



ccme

churches' commission for migrants in europe

beyond borders

since 1964



CCME Activity report 2021

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 20 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:

- 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:

2021 – more of the same ?

After the significant changes triggered by COVID in 2020, the circumstances in 2021 seemed to signal more of the same. While movement between countries, including migratory ones, slowly resumed, many of the consequences of COVID continued to impact on refugees, migrants and minority ethnic people.

While the availability and efficacy of anti-COVID vaccination in most of Europe changed certain set-ups, other patterns remained. Involving migrants in the vaccination process showed the challenges of the overall inclusion of migrants: in some countries access to vaccines was a problem for those arrived more recently, in others culturally or linguistically appropriate information on the vaccines was scarce.

In some cases, undocumented migrants may have received vaccines and even vaccination certificates but without regular ID documents remained excluded from places where a proof of vaccination was required.

Like in previous years, events around migration where orchestrated and portrayed as large-scale "crisis" around migration – where the overall rather limited scale of movements would have allowed for a swift and pragmatic response, if it had been desired. This was once again the case at the Southern and South-Eastern European sea shores, but since the summer also at the EU's Eastern borders. Once again, the most vulnerable, namely those on the move

pand 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 very brutal treatment for example at the Spanish enclave Ceuta or to very degrading and dangerous circumstances for refugees and migrants at the Polish-Belorussian border.

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 lead to minimal reactions of the EU institutions. The very clear criticism towards such practices by the Council of Europe, in particular its human rights commissioner, went largely unnoticed.



This happened against a background of increasingly “mixed” migratory movements – those arriving along the Central Mediterranean still often come from Western Africa, but there has been an increase of those originating from Maghreb countries among the newly arrived. A specific kind of arrivals were those fleeing from Afghanistan as a result of the Taliban taking over power in summer. Several tens of thousands were directly airlifted by European countries from Afghanistan and the number of those spontaneously arriving has increased too. Initial evidence however seems to suggest that most of these newly arrived in Europe had been already “en route” before the Taliban takeover

and that arrivals as a direct consequence of the events in summer are so far limited.

Overall numbers of asylum applications showed an increase compared to the exceptional year 2020, but with some 617 800 applications in the EU+ remained in line with numbers of pre-COVID period. (see European Union Asylum Agency: Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2021)

The major policy reference in 2021 continued to be the European Commission’s proposal for a “pact” on asylum and migration. It had already in late 2020 become clear that the well-known differences in opinion between different member states would make



an agreement on the different proposals in the “pact” as a whole very unlikely. Throughout 2021, the divergences rather grew with one group of EU member states requesting more solidarity from others in receiving asylum applicants and other member states calling for more responsibility of countries at the EU’s external border. One of the few areas of agreement were any kind of plans of externalising asylum and migration – such as keeping refugees and migrants in third countries, returning them more easily and barring access to full asylum procedures to those who have made it into the EU. Such plans on EU level were complemented by countries inside the EU (e.g. Denmark) or outside (the UK) developing national policies which would completely undermine asylum requests on these countries’ territory.

CCME’s work in 2021 was guided by the CCME work programme 2017-2020, which had been prolonged to cover 2021, and its thematic priorities.

Obviously, the context of COVID-19 also meant that traditional patterns of the work of CCME needed to be changed, with physical meetings being impossible for most of the year – both among members or ExCom, but also with EU policy makers or civil society in Brussels. While virtual communication tools made it possible to ‘stay in touch’, the opportunities provided by more informal encounters and direct interaction were missed in both networking and advocacy.

Safe passage

mediterranean HOPE

federazione delle chiese evangeliche in italia

Humanitarian corridors – 5 years of
Mediterranean Hope

Promoting alternatives to the current system of deaths at the borders of Europe through SAFE PASSAGES remained a priority of CCME. In view of 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 and departures also in 2021 only very slowly resumed. Many other cases were not processed. Like the previous years, CCME joined forces with other organisations insisting that resettlement activities be taken up again along with other forms of international mobility – most visibly in an appeal “Time to get resettlement moving” prior to the EU resettlement forum in July.

Throughout the year CCME highlighted the need for safe and predictable disembarkation arrangements for persons rescued at sea. 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 speedily 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 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, a hybrid event 1-3 December in Berlin and online 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, it also highlighted the intertwined opportunities and risks of community sponsorship and the specific role for churches.

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 every year CCME (and CEC) suggested commemoration in June 2021 on or around World Refugee Day.

The most comprehensive and principled expression of CCME and its members' demand for a different asylum and migration policy was the message adopted by the CCME extraordinary General Assembly in October. Under the title "Together we can save a million vulnerable humans in Europe again!", the message called for a more generous approach in welcoming vulnerable in Europe – recalling the experiences of 2015 in which Europe had despite challenges managed to protect a million newly arrived. The message also 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 received widespread attention among churches across Europe.

Europe and International Refugee Protection

As outlined above, both political and epidemiological factors led to a situation where the defence of the basic rights of access to asylum and non-refoulement became a necessity, particularly at the external borders. CCME has, despite the limitations of communication opportunities due to COVID, advocated with officials of the European Commission and members of the European Parliament to defend these minimum standards of international and EU law.

CCME has also been reaching out to churches in countries at the external borders, mainly of the EU. In addition to long-established contacts at the Southern EU borders, this in particular concerned churches in the countries neighbouring Belarus and church groups in Belarus, as a higher number of refugees and migrants



Humanitarian aid by Polish Diakonia in Polish border town Hajnowka

was coming via Belarus there, encouraged by Belarussian authorities. Given the relatively recent engagement of these churches with refugee/migrants issues, a careful balance between charitable activities and policy messages in country and on EU level was necessary.

CCME in particular tried 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.

Solidarity

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 and the respective churches. As it could be observed at the Southern EU borders, events at the Eastern border showed 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. The awareness raising was connected to the demand for a binding system of responsibility sharing within the EU. CCME also underlined how plans to kept 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.

CCME also stressed the need for shared responsibility in the cases of those rescued at sea – not least as the so-called ‘Valetta mechanism’ on these situations didn’t seem to work, leading once again to repeated standoffs after search and rescue activities.

CCME through facilitation of contacts between members and partners was able to support a number of initiatives on Greek islands, the Greek mainland but also in other countries.

The issue of ‘push-backs’ at the external borders remained very visible, both in the Mediterranean but also at land borders, be it in Greece, 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. CCME kept raising the question of the role of FRONTEX in this context.

CCME continued its work in 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 and pushed for the investigation of alleged human rights violations at the EU’s external border.

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 unfortunately impacted by COVID, but contacts are maintained virtually.

CCME’s General Secretary continues his mandate on the advisory committee of the refugee and

migration programme of the US Church World Service. Cooperation with the Presbyterian Church USA and the different bodies of the United Methodist Church were also developed further.

The fellowship of WCC members and contacts complemented the global context of cooperation. Contacts have been further revitalised and CCME didn't only contribute to several virtual events of WCC in 2021, but also joined the planning for different activities at and in preparation of the WCC General Assembly 2022 in Karlsruhe/Germany.

Upholding the Dignity of Persons, addressing discrimination

The CCME's work in this area was very much guided by the developments in European churches around the Black Lives Matter movement. A CCME virtual event on the occasion of the anniversary of the killing of Floyd George in May asked "Black Lives

Matter – what have European churches done and learnt?". The event gave account of some of the developments 2020-21 and asked how a critical and controversial conversation can be held without leading to further

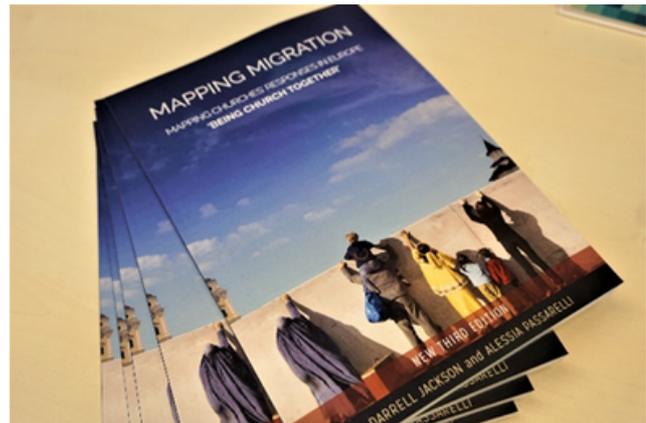
division. Critical patterns of analysis such as structural racism, the analysis of churches as actors of colonialism and white privilege on the one hand but also the concept of "safe space" on the other gave important insights.

