



RESPONDING TO REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS: TWENTY ACTION POINTS

Background

The issue of migration has been a special point of concern for Pope Francis since the early days of his pontificate. At Lampedusa, which was his first trip outside of Rome as Pope, the Holy Father lamented the globalization of indifference shown to migrants and other populations. On multiple occasions, he has called attention to migrant populations who often remain overlooked and ignored or, worse still, deemed a threat. Church teaching calls on all Catholics to provide special attention to migrant populations; this call has important pastoral and policy dimensions, which are geared to the spiritual and physical well-being of migrants and their families and the communities that receive them.

Recognizing the vital role that the international community plays in providing support to these populations, the Vatican recently turned its attention to an initiative spearheaded by the United Nations that would create the first intergovernmental agreement to cover all dimensions of international migration: The UN Global Compacts on Migration and on Refugees.

Hoping to shape the substance of these compacts to better reflect moral principles consistent with Catholic Teaching, the Vatican engaged in a period of deliberation and reflection. Following an extended consultation process with Catholic organizations, universities, and ecclesiastical conferences from around the world, the Vatican released a list of [Twenty Points](#) that can help to guide advocacy and other forms of engagement in the development of the compacts. It is worth noting that the value of these principles are not exclusive to this process; they can also inform the work of Catholics globally as they engage their local and national communities on migration related legislation. These points can be used to initiate discussions between episcopal conferences in different countries, as well as between organizations and individuals who are engaged in migration-related work. The Twenty Points can also inform how Catholics should engage migrants who live in their communities or whom they might meet along the way. While the uses and implementation of the Twenty Points is versatile, they are particularly relevant to the development and finalization of the UN Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees that will occur over the next several months.

The Twenty Points are structured around a set of four verbs: welcome, integrate, protect, and promote. Please find below a brief overview of these four key themes and some of the ways in which they are pertinent to migration-related policy.

To Welcome

Persons who are forcibly displaced from their homeland due to violence, environmental causes, economic vulnerabilities, or for other reasons are often left in a precarious position. While it might be impossible to remain in their local communities, there is often nowhere else for them to go – many refugees, for example remain stuck in refugee camps for years on end.

This first theme - *to welcome* - calls on governments to expand the legal avenues that would allow migrants to enter a country legally and start a new life. We must, in short, nurture societies that aim as much as possible to include, rather exclude. As such:

- Governments should emphasize family reunification and expanding the number of visas available for this purpose.
- Countries should adopt refugee resettlement policies that enable the annual resettlement needs identified by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to be met. The principle of non-refoulement should be respected and upheld.

“Welcoming means, above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally”

- While national security considerations should be taken seriously, such considerations should always emphasize the rights of migrants in this process. This could include placing at borders public officials and law enforcement figures who are trained in human rights law and international refugee law. Another

example is adopting national policies that prefer “alternatives to detention,” that refrain from putting children into detention, or separating families through detention.

- Efforts to keep the stranger out should be countered through a culture of encounter. It is an effort to facilitate a welcoming culture, the Catholic Bishops in the United States have long supported refugee resettlement, temporary protected status for migrants that would otherwise face a dangerous return home, and have actively engaged immigrant communities following their arrival in the United States to assist in integration initiatives. Pope Francis has repeatedly called on everyone to nurture a culture of encounter and welcome; doing so with respect to migrants and refugees is an ideal first step in acting upon his call.

To Protect

The Catholic Church has long emphasized the importance of protecting human dignity, both through the implementation of humane policies and through the accompaniment of migrants. Pope Francis emphasized these actions in his most recent [Migration Day Message](#), where he wrote that “The Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future. This solidarity must be concretely expressed at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return.”

How can this effort to protect translate into public policy? Church teaching recognizes that states have the right to control their borders, but this cannot come at the expense of protecting migrants’ rights – the right to life is fundamental, and must be taken into consideration when implementing migration policies.

“The second verb – protecting – may be understood as a series of steps intended to defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, independent of their legal status.”

- It is important that countries of transit and arrival, in particular, put into place policies that will help to prevent human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

- Unaccompanied migrant children who are separated from their families should not be placed in detention, but in temporary custody or foster homes that provide for their various needs.

- Governments should develop and implement policies that ensure access to basic healthcare for migrants, regardless of their status, and provide access to educational opportunities at all levels of their learning.

- It is important that governments work together to ensure that nobody becomes stateless, but has the opportunity to become citizens of a country. This will increase legal and other protections available to them.

— To Promote —

The third verb espoused in the Vatican's Twenty Points calls on states and communities to put into place conditions that will allow migrants to fully flourish as human beings. Given the role that work plays in the building up of a person's identity and their ability to contribute to society. For this reason:

- Host countries should enact internship and apprenticeship programs for qualified migrants, and establish policies that will allow for the assessment of educational and vocational expertise of migrants that were learned in their home country. Governments could help to ease licensing processes in various disciplines, thus allowing migrants to use their skills to contribute to their country of destination and to provide for their family.

- Governments should institute practices that will

“Promoting essentially means a determined effort to ensure that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities which welcome them – are empowered to achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions which constitute the humanity.”

promote and preserve the integrity of the family. This should include implementing policies that promote family reunification and, where applicable, assist in family tracing for those who are separated from one another because of the migration process. There should be made allowances for family members to work following their arrival.

- Vulnerable migrant populations, and particularly those with various mental or physical disabilities, should be provided with assistance devices or specialized trainings that will allow them to flourish following their arrival in their host country.
- Given the central role that religion plays in the lives of many migrants, it is essential that protections for religious freedom be put into place and guaranteed to all migrants, regardless of migratory status or religious identity.

— To Integrate —

In his [2018 World Day of Peace](#) message, the Pope called on each of us to, “in a spirit of compassion, [let us] embrace all those fleeing from war and hunger, or forced by discrimination, persecution, poverty and environmental degradation to leave their homelands.” As we do so, it is crucial that we fully welcome them in and help them to become an active, participating part of our communities. Integration is key to ensuring such welcome and engagement.

Integration should not be confused with a process of assimilation, where the migrant loses her cultural heritage completely, but instead as a process in which an individual's cultural heritage can help to enrich the daily life of their host country, which in time can also become their home country. Accordingly, integration is not a one-way street but an opportunity for mutual dialogue. The host community, while making the effort to teach migrants what it means to be part of a new country, should also make an effort to understand and appreciate the cultural richness that migrants bring with them. These integration efforts could include, for example, helping migrants

learn the local language, so that they can more easily navigate their new homeland.

“The final verb – integrating – concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees.”

Citizenship is an important component of ensuring that an individual is a contributing part of the community and is fully integrated. In our modern world, citizenship provides a person with the ability to participate in society, and often provides a variety of legal protections and various rights that are not necessarily available to non-citizens. Citizenship should be based on birth and be available to all, regardless of economic standing, property ownership, or other extrinsic factors.

Additionally, positive examples of migrants and their communities should be promoted and fear based narratives that prey on the insecurities of the native population, condemned. Such efforts will help to lessen the animosity that is sometimes targeted at immigrant communities and provide the conditions through which these communities will be able to become active and participating members in the host country.