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## Europe must stand for asylum

**On this World Refugee Day, Caritas Europa calls to safeguard the right to asylum in Europe and expand safe pathways, such as resettlement and family reunification procedures, instead of eroding them.**

While protection needs remain at record level with more than [123 million](#) people living forcibly outside of their home country due to war, conflict, violence, persecution and the impact of climate change, we call on European governments to safeguard the right to asylum, which is increasingly being threatened in Europe and beyond.

Amid growing stigmatisation, scapegoating and criminalisation of migrants and refugees – and escalating attacks, whether verbal, legal, [financial](#) or even physical, against the civil society organisations and volunteers who defend their rights – Caritas Europa sounds the alarm: the right to asylum in Europe is under serious threat.

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. Additionally, EU Member States must properly apply the new [solidarity mechanism](#), with a strong emphasis on relocations to alleviate pressure on countries of first arrival.

At the same time, EU Member States should expand, not restrict, [access to safe pathways](#), such as resettlement, humanitarian admission and humanitarian corridors, in line with their commitments under the [Union Resettlement Framework](#). Family reunification must also be facilitated rather than hindered, as current restrictions in several countries continue to keep families apart.

Across Europe, Caritas organisations demonstrate daily that humane and effective ways to welcome and support people forced to flee 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. However, these humane approaches are increasingly threatened by worrying policy trends.

We are deeply concerned by a string of recent policies at EU and national level which tend to further externalise asylum responsibilities outside of the EU and restrict access to asylum in Europe. The European Commission's recent proposals to reform the concepts of "safe third countries" and "safe countries of origin" illustrate this tendency.

If approved, the ["safe third countries" reform proposal](#) would facilitate the transfer of asylum seekers to a so-called "safe third country", even if the person has neither transited through it nor has any connection with it. In such cases, the person's asylum application would no longer be examined in the EU Member State but would instead be deferred to the designated non-EU country (i.e. the "safe third country").

We are concerned that such a policy would further shift asylum responsibilities outside of the EU, increasing the risk that individuals and families may face inadequate reception conditions, legal uncertainty or even refoulement in the countries to which they are transferred without even accessing protection.

Moreover, this approach echoes failed past initiatives, such as the widely criticised UK-Rwanda deal, ultimately abandoned after being deemed [unlawful by the UK's highest court](#) and costing taxpayers [up to £715 million](#) (€ 837.5 million), and Greece's designation of Turkey as a "safe third country" for several nationalities, which was later [overturned by a Greek court](#).

Equally concerning is the European Commission's proposal to establish an [EU list of "safe countries of origin"](#), which contains countries where significant human rights compliance issues have been reported, such as [Egypt](#).

Morocco and Tunisia. This would result in fast-tracked asylum procedures for individuals from these so-called “safe countries of origin”, heightening the risk of returning people to countries where they may face persecution and violence, thereby violating the principle of non-refoulement.

“ We urge European leaders to uphold the right to asylum and refrain from shifting their responsibilities to non-EU countries. Even in challenging times, Europe has the capacity – and the moral and legal duty – to protect those fleeing war, conflict or persecution. As democracy and the rule of law face global threats, EU Member States must respect their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and EU law and defend a strong, fair and dignified asylum system.

**Maria Nyman**  
**Secretary General Caritas Europa**

Now, more than ever, Europe must demonstrate global leadership by embracing a more welcoming approach that respects refugees’ human rights and dignity, enabling them to thrive and contribute to their new communities.

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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.



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