



MIGRANTS  
REFUGEES

## Plenary Assembly of the Council of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Europe

25-27 September 2020, Prague

### *Responding to Recent Challenges in the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe*

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Most Reverend Eminences and Excellencies,  
Reverend Monsignors and Fathers,  
Dear friends,

I cordially greet you and thank the organizers for having kindly accepted my request to speak at your Plenary Assembly.

In this speech I would like to suggest three points for your consideration. First, I would like to briefly describe the Holy Father's Message for the 106<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which this year will be celebrated tomorrow, Sunday, 27 September. Secondly, I would like to briefly illustrate the work of the Section for Migrants and Refugees and highlight the work we have done during this pandemic. Finally, I will devote a few words to the common mission of the universal Church and local Churches in relation to the pastoral care of migrants.

#### **1. A Brief Discussion of the Message for WDMR 2020**

Since the beginning of his papacy, the core of Pope Francis' teachings on migration has revolved around four action verbs: welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating.<sup>1</sup> In this year's message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, these four verbs refer specifically to forced internal migration. The title of the Holy Father's Message dedicated to the Day we will celebrate tomorrow is "Forced like Jesus Christ to Flee: Welcoming, Protecting,

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Address to participants in the International Forum "Migrations and Peace"*, 21 February 2017  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/speeches/2017/february/documents/papa-Francis\\_20170221\\_forum-migrazioni-pace.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/speeches/2017/february/documents/papa-Francis_20170221_forum-migrazioni-pace.html)

Promoting, and Integrating Internally Displaced Persons".<sup>2</sup>

In this year's Message, these four verbs are further developed into six pairs of verbs that are linked together by causality: know in order to understand, be close in order to serve, listen in order to be reconciled, share in order to grow, be involved in order to promote, and cooperate in order to build.

There are currently about 50.8 million internally displaced people in the world, of whom 45.7 million have been displaced due to conflict and violence and 5.1 million due to environmental disasters. "When we talk about migrants and displaced persons, - the Holy Father said - all too often we stop at statistics. But it is not about statistics, it is about real people! If we encounter them, we will get to know more about them. And knowing their stories, we will be able to understand them."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, numbers and statistics are useful if they effectively convey the growing need for solidarity and cooperation.

The invitation to concrete action that is expressed by the last pair of verbs, prompts us to work together to build something. We must learn how to join forces and harmonize our efforts to make our shared commitment to build and rebuild our common home possible. Regarding COVID-19, the Pope reiterated that cooperation and solidarity are necessary and urgent conditions for re-construction. "This is not a time for self-centredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons."<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The work of the M&R Section

Since January 2017, under the direct guidance of the Holy Father, the Section for Migrants and Refugees has clearly pointed to a fundamental aspect of the mission of the Church, namely to assist the people of God, as they experience *the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of contemporary people, especially the poor and all those who suffer* (Vatican Council II, 1965). The main task of our Section is to support the Church - at the local, regional, and international level - in assisting people at every stage of their forced migration journey.

### *Pastoral Documents*

In an effort to best fulfil the mission that was entrusted to us by the Holy Father, in recent years our Section has drawn up a number of pastoral documents on issues that fall within its scope of activity. These documents are meant to inspire the work of our Section and its partners and are always drafted in consultation with Catholic organizations and religious congregations. Then, they are submitted to the Catholic Bishops' Conferences for further

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, *Message for the 106th World Migrant and Refugee Day 2020*  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/messages/migration/documents/papa-Francis\\_20200513\\_world-migrants-day-2020.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/messages/migration/documents/papa-Francis_20200513_world-migrants-day-2020.html)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Message Urbi et Orbi, 12 April 2020*  
[http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/messages/urbi/documents/papa-Francis\\_20200412\\_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/Francis/it/messages/urbi/documents/papa-Francis_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html)

additions and comments, to the Secretariat of State to be reviewed, and finally to the Holy Father for his approval.

