



The "right" not to have to emigrate

The decision to emigrate is not always a free decision. Indeed, in today's world, burdened by growing inequality, lack of opportunity, environmental crises, conflicts, and human rights violations, many are forced to flee their homeland, in order to seek better life prospects for themselves or their families, or simply to survive.¹

While violence, conflict, and climate change contribute most significantly to involuntary migration, economic development is also a major factor. Some regions of the world are more privileged than others, and within each society, access to the common good – work, health, education, welfare – is not always guaranteed. In the absence of opportunities for personal and family fulfillment, migration sometimes emerges as the only truly possible choice.²

In this regard, the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development considers it important that the local churches, in a spirit of fraternity and justice, commit themselves to working together with their governments in order to ensure that all of their fellow citizens have the conditions necessary for accessing integral human development in their homeland, *without being forced to emigrate*.

In this sense, the so-called "right" not to have to emigrate is understood as the fundamental right of every individual "to life, liberty, and the security of their person,"³ that is, to lead a life of dignity in one's country of origin. When this right is not guaranteed, everyone's right "to freedom of movement"⁴ to seek a better life, particularly for his or her family, becomes even more imperative.

Reasons

With this conviction, Benedict XVI recalled the need to look carefully at the primary causes of migration in order to fully understand it as a phenomenon, and to not overlook the fact that: "even before the right to migrate, there is need to reaffirm the

¹ Pope Francis, *Message for the 100th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 5 August 2013.

² Pope Francis, *Prayer Vigil in preparation for World Youth Day*, 8 April 2017.

³ *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Article 3.

⁴ *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Article 13.

right not to emigrate, that is, to remain in one's homeland."⁵ His predecessor, St. John Paul II, had also stated that "it is a basic human right to live in one's own country. However, this right becomes effective only if the factors that urge people to emigrate are constantly kept under control."⁶

With Pope Francis, the Church renewed its commitment to supporting "all who work to defend person's right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one's country of origin."⁷ For this to happen, the Holy Father reiterates, it is necessary to help the countries from which migrants and refugees depart, through "solidarity, cooperation, international interdependence and the equitable distribution of the earth's goods," in order to "avert, if possible at the earliest stages, the flight of refugees and departures as a result of poverty, violence and persecution."⁸

The co-responsibility of civil society and governments in the worldwide development of all peoples imposes new forms of solidarity, which the Holy Father identifies "in helping to develop populations left behind and levelling countries that enjoy certain standards and levels of development and those that are unable to guarantee the bare minimum to their populations."⁹

The international community, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also stresses the need to promote an inclusive economy and create favourable conditions for work and schooling.¹⁰

Moreover, in a similar vein, the Global Compact for Migration, in seeking to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, has as one of its goals to "mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin, and so compel them to seek a future elsewhere."¹¹

Methods

The Migrants and Refugees Section advocates the promotion of equal access of all people to the common good at all levels of society, "so that every person has the opportunity to express and realize his or her life project and can develop fully as a

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 99th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 12 October 2012.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Address to the IV World Congress on Migration*, 9 October 1998.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Message for the 102nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 12 September 2015.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Message for the 102nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 12 September 2015.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, 5 February 2020.

¹⁰ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Resolution 70/1*, 25 September 2015.

¹¹ *Global Compact for Migration, Shared Responsibilities*, 12. 19 December 2018.

person."¹² To this end, it encourages local Churches to develop and initiate, in concert with their governments, public programs that aim to ensure, through the participation of all citizens, universal access to proper housing, decent and duly paid work, adequate food, and clean water as indispensable goods and conditions for a life of dignity.

He also believes that access to basic education for all should be guaranteed through norms that recognize the equal right to education, without discrimination of any kind, including social discrimination. With this in mind, Pope Francis has launched the initiative of a Global Educational Pact, for a more open and inclusive education. Government authorities can and should, therefore, count on the Church's commitment to build a "village of education" that has the courage to put the person at the centre, invest the best energies with creativity and responsibility, and train people willing to put themselves at the service of the community.¹³

In order to ensure conditions of well-being in the areas from which emigration flows, a greater effort would be needed, from all actors in society, in order to end economic injustices. Competitiveness and the "survival of the fittest," which often lead to depriving the most disadvantaged countries of the resources necessary for their development, must give way to economic aid and the cancellation of debts, as well as the reduction of international sanctions that make it difficult for States to provide adequate support to their populations.¹⁴

As the Holy Father states: "The earth has been devastated by the excessive exploitation of its resources and by decades of pollution. As a result, more and more people are forced to leave their lands, which have become uninhabitable."¹⁵ It is time, therefore, for a common commitment, as well as serious, concrete and shared responses from all countries, to put a real brake on the climate crisis and its effects on migration. In this sense, the world of academia is also called upon in order to play a leading role in providing scientific data that can "guide and inform the decisions of government leaders in support of an effective care for our common home."¹⁶

Finally, it is reiterated that "dialogue – not arms – is the essential way to resolve disputes."¹⁷ In this regard, "the theme of disarmament will have a central place, [...] the

¹² Pope Francis, *Message for 47th World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2014.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Global Compact for Education, Vademecum*, 12 September 2019.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Videomessage for the 75th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization*, 25 September 2020.

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the meeting refugees, Pontifical Gregorian University*, 29 September 2022.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the meeting refugees, Pontifical Gregorian University*, 29 September 2022.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See*, 9 January 2020.

enormous funds that continue to be destined to weaponry may be diverted to development, health care, and nutrition."¹⁸

Therefore, there is a need for dialogue to find ways of peace by which migrants can live and also return to their homeland in dignity, freedom, and security.

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¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Journey to Malta: Meeting with the authorities, civil society, and diplomatic corps*, 2 April 2022.