CCME contributed these discussion and insight to the global event series by WCC and the Council on World Mission "Anti-racist in Christ – Ecumenical Christian Repentance, Reflection and Action on Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia" in June 2021.

Uniting in diversity/being church together

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 mean for traditional Protestantism.

The 3rd edition of the Mapping Migration study which had been completed in late 2020 was rolled out throughout 2021.



As with previous editions, both the detailed information on churches activities and statistical data on migration in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe inspired discussions as well as efforts of churches across Europe to map their own activities.

CCME continued to monitor the development of inter-religious work on migration e.g. through contacts with Jewish HIAS or the intergovernmental KAICIID.

CCME internal



CCME GA October 2021

The COVID situation also had a massive impact on the internal life of CCME beyond events.

The extraordinary CCME General Assembly was finally held in October 2021 with the majority of delegates attending in person and others via zoom. It adopted a multi-annual work programme with stronger prioritising, welcomed three new members, changed the

outdated CCME statutes and in its General Assembly message formulated the vision of a different asylum and migration policy (see above).

The COVID pandemic also had a major impact on the work of the Executive Committee (ExCom), which only meet briefly once in “real life” (with some

members calling in virtually) prior to the extraordinary General Assembly. While certain aspects of the work can be undertaken using virtual meeting formats, a real exchange and common development is still very difficult for such a diverse group that has never met as a whole in real life.

While CCME was able to organise virtual events on a number of important issues, it has generally been a problem that exclusively virtual meetings significantly limit the dynamic and depth of exchanges.

CCME continued its organisational consolidation, addressing both requirements for CCME itself (such as accounting arrangements) and for CCME as part of the owners' association of the Ecumenical Centre Brussels.

CCME continued the close co-operation with CEC, the Conference of European Churches, particularly with the CEC General Secretary and Finance Secretary, but also in direct work with other staff, member churches, governing board and working

instruments of CEC. As foreseen in the CCME-CEC agreement 2018-24 and in the strategy of CEC for 2019-23, CEC is working "with and through CCME" on migration and related issues.

It was against this background a major shock to learn in late November that the CEC governing board had unilaterally decided to terminate essential aspects of the CCME-CEC cooperation agreement not least the funding of a staff position. CCME and CEC have agreed on a new scenario in which this support is phased out until 2024, but it is clear that the financial feasibility of CCME is in danger at the moment. Members will have to decide if they will in the future adequately resource an organisation working with them and for them.

The secretariat saw significant staff changes: Executive Secretary Shari Brown has returned to Birmingham at the end of September.

Office manager Emmanuel Kabalisa left CCME after 23 years of faithful service in mid-October for an assignment in Belgian foreign relations. Tremendous thanks go to both of them! CCME staff and colleagues in the Ecumenical Centre Brussels as well as ExCom and members said good bye to them at little ceremonies in the house and during the extraordinary GA. CCME was lucky that Christine Rugurika joined the team as office administrator in October.

An external accountancy company assures accurate and transparent book-keeping.

The internships of Oisin Desmond and Deborah Romano provided CCME with excellent support – mainly around the events on Community sponsorship and conversion in the asylum procedure, but also in the context of the extraordinary GA. Many thanks to both!

The financial situation has been almost balanced in 2021. The year closed with a result of 1.820,65 EUR for the programme activities[1].

[1] CCME's part ownership of the Ecumenical Centre added a minus of 6.051,16 EUR, largely due to depreciation after renovation.



First meeting of the CCME ExCom 2020-23

Funding and fundraising remain challenging, as major parts of income are related to project/event funding, which was highly problematic when events couldn't go ahead as planned due to COVID-19. Fundraising and accounting/reporting take up large amounts of time, which cannot be used for networking or advocacy.

CCME is financially very vulnerable as membership fees only cover a fraction of the costs related to ongoing service which CCME provides for members. The stop of CEC's financial support will further exacerbate the problem.

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.

Thanks go to all those who have helped CCME and its mission in these difficult times – ExCom (outgoing and incoming), 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."

*“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)