

National Migration Week 2023

September 18 - 24



“Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay.”

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About National Migration Week

In a world marked by immense suffering, the plight of migrants and refugees stands out as a pressing global issue. The World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) is an opportunity for global church and the Catholic faithful to engage in prayer, reflection, and action on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are forced to flee their homes. National Migration Week is a uniquely US-based celebration that builds on the ideas put forth in WDMR and shaped accordingly to American public. In 2023 we will celebrate National Migration Week September 18 – 24, which culminates with WDMR that Sunday the 24th.

This year's theme, "Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay," shines a light on the root causes that drive migration. In many instances, war and conflict have left people with no option but to abandon their homes and seek safety elsewhere. The Syrian conflict, for example, displaced millions, creating one of the largest refugee crises

in modern history. More recently, the Russian invasion of Ukraine displaced hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom fled to neighboring countries in search of safety. In both cases, migration is not a choice, but a necessity for survival.

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of understanding the systemic factors that contribute to forced migration, such as political instability, economic inequality, and persecution. Through advocacy, education, and charitable works, Catholic faithful can work to create a world where individuals and families are free to choose whether to migrate or stay in their homelands. By addressing these issues, we can help create the conditions for people to live in safety and dignity, regardless of where they call home.

Let us use this National Migration Week and World Day of Migrants and Refugees as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the complex issues driving forced migration and to renew our commitment to building a just and inclusive world.

JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS

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World Day of Migrants and Refugees

24·IX·2023



“Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay”

The World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023

The [Holy See Press Office](#) published the Message of Pope Francis for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR) to be held on Sunday, September 24, 2023 with the theme: “Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay”.

In his Message, Pope Francis recalls that “migrants flee because of poverty, fear or desperation” and points out that some of the most visible causes of migration are “Persecutions, wars, atmospheric phenomena and dire poverty”.

In this regard, the Holy Father indicates in the Message that “Joint efforts are needed by individual countries and the international community to ensure that all enjoy the right not to be forced to emigrate, in other words, the chance to live in peace and with dignity in one’s own country.”

The Pope also asks “to see in the migrant not simply a brother or sister in difficulty, but Christ himself, who knocks at our door” and adds that, “as we work to ensure that in every case migration is the fruit of a free decision, we are called to show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant”.

“In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone,” wrote Pope Francis.

Pope Francis’ Prayer for the 2023 WDMR

God, Father Almighty,
grant us the grace to work tirelessly
for justice, solidarity and peace,
so that all your children may enjoy
the freedom to choose whether to migrate or to stay.
Grant us the courage to denounce
all the horrors of our world,
and to combat every injustice
that mars the beauty of your children
and the harmony of our common home.
Sustain us by the power of your Spirit,
so that we can reflect your tender love
to every migrant whom you place in our path,
and to spread in hearts and in every situation
the culture of encounter and of care.



Disparities of wealth within countries can be significant and even greater between countries. This disparity can drive migration. Seen here: a Mumbai cityscape with a big contrast between poverty and wealth; Getty/Adrian Catalin Laza

“The migratory flows of our times are the expression of a complex and varied phenomenon that, to be properly understood, requires a careful analysis of every aspect of its different stages, from departure to arrival, including the possibility of return.”

- Pope Francis, 2023 [World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#)

Pope Leo XIII observed in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* that “men would cling to the country in which they were born, for no one would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life.”¹ While it is true that in our global world people choose to migrate for a variety of reasons – for love, adventure, and job opportunities in distant lands – Pope Leo XIII’s point is that most people are predisposed to remain where things are familiar if given the opportunity to do so. The familiarity of local customs and language provide a sense of belonging and identity that can be difficult to replicate elsewhere. It is difficult to pick up and emigrate to a country where the language is absent different, might inspire the desire to emigrate,

access to gainful employment is hard to come by, and social mores different. But we live in a world where the choice to remain is not always a realistic one.

To understand global migration, it is thus important to understand the root causes that motivate people to migrate, often against their own desires. Within a migration context, both push and pull factors play off one another; push factors being the reason(s) why people would want to leave their home country and pull factors being the reason(s) why people would want to come to a new country. So, for example, in a country or region where endemic poverty is pronounced and economic opportunities severely limited, the promise of gainful employment elsewhere can

function as the pull factor for a person to migrate to a particular place. A myriad of other push and pull factors can also play into the decision to leave:

PUSH	PULL
Persecution, Violence, War	Safety and Stability, Freedom
Poor Wages, Lack of Jobs	Higher Wages, Job Prospects
Crop Failure, Famine, Natural Disaster	Food Availability, Better Environment
Limited Opportunities, Family Separation	Better Quality of Life, Family Reunification

