

## 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 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 members 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>