

SAFE PASSAGE

What is Safe Passage?

Safe passage means providing people in need of international protection with a safe and legal way to enter Europe – for example, by reducing visa restrictions to make it possible to take a regular flight.

Why is it important?

All European countries are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, according to which they are legally obliged to provide access to asylum procedures to those seeking international protection. Access to the asylum procedure in European countries is only possible on their territories.

However, legal access to Europe for asylum seekers is currently extremely limited, which means that people in vulnerable situations have to undertake very dangerous and irregular journeys to reach Europe.

The lack of legal routes, combined with the high demand for travel to Europe, lets the business of smugglers flourish. In addition, the lack of safe passage means that European countries are not able to manage and control who enters their territory.

What does it mean in practice?

There are a number of practical ways to provide safe passage for refugees. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe – CCME - is calling on European governments to implement the following:

- Maintaining search and rescue operations at sea, preferably civilian;
- Guaranteeing access to asylum procedures in the EU and decent and adequate reception conditions;
- Increasing the number of resettlement places for refugees;
- Suspending visa requirements for refugees from war areas and dictatorships;
- Issuing humanitarian visa to refugees from crisis regions;
- Providing more flexible and generous opportunities for family reunification;
- Mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions within EU and Schengen member states;
- Establishing a fair sharing of responsibility for refugee reception among EU member states.

What is the current status?

Over the years, and most visibly during 2015, the political discourse has focused on securing borders and enhancing controls to stop people from reaching the EU. However, even without any legal passage, people who are in desperate need of safety will attempt the journey. The difference is that travelling is more dangerous and deadly – in 2016 alone, more than 5,000 people lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean.

Stopping people from coming is not possible. However, organising and managing their arrival to Europe to seek protection is possible. Implementing safe and legal channels would greatly contribute to reducing the loss of lives and dismantling the business of smugglers.

