. Deaths in the Mediterranean continue, and little-known places of emergency, like the borders of Belarus with the EU or in the (English) Channel last year, received more attention as deaths increased – with IOM documenting some 234 deaths in other parts of Europe here. Regions outside Europe such as the Sahel remain major dangers for many on the way to Europe. Globally, IOM reports that at least 8,938 people died on migration routes worldwide in 2024.²
- Since 2014, more than 33,000 people are reported by IOM and other sources to have lost their lives on their way to Europe, drowning at sea or in rivers, suffocated in containers on trucks or ships. The fate of those still in international waters or waters of North African countries is often unclear and their numbers increase as EU member states send boats back to Libyan waters.
- As in previous years, 2024 has not seen any systematic activity from states in search and rescue. An ongoing criminalisation of civil society actors in search and rescue or assistance at the land borders or those rescued themselves were documented in a study commissioned by the European Parliament³ and a major concern for the churches.
- Churches in Europe have responded to the ongoing loss of life at the borders of and in Europe by offering practical solidarity, but also by advocating for safe and legal ways for refugees and migrants to enter Europe. Churches in several countries have concretely offered to host those rescued at sea or relocated to unblock the political impasse and allow for disembarkation. Churches in several places are supporting or launching search and rescue initiatives. Development and humanitarian organisations of churches are working on mitigating the consequences of the ongoing crisis. Churches are among those to have organised broad civil society assistance to those forced to flee within and from Ukraine.
- CCME, together with partners, launched the “Safe Passage” project a decade ago. An exchange between churches for safe passage has thus been facilitated. Projects for sponsoring safe refugee arrivals through resettlement, humanitarian visa/humanitarian corridors and other pathways have been undertaken by more and more churches in Europe. CCME in coalition with others in September 2023 had called to “expand resettlement and safe pathways to Europe”⁴. However, the pledge of places for 2024 and beyond remains disappointing. Only 61,000 places for resettlement and humanitarian admission were pledged by the EU’s member states

¹ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>

² <https://www.iom.int/news/2024-deadliest-year-record-migrants-new-iom-data-reveals>

³ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU\(2025\)765787](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2025)765787)

⁴ https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/JS_7-priorities-to-expand-resettlement-and-safe-pathways-to-Europe_FINAL_signatories_3.pdf

for the 2-year period of 2024-25⁵.at a time when the UN Refugee agency UNHCR estimates the global resettlement needs at 2,9 million⁶. First figures of persons effectively entering Europe in 2024 that even the modest pledges have not been fulfilled. suggests

- The General Assembly of CEC, held in Budapest in July 2013, renewed the call on churches “to commemorate those who have died on their journey to find a dignified life in Europe through an annual day of prayer.” In past years, many churches and parishes across Europe have taken up this call and held commemoration services, prayers or vigils around 20 June, International Refugee Day.

⁵ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/2023-global-refugee-forum-eu-announces-resettlement-pledges-2023-12-15_en

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-2025-global-refugee-resettlement-needs-spike-almost-3-million>