

Cease pushbacks now!

Caritas Europa urges states to respect the Geneva Refugee Convention and human dignity at EU borders

As people die in the freezing forests of north-eastern Europe, Caritas Europa cannot remain silent. In reaction to the European Council's October session, we call on EU leaders to uphold human dignity and to ensure humanitarian access to people in need at the EU's borders.

The death toll at the border between Belarus and Poland **rose to eight**, as the body of a 19-year-old Syrian was found in a river on Wednesday, 20 October. Hundreds of others, including families and children from Iraq and Afghanistan, are stuck in the no man's land between both countries. The situation is also extremely challenging for migrants on Belarus' borders with Latvia and Lithuania, where NGOs are struggling to respond due to emergency laws preventing access to the border and a harsh COVID-19 lockdown. Reports have also documented several cases of pushbacks and violence towards migrants. We remind our leaders of the obligation to uphold EU law and respect the right to asylum at the external border.

“ Every person, no matter where they come from, is like a sister or brother to us. This spurs us to make every effort to help. It is about saving lives.

Fr. Marcin Iżycki, Director of Caritas Poland

While EU leaders talk about the 'weaponisation' of migrants by Belarus, Caritas Europa recalls that all human beings, regardless of their origin or reasons for travel, should have their rights respected. Geopolitical tensions should not be a pretext to let people die for trying to cross a border, or to shirk responsibilities to protect the right to asylum.

“ People should never be dehumanised and should always be treated with respect and dignity. The EU must now do the utmost to prevent further deaths at its borders and provide aid to people who are literally freezing to death.

Michael Landau, President of Caritas Europa

We are extremely worried that the latest legislative developments in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland impede access to asylum in the EU, and legitimise pushbacks, undermining the Refugee Convention and EU law on asylum. The European Commission should carefully analyse and monitor these legislative changes and take legal action as needed to ensure compliance with the EU asylum acquis, including access to asylum and adequate reception conditions. Building expensive walls is not in accordance with EU values, nor should it be endorsed by EU Institutions as a response.

While we recognise the challenges faced by EU countries bordering Belarus due to the increase of migrant arrivals since the summer, we remind all countries that border management must take place with respect to human rights and international law.

The thousands of people who braved the cold in **Warsaw** on Sunday, 17 October to call for solidarity with migrants and the end of pushbacks and violence, show that EU citizens do care for human rights and human dignity, regardless of political rhetoric or legislation. Building walls and violence against migrants cannot be the way forward for the Union.



more information

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about caritas

Caritas Europa is a network of 49 member organisations in 46 European countries and one of the 7 regions of Caritas Internationalis. Our members assist and provide services to millions of people in need.

Caritas Europa aims at lifting people out of poverty by empowering them and by influencing unjust structures and unfair policies that keep people trapped in positions of disempowerment.