

Building the **future** with migrants and refugees



MIGRANTS
REFUGEES

BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Building the future with migrants and refugees means building the Kingdom of God without excluding anyone. Today's economic and financial systems and societies seem to prefer building a future only for a few people, leaving out those who do not seem to produce a profit, namely the invisible and the excluded: among them there are migrants, refugees, displaced people, and victims of human trafficking. Building the future with migrants and refugees means putting everyone, especially the most vulnerable, at the centre of the future that we want to build: a city of God whose gates are always open for people to come in and enrich the city being built.

People on the move bring along with them a great potential that is social, economic, cultural, human, and religious. The presence of migrants and refugees empowers every dimension of integral human development and offers our society an opportunity to become more intercultural and grow in humanity. They also help our Church to be more visibly Catholic, ever more universal in her lived expression. The richness brought about by Catholic migrants and other displaced people certainly revitalises our communities. And also those who belong to other religions or have no religious affiliation at all share our own mission and enhance the missionary spirit of our communities.

Building the future with migrants and refugees means to include them, by putting them at the centre of our future, unleashing their potential as migrants and refugees.

In order to achieve this goal, it is important to distinguish the first moment of *Welcoming* and *Protecting* - where specific pastoral structures are essential - from the second one of *Promoting* and *Integrating* - where the main responsibility is entrusted to parishes.

1. Including Migrants and Refugees: Work, Security and Health for All

Inclusion - work, security and health for all - must be carried out by taking into account the potential development that all people can provide. Welcoming and protecting also means including people with special needs or other difficulties to be part of this building process.

This can be done by:

- a) Considering the Church as a bridge between unprotected migrants and institutions, helping them to overcome their fear of approaching or using public services. The local Church, with its mediation role, can promote dialogue between migrants and refugees and local institutions, and help simplify bureaucratic requirements.
- b) Including migrants and refugees concretely in the Church's efforts to build the Kingdom of God, as in the synodal process. This entails including migrants and refugees in parish pastoral councils, Catholic school boards, Catholic associations, charities and agencies.
- c) Shifting narratives that portray migrants and refugees as burdens with a narrative centred on mutuality and on the benefits of "building with." This entails providing a safe place where people can tell their own stories, while being inspired and spirited to do something for others, inviting migrants and refugees to also share their testimonies and experiences. This should be done also by using social and mass media. Radio debates, for instance, can give migrants and refugees an opportunity to openly voice out their concerns, by raising awareness on topics such as rights and duties of migrants, safe migration, gender-based violence, assistance to minors, and prevention of human trafficking.
- d) Fostering welcoming attitudes in destination countries, while avoiding the perception of double standards among refugees. Every migrant and refugee needs to perceive that they are getting the same rights and opportunities. This entails developing good practices that are rooted in a long term commitment and not just aimed at responding to the immediate needs of those fleeing wars and tragic situations.

- e) Advocating for the governance of migration processes focused on the promotion of human rights and the integration of migrants and refugees, by providing, for example, a faster recognition of their academic qualifications or the development of specific services for migrants with special needs. This entails jointly advocating with other partners, such as non-governmental organisations, in order to improve state practices by making some specific recommendations.
- f) Including local communities, especially the most vulnerable members among them, as beneficiaries of protection and assistance programmes, together with migrants and refugees. This entails informing the local faith-communities and civil society groups about the opportunities to mutually enrich those communities.
- g) Preparing the host community with correct, awareness-raising information against prejudice and discrimination. This can be fostered by promoting educational programmes which include a spiritual perspective consistent with Catholic social teaching (focusing on the notions of solidarity, subsidiarity, and human dignity), as well as by using multiple strategies ranging from personal and community witness, intercultural activities, or the use of media and social networks.
- h) Promoting a greater investment for the formation of pastoral agents as well as lay people working with people on the move. This entails producing training resources in dioceses and parishes to improve the pastoral care of migrants and refugees. An example can be the drafting of booklets with legal information for each type of migration, so as to assist the pastoral care agents to better understand and explain the law.
- i) Envisaging an internal document for the pastoral care of those migrants and refugees who have gone through particularly negative and traumatic experiences which can serve as a guideline for priests in their counselling ministry.
- j) Providing particular assistance to victims of human trafficking, especially to women and minors. This entails organising or coordinating appropriate shelters with their supporting equipment, as well as a team of psychologists, therapists, legal assistants, and medical practitioners.

2. Enhancing the Potential Contribution of Migrants and Refugees to Development

Local churches are called to enhance the potential contribution that migrants and refugees can make on behalf of a real change of the current system. There are many good practices that Catholic actors can offer on how local contexts can be transformed by building a better future for all. This can be done by:

- a) Fostering a collaborative advocacy effort with local governments to develop programs such as vocational training, faster recognition of migrants' qualifications or driving licences, language and education courses, labour and housing market integration, social integration through microcredit projects, coordination with health and education services and, more importantly, mental health and psychosocial support.
- b) Nurturing a culture of encounter in parishes as a way to foster inclusion, especially through the celebration of religious feasts to enliven and enhance practices at the parish and diocesan levels, as a way to integrate the spirituality of migrants into local liturgies for a mutual enrichment (see [POIMM](#)). This entails also the celebration of masses in various languages, as well as setting up an international pastoral team consisting of priests, deacons, sisters and lay people from different countries to spiritually accompany migrants and refugees, and offering them halls or rooms where to practice their faith, if needed.
- c) Promoting the personal encounter of the whole society, including Catholic communities, with migrants and refugees, especially if they belong to a different ethnic background. This entails encouraging families and religious orders to welcome migrants and refugees by temporarily living with them or sharing different activities with them, as well as allowing people from refugee camps living close to nearby schools, to board or to commute, so that they can easily integrate with the local community.