Persecution, Violence, and War

Safety factors can cause danger to individuals, prompting them to migrate. Persecution and discrimination based on nationality, race, religion, political beliefs, or membership status in a particular social group² will prompt people to move large distances in search of living conditions where safety can reign over their lives. Danger can be imposed upon individuals by something formal, like war³, or informal, such as internal strife⁴ or widespread organized national criminal activity. For example, the turbulent⁵ Northern Triangle of Central America, composed of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, was described in 2018 by the U.S. Department of State as a region that “suffers from high rates of violence and crime with weak judicial systems to prosecute criminals and protect those affected.”⁶ Countless thousands of people have left a multitude of war-torn or unsafe countries, some of whom receive little coverage in international news.⁷ Very many of those leaving their home countries have travelled through irregular means seeking safety and security in other regions of the world.⁸



Internally displaced Syrians, including children, at a refugee camp near the Turkish border in Atme, Syria; Getty/Joe Carillet

Economics and Related Social Factors

Economic migration, whether permanent or seasonal, is a commonly cited reason for migration.⁹ In general, it is believed that in economic migration people move from poorer developing areas into richer areas where wages are higher and more jobs are available.¹⁰ Immigration from Brazil in the last decade of the 20th century provides an example of the way in which economic factors contributed to migration patterns in the case of Brazilian immigrants in the U.S., who have cited economic reasons for leaving their home in search of prosperity elsewhere. Many sought to escape the hyperinflations that plagued Brazil up until 1994. Yet even since the late 1990s, when inflation subsided and prices stabilized, middle and lower-class Brazilians experienced an average loss of a third of purchasing power in their salaries, resulting in a wave of migrants to the United States knowing that they can earn as much as four times what they earned in Brazil working the same jobs.¹¹ Declining or stagnant wealth, paired with the promise of economic prosperity elsewhere, can function as a significant impetus to migrate.

Social factors motivating migration grow from the human needs and the desire to seek opportunities absent in their homeland. Migrants often move to ensure better opportunities for themselves or their family, like sending their child to a better, safer school or finding a job that would have not only a sufficient salary, but also important benefits and career growth prospects. In terms of education, United States colleges and graduate programs have been a particularly strong attraction for young, talented individuals around the world.¹²

Environmental Displacement

Migration caused by environmental factors is increasingly spontaneous and undertaken with little regard for personal well-being at the time. Environmental factors such as hurricanes¹³, crop failure¹⁴, pollution, and climate change¹⁵ may result in immediate or long-term health risks, loss of shelter, lack of viable food sources locally, or unfeasible solutions¹⁶ for people residing in impacted regions. In *Laudato si'* (2015), Pope Francis highlighted the rise in migrants fleeing environmental degradation and calls for collective global action on both crises. The Holy Father was prescient in his calls when a few years later Hurricanes Eta and Iota rampaged through Central America and resulted in the International Red Cross estimating 1.5 million being displaced by the disasters of a “climate crisis.”¹⁷

It is important to note that more than one root cause can trigger migration of people. More importantly, a consistent component of the various root causes of migration is family unity. Thus, representatives of the international Catholic church¹⁸ and U.S. Catholic bishops¹⁹ have spoken clearly about the need to maintain family units in immigration agreements and national legislation. For Catholics, it is necessary to incorporate the principles and values of Catholic social teaching equally within the context of the root causes of migration. Catholic concepts that include human life and dignity, the common good, a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work, solidarity, subsidiarity, integral human development, and welcoming the stranger.

In *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the U.S. and Mexican catholic bishops emphasized the root causes that contribute to irregular migration and the importance of addressing these factors so as to stabilize local communities. Here they wrote that “Catholic teaching also states that the root causes of migration – poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflicts – must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families.”²⁰



Endnotes

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- 7 “Zomi Community,” Catholic Charities of Oregon: <https://www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org/services/auxiliary-services/zomi-community/>
- 8 “Crossing the Darien Gap: Migrants Risk Death on the Journey to the U.S.,” Council on Foreign Relations (2022): <https://www.cfr.org/article/crossing-darien-gap-migrants-risk-death-journey-us>; “Hundreds of Afghans risk 11-country trek to seek haven in United States,” Reuters (2023): <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hundreds-afghans-risk-11-country-trek-seek-haven-united-states-2023-02-01/>
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- 12 U.S. Colleges and Universities See Strong Rebounds in International Student Enrollments Institute of International Education (2022): <https://www.iie.org/news/us-sees-strong-international-student-enrollment-rebounds/#:~:text=U.S.%20higher%20education%20institutions%20reported,all%20academic%20levels%20and%20OPT>
- 13 “CRS in Mexico,” Catholic Relief Services (2021): <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/mexico>
- 14 “A Conversation with Catholic Relief Services,” Catholic Health Association – Thinking Globally (2019): <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/health-progress/thinking-globally---a-conversation-with-catholic-relief-services.pdf?s-fvrsn=0>
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- 16 “The Impact of Sea-Level Rise and Climate Change on Pacific Ocean Atolls,” U.S. Geological Survey (2022): <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/pcm/science/impact-sea-level-rise-and-climate-change-pacific-ocean-atolls>
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- 20 “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” No. 28: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope>

