



Conference of European Churches

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Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

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

12th May 2026

## **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 sisters 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 2026) 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 **21 June 2026**. For some, commemorations on other dates or occasions in the year have become a tradition.

Our appeal is made a few weeks before the EU asylum and migration pact needs to be officially be implemented – with consequences in the EU and beyond.

This “pact” and legislation adopted 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 a situation where humanitarian support activities, including search and rescue activities continue to be criminalised – with churches, NGOs or migrants themselves being affected.

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 has in late 2024 been completely overhauled and updated .

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](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.

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As churches 'organisations and Christians, our calling at this crucial point 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 who are vulnerable and 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](mailto: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  
General Secretary  
Churches' Commission for Migrants in  
Europe

## 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 2,200 persons lost their lives in 2025 in and on the borders of the Mediterranean alone, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)<sup>1</sup>. 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. Regions outside Europe such as the Sahel remain major dangers for many on the way to Europe. Globally, IOM reports that at least 7,904 people died on migration routes worldwide in 2025.<sup>2</sup>
- Since 2014, more than 34,000 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 these North African waters.
- As in previous years, 2025 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 recent studies<sup>3</sup> and a remain 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<sup>4</sup>. 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 early 2026 had called to “urge EU Member States to fulfil and exceed their current pledges<sup>5</sup>” (on refugee resettlement).

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data>

<sup>3</sup> <https://picum.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Criminalisation-of-solidarity-with-migrants-in-the-EU-2025.pdf> and <https://searchandrescue.msf.org/news/the-obstruction-of-search-and-rescue-vessels-causes-hundreds-of-deaths-at-sea.html>

<sup>4</sup> See the article of Ansgar Gilster in CCME/WCC: Mapping migration 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 109 ff at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/mapping-migration-4th-edition>

<sup>5</sup> [http://ccme.eu/storage/app/media/uploads/2026%20documents/Union%20Plan%20Statement\\_Jan%202026%20final.pdf](http://ccme.eu/storage/app/media/uploads/2026%20documents/Union%20Plan%20Statement_Jan%202026%20final.pdf)

However, the pledge of places for 2026 and beyond remains extremely disappointing. Only 10,430 places for resettlement and humanitarian admission were pledged by the EU's member states for the 2-year period of 2026-27<sup>6</sup>.at a time when the UN Refugee agency UNHCR estimates the global resettlement needs at 2.5 million<sup>7</sup>.

- 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.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L.202502628>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/2026-projected-global-resettlement-needs-pgrn>