- d) Valuing the subjectivity of refugees: refugees can become ambassadors of peace, solidarity, and social friendship if we give them a chance. This can be done by offering them spaces to speak about their own challenges and aspirations.
- e) Preparing migrants and refugees for resettlement and integration into host communities. This can be taken up by home dioceses and parishes by setting up counselling centres that can help refugees make right decisions, thus addressing unrealistic or false expectations and misinformation with accurate and reliable information. This entails meeting also the needs of returnees who, after coming back to their countries of origin, often suffer discrimination and difficulties in re-integrating.
- f) Assisting refugees who wish to return to their homeland by providing them with a reception system that does not consider them as just being stationary in a place but rather inviting them to participate in the life of the Church community. This entails trying to anticipate their return by helping them rebuild the ties with their homeland (for example, looking after the children's school enrolment) and offering them spiritual care during this transition.
- g) Assisting refugees to develop attitudes and skills needed to successfully adapt to the new society, through the understanding of different cultural norms, especially women that might struggle while encountering different social and cultural paradigms. This entails having experts, such as legal and social workers as well as cultural mediators, supporting migrants and refugees develop their potential, by devising, for example, individual plans for personal fulfilment. Particular attention should be given to the creation of job descriptions and the development of future prospects with the help of "job coaches" working together with individual refugees.
- h) Fostering the digital skills of migrants and refugees and use of digital tools in daily and social life so as to foster their integration into the host society, while avoiding socioeconomic inequalities.

3. Involving Youth

The youth component is a key-factor to building a future together. Young people must be involved and recognised as protagonists in the present time. This can be done by:

- a) Integrating migration issues in their formal education curricula. This can be achieved thanks to the Catholic educational network spread worldwide, ie. schools and universities.
- b) Offering scholarships to migrants and refugees, including those with special needs, to access all levels of education, especially higher education.
- c) Integrating migration aspects in catechesis and youth work, as part of their Christian formation.
- d) Counselling young migrants and refugees to choose professions that will address needs in the local contexts.
- e) Fostering active youth involvement in making a difference. Youth initiatives for social inclusion of migrants are to be promoted and supported at Church level, ie. young migrants and local youth joining in services or sharing life's experiences. This entails the active participation of young people with a migrant background in tutoring pupils, by helping them to understand the school system and giving them concrete support to succeed in school, as well as organising leisure activities to share their experiences and celebrate their cultural diversity.
- f) Accompanying second generation migrants, who often find themselves straddling two worlds: their family of origin's world, still tied up to their culture, and the world where they were born or grew up in, which is their home, even if unfortunately in many cases they are not yet citizens of.
- g) Supporting, instead, young migrants in their role as bridge-builders between the culture of origin and the society they live in.
- h) Working for the protection of adolescents and children's rights, such as access to identification documents, access to health and education, which are the first steps to ensure that young migrants become active citizens in future societies. This includes advocacy to defend the rights of migrant children, both unaccompanied or separated from their families, as well as programmes on behalf of minors.

4. Becoming a Synodal Church

To be a Synodal Church means to be a Church which is not laid back but rather reaching out to people, especially those who are at the margins and the most vulnerable, walking together with them and with God. As “this is what we are called to: unity, communion, the fraternity born of the realization that all of us are embraced by the one love of God”¹.

In such a context, in which we look both at the present and the future, without losing the perspective of the demographic changes, religious congregations are invited to join forces in coming years. In order to avoid dispersion, inter-congregational projects to jointly build a future together are the most successful way forward. Catholic organisations also need to join forces in order to bear witness to the true nature of the Church in action. For this reason, the involvement of episcopal conferences, dioceses and parishes becomes the key to success, by networking with different religious institutions, both public and private, in a synodal perspective so as to enlighten people before departure, while transiting, when arriving or even returning, and foster inclusion, welcome, protection and integration. This coordination and sharing of good practices is vital to have a greater impact.

¹Pope Francis, *Moment of reflection for the opening of the Synod*, October 9, 2021.

Conclusion

AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW IN HUMANITY

Inequalities and an unbalanced world, which often are the root cause of migration, reveal the deep wounds of humanity and also show the path to start building the Kingdom of God (EMCC, 12). By recognising the migrant as the image of Christ (Mt 25,35), migration, even in its most dramatic forms, is a “challenge to the faith and love of believers, who are called on to heal the evils caused by migration and discover the plan God pursues through it even when caused by obvious injustices” (EMCC, 12).

Contemporary migrations, especially those involving a great number of people, promote the encounter of races and peoples, and the construction of societies that are culturally diverse, able to live out communion in diversity, which is the objective of God’s plan for humanity. The shift taking place from monocultural to multicultural societies can be a sign of the living presence of God in history and in the community of humankind, for it offers a providential opportunity for the fulfilment of God’s plan for a universal communion. (EMCC, 9)

The Catholic Church is again invited to be prophetic, to see and read in the eyes and faces of migrants and refugees the invitation of God to welcome Him. It is an opportunity to grow in humanity, to witness the saving love of Jesus Christ through charity, solidarity, encounter, and mutual enrichment.