Youth and Young Adult Learning Activity

The below activity will provide an opportunity for youth and young adults to better understand forced migration and some of the underlying causes that give rise to forced migration. After the activity, participants should have a better understanding of what causes forced migration, historical events that exemplified forced migration situations, and ideas as to how we can support migrants who are forced to flee from their homes.

Lesson Title - Understanding Forced Migration: Root Causes and Global Responses

Grade Level: 13-17-year-olds (8th-12th grade)

Duration: 70 minutes

Objective:

- Students will be able to define forced migration and identify its root causes.
- Students will explore historical events and international agreements related to forced migration.
- Students will develop empathy and understanding for those who experience forced migration.

Materials:

- Computer with internet access
- Projector/screen
- Whiteboard/flip chart and markers
- Backgrounder on root causes of forced migration
- Handout on historical events and international agreements
- Index cards

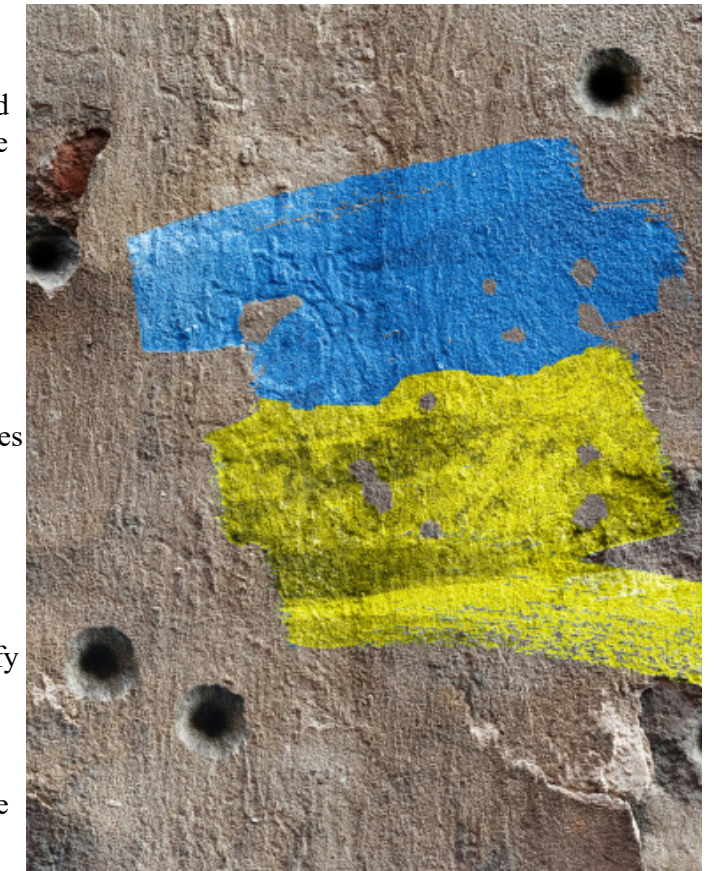
Lesson Plan:

1. **Introduction** (5 minutes)

- Ask students what they know about forced migration and write their ideas on the whiteboard.
- Explain that forced migration is the involuntary movement of people from their homes due to factors such as conflict, persecution, natural disasters, and development projects.

2. **Root Causes of Forced Migration** (10 minutes)

- Hand out the "[Root Causes of Forced Migration](#)" handout. It is ideal if you can distribute this resource before the exercise so that students can arrive with some preparation and thought on the issue.
- Discuss each root cause (conflict, persecution, natural disasters, and development projects) and provide examples for each, such as:
 - a) Conflict: The Syrian Civil War (2011-present)
 - b) Persecution: The Holocaust during World War II (1933-1945)
 - c) Natural disasters: Hurricane Katrina (2005)
 - d) Development projects: The Three Gorges Dam in China (1994-2006)
- Encourage students to ask questions and share their thoughts on each root cause.



