

As you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.

Matthew 25:40

ALL refugees welcome¹

Easter statement of European church leaders 2022 on Europe's commitment to refugees

We are addressing you in these days before the feast of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as leaders of African instituted, Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, Orthodox and Protestant churches and organisations in Europe.

Together we want to share our reflections, concerns and hopes on the reception across Europe of refugees fleeing from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The welcome of refugees from Ukraine—a sign of hope and encouragement in dark times

Against the background of atrocities committed in the war waged by the Russian leadership against Ukraine, individuals, groups, organisations and not least our churches have responded with empathy, warmth and concrete solidarity for fellow human beings fleeing from the war. Support is continuing into Ukraine where still possible. In neighbouring countries, support extends from immediate welcome to long-term needs. European states and the European Union have so far responded by activating some of the most generous legislation and programmes in history, involving many non-state actors.

Certainly, there are still problems that need to be resolved. More effort from governmental actors will be needed in the near future, as sustaining the response by civil society and individual volunteers will become more challenging. Durable solutions will need to be found.

Overall, however, Europe has so far shown that it can be a champion of refugee protection. Commitment remains strong even as the arrivals continue. This should be an encouragement and an inducement to continue this commitment beyond the current context.

The welcome of refugees—a central biblical commitment

Extending welcome and hospitality to “strangers” or “aliens” and those in need has been a central motif of Christianity since its early days. Apostle Paul reminds us in his letter to the Hebrews: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2)². This Christian leitmotif takes up the Old Testament's teaching that “when an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:33–34). This God-given imperative connects the equal treatment of the stranger/alien to the obligatory response that arises from connection and relationship with God. In translating this understanding for his day, Jesus reminded his listeners that “as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

¹ The “ALL refugees welcome” headline underlines that all refugees should be welcomed on equal terms in the existing legal framework, irrespective of their origin, colour of skin, gender, orientation, ability, or residence status. As mentioned, Europe is, has been and will be far from welcoming all refugees on the planet.

² All biblical passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version

The welcome of refugees—to be extended to all in need of protection

It is painful for us to hear reports that persons trying to flee Ukraine in recent weeks were discriminated against based on their ethnicity, religion or origin. Based on both our Christian convictions and international law, it is unacceptable that such incidents occur. We welcome activities of international and European institutions to ensure broad and equal access for those in Europe in need of international protection.

The welcome of refugees from Ukraine—commitment and encouragement for the future

Amid the hope, which we derive from Europe's generous welcome of refugees from Ukraine, we also note that this response is different from the one received by many people escaping from other wars or disasters in recent years. There have been wonderful examples of compassion, solidarity and hospitality in these situations, too—not least among churches—but in many cases doors have remained closed.

Europe so far hosts only a small proportion of refugees globally, as most people remain in the immediate neighbourhood of these conflicts. It may be understandable that a war nearby triggers a greater response than a conflict that seems far away. We are also aware that the challenge of adequately welcoming persons fleeing from Ukraine will become more pressing over the coming weeks and months, especially as more long-term integration will be needed.³

It is our conviction and hope that Europe can and must provide welcome to those knocking at its door who are in need of its protection. This should be in solidarity with newly arrived and among Europeans and different European countries. We therefore hope and believe that the welcome of refugees from Ukraine so far extended by Europe will set an example and be a commitment to the welcome of refugees in the future—irrespective of their origin, colour of skin, gender, orientation, ability or residence status.

We invite Europe—its citizens, societies, states and political institutions—to join us in this current commitment and in the future efforts that will be needed. In this invitation, we echo the biblical encouragement: “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7).

11th April 2022

³ For more details on needs and challenges in welcoming refugees from Ukraine, see the ecumenical statement of nine international European Christian organisations: <https://ccme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CG-Ukraine-Statement-Final-march2022.pdf>.

INITIAL SIGNATORIES (AS OF 11th April 2022)

Austria: Bishop Michael Chalupka, Bishop of the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession

Belgium: Rev. Steven H. Fuite, President of the United Protestant Church in Belgium

Czechia: Rev. Pavel Pokorný, Synodal Senior Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

Finland: His Eminence, Archbishop Leo of Helsinki and All Finland, Finnish Orthodox Church
The Most Rev. Dr. Tapio Luoma, Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Germany: Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, Bishop for ecumenical relations and Bishop Christian Stäblein, Representative on Refugees and Migration, Protestant Church in Germany (EKD)

Rev. Christoph Stiba, General Secretary of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany

Greece: His Beatitude Ieronymos II, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Church of Greece

Italy: Prof. Daniele Garrone, President of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI)

The Reverend Austin K. Rios , Executive Director, Joel Nafuma Refugee Center, Saint Paul's Within the Walls, Rome (The Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion)

Netherlands: Rev. dr. René de Reuver, General Secretary of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN)

Poland: Rev. Andrzej Malicki, General Superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Poland

Spain: Rev. Alfredo Abad Heras, President, Spanish Evangelical Church (IEE)

UK: Mr. Patrick J Coyle, Chair, Cytûn - Churches Together in Wales

Right Reverend Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani Bishop of Chelmsford and Vice-President of the Conference of European Churches, Church of England

His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain

Right Revd Dr John Perumbalath, Bishop of Bradwell, Chair of the Churches Refugee Network of CTBI, Church of England

Lord Wallace of Tankerness (Jim Wallace), Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Europe wide & international:

Special Apostle Pastor John Adegoke, Chairman, Unification of Cherubim and Seraphim Churches, Europe Chapter

Mr Thomas Bucher, General Secretary, European Evangelical Alliance

Rev. Anne Burghardt, General Secretary, Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Alan Donaldson, General Secretary, European Baptist Federation

Right Reverend Mark D. W. Edington, Bishop in Charge, The Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe (The Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion)

Sr. Jolanta Kafka rmi and Sr. Patricia Murray ibvm, President and Executive Secretary of the International Union of Superiors

Rev. Christian Krieger, President, Conference of European Churches

Ms Heather Roy, Secretary General, Eurodiaconia

Bishop Harald Ruckert & Doug Swanney, Co-Chairs, European Methodist Council

Mr Jan De Volder, Secretary-General of Sant' Egidio Brussels Europe



Facilitated by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)

Contact:

CCME, General Secretary, Dr. Torsten Moritz,

174 rue Joseph II, 1000 Brussels Belgium, Torsten.moritz@ccme.be