



Regularization of Migrants in Administrative Irregular Status

In most countries, migrants are frequently overrepresented among the most vulnerable persons. This is particularly true for those in irregular status. As the Covid-19 crisis is amply demonstrating, in emergency situations migrant precarious workers risk losing all sources of income and, if irregular, being excluded from all public subsidies. Their vulnerable situation has an immediate impact on the well-being of their families, including the families back home who suffer from diminished remittances. These and other concerns have led to the reopening of the debate in many countries on regularization of migrants whose administrative status is irregular. The Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is determined to support the call for a massive campaign to regularize irregular migrants, clarifying its reasons for advocating such a campaign and suggesting methods of implementation.

The reasons

In current conditions, most of the ‘political’ arguments in favor of regularization are utilitarian in nature. They are related to workforce shortages, particularly in the agriculture sector; forecasts of reduced migration inflows; and the impossibility of deporting or repatriating irregular migrants in the short run.

From the perspective of the social teachings of the Catholic Church, the call for regularization is grounded in the conviction that “the primary commitment of each person towards others, and particularly of these same [political and social] institutions, must be for the promotion and integral development of the person” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 131). And this principle applies not only to the citizen members of any given political institution, but also to all persons living in the territory. Any action or condition that jeopardizes the achievement of anyone’s integral human development should be avoided. Irregular administrative status is one such condition, and it can be easily changed by an administrative act.

Opponents of regularization argue that such a measure is likely to have several negative consequences. In reality, most of them depend on how the regularization is

implemented, and the rest would eventually constitute a ‘lesser evil’ compared to the present situation.

The methods

In consideration of the variety and complexity of national and regional situations, it is advisable to develop different plans to achieve regularization. They would target different categories of migrants in irregular administrative status and be tailored to each unique situation. Nevertheless, the plans would all be consistent with the promotion of integral human development and with the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: ‘no one left behind.’

To be really effective, regularization measures should be implemented together with programmes aimed at the labor market participation and social inclusion of beneficiaries. Such programmes should pay due attention to migrants’ family integrity and the preparation and empowerment of local communities for a successful two-way integration process.

Regularization measures should be complemented with initiatives aimed at preventing the rapid re-creation of new irregular situations, i.e. programmes targeted to effectively combat irregular employment. Moreover, wider and easier channels for regular migration should be offered, so as to make the use of irregular pathways unnecessary.

Regularization must not be understood or communicated as ‘the solution,’ but as an extraordinary measure to be taken so as to quickly restore the decent life and dignity of many human beings, while providing a conducive environment for the development of immigration and integration policies consistent with the model of shared governance envisioned in the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular migration*.

Migrants & Refugee Section

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

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