3. Historical Events and International Agreements (15 minutes)

- Hand out the "[The Convention and Protocol Related to the Status of Refugees](#)" handout.
- Discuss key historical events and international agreements related to forced migration, such as:
 - a) The 1951 Refugee Convention
 - b) The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees
 - c) The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - d) The 2015-2016 European Migrant Crisis
- Explain how these events and agreements have shaped the international community's response to forced migration.

4. Activity: Forced Migration Role-Playing (20 minutes)

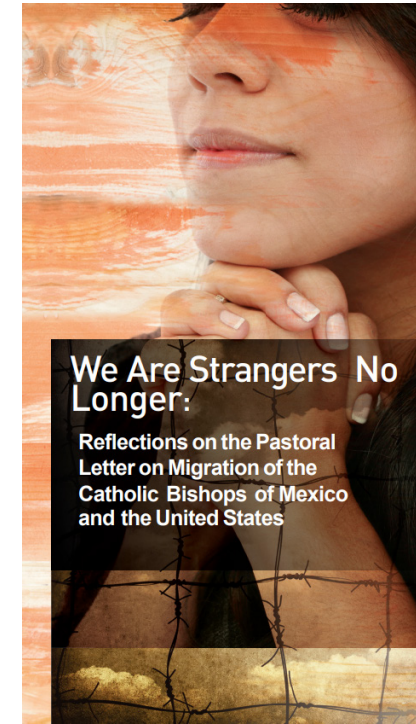
- Divide the students into groups of 4-5.
- Assign each group a different root cause of forced migration (conflict, persecution, natural disasters, or development projects).
- Provide each group with a set of index cards. Each card should have a specific challenge or situation that someone experiencing forced migration may face (e.g., "You must leave your home with only the items you can carry", "You are separated from your family and must find a way to reconnect").
- Instruct the groups to role-play scenarios based on the root cause they were assigned, using the index cards as prompts.
- Encourage students to think about how they would feel in these situations and how they might overcome the challenges they face.

5. Group Discussion and Reflection (20 minutes)

- Bring the class back together and ask each group to share their root cause and a few highlights from their role-playing exercise.
- Facilitate a discussion on the emotions and challenges faced by those experiencing forced migration.
- Encourage students to consider how they can help raise awareness of forced migration and support those affected by it.

6. Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Review the key points covered in the lesson, emphasizing the root causes of forced migration, historical events, and international agreements.
- Encourage students to continue learning about forced migration and to take action in their communities to support those affected.
- Encourage students to check out the Justice for Immigrants Campaign website: (www.justiceforimmigrants.org)



20th Anniversary - Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope

In 2003, the bishops of the United States and Mexico issued a joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, that presented a Catholic framework for responding to the ongoing migration phenomenon in their respective countries. In doing so, the bishops offered pastoral guidance to Catholics who encounter and engage migrants living and working in their communities. The letter also suggested systematic reforms to U.S. immigration policy and presented an alternative to the existing immigration policy paradigm.

Please take an opportunity to read and reflect on the pastoral letter and recognize the continued importance that it has for the political and pastoral concerns of the Church today. An additional resource – [We are Strangers No Longer: Reflections on the Pastoral Letter on Migration](#) (sp) – provides an overview of some of the important themes in the letter and can help as you learn more about it. Please feel free to reach out to Todd Scribner at TScribner@uscgb.org should you have any questions, comments, or would like to share what you are doing on the migration issue in your local community.

Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees

Launched in 2010, POWIR supports a selected set of diocesan resettlement programs each year to meet critical needs of newcomers. Since its inception, 52 MRS resettlement affiliates have participated in POWIR, making a difference in the lives of individuals and families from 50 countries. Since May 2021, From May 2021 to January 2023, the POWIR program has coordinated the work of 9,900 volunteers who have engaged in 109,000 volunteer hours and who have helped 23,899 clients.

POWIR dioceses equip parishes and community groups with skills to focus on long-term integration as an integral part of refugee and migration ministries, and include English as a second language learning, literacy acquisition, and job readiness programs. By offering welcome and hospitality in their parishes and communities, volunteers' lives are simultaneously enriched through meals shared and friendships formed.

If you want to learn more about the POWIR program, volunteer at an existing POWIR site, or explore the possibility of forming a POWIR program in your diocese, please reach out to us at MRSPOWIR@uscgb.org. To find out if there is a POWIR program in your area, please visit this [interactive map](#).

Volunteer at a local Catholic Charities

If you don't have a POWIR program in your local community, please be sure to check out where your [nearest Catholic Charities](#) is located. They do amazing work with migrants and refugees every day and could use your expertise and support as a volunteer.