Let me first mention two comprehensive documents issued in 2018. In *Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Action Points of Pastoral Action*, our Section developed the four-verb approach of Pope Francis even further, introducing practical guidelines to help plan and assess pastoral care of people on the move. A companion document entitled *Twenty Action Points for Global Compacts* was published and adopted by the Holy See as its official contribution to the consultations and negotiations involving two Global Compacts - the first on refugees and the other on orderly, regular, and safe migration.<sup>5</sup>

The *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking*,<sup>6</sup> published in 2019, is meant to provide a key to reading and understanding human trafficking in order to corroborate and support the necessary and lasting fight against this scourge by enhancing and promoting actions to counter and prevent human trafficking, with the participation of all relevant players.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, the Section for M&R published the *Pastoral Orientations on Internally Displaced People*<sup>7</sup> - a document that provides practical guidelines to local Churches affected by forced displacement and identifies pastoral practices that can be implemented and renewed.

Each title is meant to provide a key to reading and understanding the phenomena of human movement, displacement and vulnerability; to inspire pastoral action and social, moral and political advocacy; and to share best practices. One important observation is that there are overlaps in the categories: for instance, people seeking an acceptable life for themselves and their children by migrating can fall victim to the scourge of human trafficking.

Throughout 2020, our Section has been engaged in an in-depth analysis of the growing plight of people who have been displaced by climate change, hoping to be able to offer pastoral guidance during the coming year.

Finally, our Section actively and regularly collects Pope Francis' teachings on the pastoral care of migrants, refugees, and victims of human trafficking. This collection is entitled *Lights on the Roads of Hope*<sup>8</sup>, and includes a simple online tool to search for quotations on different aspects of human mobility.

#### *The M&R Section during the Pandemic*

Based on careful consultations and reflection, our Section has produced four position papers in recent months that analyse specific critical issues and then offer operational proposals and viable solutions<sup>9</sup>. The topics are:

- legalization of undocumented migrants;

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<sup>5</sup> <https://migrants-refugees.va/20-action-points-migrants/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://migrants-refugees.va/trafficking-slavery/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://migrants-refugees.va/en/idp/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://migrants-refugees.va/resource-center/collection/>

<sup>9</sup> *Attached*

- alternative measures to migrant detention;
- entry into foreign countries of migrants who apply for international protection;
- dignity of migrant workers;

The purpose of these position papers is to facilitate the work of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission and, above all, to support the magisterium of the Holy Father.

During the pandemic, our Section has also endeavoured to gather good practices and important statements from local Churches and other Catholic actors assisting the most vulnerable people who are forced to move and whose situation is made much more difficult by the pandemic. Our worldwide findings are disseminated weekly in a bulletin entitled, "No One Should Be Forgotten!" So far, 20 editions have been published.<sup>10</sup>

#### *A Few Examples of Good Practices from Local Churches*

I would like to extend the Holy Father's deep gratitude to those Churches and local communities that have not stopped working during the pandemic and have promptly adapted their services to people in need, including migrants.

Here are a few examples. In the Archdiocese of Madrid, the *Mesa por la hospitalidad*, a centre that provides meals and temporary beds to forcibly displaced people, has been converted into a shelter. In Sisak, Caritas Croatia has produced a film to raise awareness on forced migration during the pandemic, to be shown to Croatian children and students. And in Greece, thanks to the efforts of the Community of Sant'Egidio, the first "solidarity restaurant" for refugees was opened in Lesbos on 4 August; the refugees on the island help to operate it.

Please share the good practices you are aware of or in which you have participated. Please send us a brief description and some photographs.<sup>11</sup>

### **3. Common Mission**

The difficult experience we all share this year makes us feel that we are "in the same boat". Let this be a reminder of the essential common space of our humanity. Solutions must be found together, in harmonious synergy with all the elements of the human family and always considering the other components of our common home. The post- COVID-19 world must be built by all.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding migration, the Churches of origin, transit, and destination represent the itinerant face of the one Church of Christ, a Church that is not limited by geographical borders and is therefore privileged in her capacity for pastoral service. The urgent need for solidarity that emerges in the current context invites all Churches to collaborate and cooperate at the

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<sup>10</sup> To receive the bulletin just send a simple request to [media@migrants-refugees.org](mailto:media@migrants-refugees.org)

<sup>11</sup> [media@migrants-refugees.va](mailto:media@migrants-refugees.va)

<sup>12</sup> Preface by Card. M. Czerny in Francis, *Life after the Pandemic*, LEV, 2020, p.5.

regional, transnational, and global levels.

