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EU's migration policy must be rooted in protection, solidarity and dignity

As EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivered today her State of the Union address at the European Parliament, Caritas Europa reaffirms that Europe's response to migration cannot entirely focus on deterrence, return, restriction to access to asylum and externalisation.

In her speech, President Von Der Leyen called for a stronger European response to migration, including a new European Emergency Response Framework for sudden and large-scale arrivals, stronger support for border management and a reinforced role for Frontex, particularly on returns.

As an organisation working to protect people's human dignity and human rights, we reiterate that the EU cannot keep on ignoring the reasons why people migrate, be it for protection, the search for a more dignified life or to reunite with family members. Border management should not come at the expense of a strong asylum system, safe and regular pathways, responsibility-sharing or dignified, rights-compliant measures.

We are concerned that the events of Ceuta are being used to promote plans to restrict and suspend access to asylum in Europe. The tragedy in Ceuta, where at least 140 people lost their lives and, [according to Spanish authorities](#), an estimated 700 to 1,000 children remain on the streets, should serve as a stark reminder of why protection must remain at the centre of Europe's response. We also recognise the profound impact on the people of Ceuta, whose community, public services and local institutions have come under immense pressure.

We echo President von der Leyen's reaffirmation that Europe should always uphold its values and fundamental rights. This commitment must also guide the response to situations such as Ceuta. As she underlined, these challenges require a European response based on solidarity and practical support to the local communities. This must not, however, come at the expense of people's right to seek asylum.

A comprehensive response is needed to ensure that people arriving in Europe are properly identified, that children and other people in vulnerable situations are protected, and that they receive humanitarian assistance and are referred to the appropriate services.

"Europe has both the capacity and the responsibility to protect people seeking safety. The answer to the challenges at our borders cannot be to close the door to those who need protection; instead, we need to build a European system based on responsibility-sharing, solidarity and human dignity. Whether it is trade, climate change or artificial intelligence – Europe will have to tackle these issues together."

Michael Landau,
President of Caritas Europa.

Rather than restricting access to asylum in Europe, the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum should prioritise establishing dignified asylum and reception systems with robust safeguards, including for children, families and other people in vulnerable situations.

This is not only a policy ambition. Caritas organisations across Europe demonstrate daily that humane and effective ways to welcome and support people forced to migrate are possible, through programmes that provide

care for unaccompanied children, safe reception centres for people in vulnerable situations, community sponsorships that foster integration, and social and legal counselling to help people rebuild their lives.

“Our members know from experience that humane and effective responses are possible. We want to see this experience reflected in European policies, policies that protect people while also supporting communities and Member States.”

Maria Nyman,
Secretary General of Caritas Europa.

Europe can respond to migration with both responsibility and humanity. In the face of uncertainty and pressure, we must not lose sight of the people behind the numbers and of Europe’s responsibility to protect those in need.

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About Caritas Europa

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 works with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all. We believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies.