



Conference of European Churches

GENSEC-2022-063 CCME 022/005



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

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

16 May 2022

World Refugee Day: Call to commemorate refugees who lost their lives in the Mediterranean

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

In this period of Ascension and Pentecost, filled with hope and light intended for all humankind, we are 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 2022)** the persons who lost their lives in the Mediterranean. We encourage churches to hold dedicated services, prayers and vigils on 19 June.

Our appeal is made in times when the war in Ukraine rages on. The direct consequences of the Ukraine war continue and will continue to force people to flee. There is a high risk that the war will also indirectly undermine any option of a decent livelihood. A proactive policy mitigating the global consequences of the war will be required to avoid people resorting to dangerous escape routes. Our prayers and actions for the refugees consequently become more significant than ever.

You will find a short factsheet attached. We are also offering resources that can be used as worship materials or intercessions during a service. In 2018, we updated these materials, which were initially produced together with the German Ecumenical Committee on Church Asylum, supported by the Evangelical Church in Berlin, Brandenburg and Silesian Oberlausitz and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). The resources are available in English and German and can be downloaded from the [CCME website](#).

As churches and Christians, our calling is to be witnesses and servants of the Resurrection, as well as new life in justice and peace for all, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religion. We

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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.eu about your activities and share any resources you have developed.

With our best wishes and greetings,



Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen
General Secretary
Conference of European Churches
Europe



Dr Torsten Moritz
General Secretary
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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 in the Mediterranean, including responses from churches on the situation, together with useful links.

- Around 2,720 persons lost their lives in 2021 on the borders of and within Europe, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)¹. This represents a steep increase compared to the previous year in which COVID-19 substantially reduced mobility. 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.
- Since 2000, more than 30,000 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, 2021 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 borders² or those rescued themselves have remained evident 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 situation. 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 few years 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, and connected through an event conducted in December 2021. On a political level, in December 2019 the EU pledged for more resettlement in 2020 – arrivals did not, however, fully resume in 2021 despite an improving COVID-19 situation.
- 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.

¹ <https://www.iom.int/news/rising-migrant-deaths-top-4400-year-iom-records-more-45000-2014>

² See the recent briefing by the International Commission of Jurists <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Criminalization-paper-22-04-2022.pdf>