#### *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration*

To fulfil our common mission more rapidly and completely, as an instrument of dialogue with the world, we are helped by the previously mentioned *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration* (GCM), which includes new approaches regarding legislation and practices to deal with migration, and provides common pathways for reflection and work.

Regional migration management involves not only governments but all the players who engage in international cooperation. This includes Churches, which have always been at the forefront, and non-governmental organizations working in the field to help migrants.

#### *Letter on the Relocation of Refugees from Greece*

Among the most recent examples of cross-sectoral advocacy and sponsorship initiatives aimed at supporting the cause of migrants and refugees, I would like to mention the letter regarding relocation opportunities in Europe for refugees stuck in Greece. It was co-signed by three Cardinals: Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ, Archbishop of Luxembourg and President of Comece; Konrad Krajewski, Almoner of His Holiness; and myself.

Encouraged by the Holy Father's words and following the successful experiences with the relocation and integration of refugee families in the Vatican City and in the Archdiocese of Luxembourg, we three Cardinals invite the Catholic Church in the EU "not to remain indifferent" and to give back hope to these persons, finding real relocation opportunities in the most suitable contexts.<sup>13</sup>

The letter is accompanied by a document entitled, "Guidelines on the Procedure for the Transfer of Asylum Seekers and Refugees from Greece to a European Country," which was prepared by the Community of Sant'Egidio, and provides the Catholic Bishops' Conferences with the technical information they need to receive and integrate these migrants and their families.

#### *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum*

Last Wednesday, 23 September, the European Commission presented a new Pact on Migration and Asylum which aspires to contemplate the various elements necessary for a more comprehensive European approach to migration. Among the main new elements that arouse particular attention - but also concern - that the Pact should introduce, there are two worthy to be mentioned. First is the accelerated asylum approach which envisages the fast-track procedure of request for asylum and simplified return in case of refusal. Second, the flexible division of responsibilities among member states.

Once approved, the Pact will present proposals for reform of the current European

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<sup>13</sup> <https://migrants-refugees.va/2020/02/20/card-hollerich-czerny-krajewski-call-refugees/>

legislation on this topic and will establish new ways of managing forced or unfree migration in the years to come.

In this regard, the M&R Section invites Bishops to keep pursuing a constructive dialogue with governments in order to contribute to the adoption of common decisions that are fairer and more supportive, and to ensure that such decisions are duly reflected in the future EU Pact.

Earlier I mentioned four position papers by the M&R Section. I hope the EU finds them useful in considering the legalization of migrants, alternative measures to detention, entry into foreign countries for asylum seekers, and the dignity of migrant workers.

### **Conclusions**

"The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity," the Holy Father says. "When living out this motherhood effectively, the Christian community nourishes, guides, and indicates the way, accompanying all with patience, and drawing close to them through prayer and works of mercy."<sup>14</sup> The Church is at the forefront of the globalization of charity and solidarity. We are all called to the sublime mission of working together, the Churches of origin, transit, and destination of people who are forced to move, so that they may feel welcomed, protected, promoted, and have a solid foundation for proper integration.

Although this time in history is marked by contradictions, relativism, suspicion, and fear, we are all in the same boat, guided by the steadfast helmsman who is the master of human history: our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who addresses us today with the words, "It is I, do not be afraid" (Jn 6:20). The challenges presented by this difficult moment clearly reveal to us that our common mission is to row together in the right direction indicated by Jesus Christ and never to row against Him. The future of this Continent, which can still provide a good example to all humanity, depends on our synergistic and harmonious commitment.

To corroborate my invitation to you, I would like to end with the words of the Holy Father who urges us to spare no efforts in engaging in harmonious and supportive cooperation for the benefit of all, especially the most needy. "In order to preserve the common home and make it more and more like God's original plan, we must commit ourselves to ensure international cooperation, global solidarity, and local commitment, leaving no one out".<sup>15</sup>

[With 4 attachments]

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<sup>14</sup> Francis, *Message for the 101st Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Francis, *Message Urbi et Orbi*, 12 April 2020.