
Welcoming Christ in refugees and forcibly displaced persons
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Migration and especially forced migration are of major concern to the world and to the Church: the growing numbers - 14 million refugees and some 28.8 million internally displaced registered in 2012- and their often dramatic situation raise many more questions than the humanitarian situation only.

Human mobility and especially forced migration are connected and intertwined with various factors of three principal kinds: ethical, humanitarian and political. Each of these three dimensions refers in its own specific ways to causes, operational responses, legal protection mechanisms, economic capacity and actors. The mix and interaction of these eight fields offers already a complex matrix and, in more general terms, a set of important new challenges. Human mobility calls for a change in mentality, structural approaches and societal thinking.

The document “Welcoming Christ in refugees and forcibly displaced persons” prepared by the two Pontifical Councils for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant people and Cor Unum specifically focusing on the role of the Church towards forcibly displaced is therefore a timely document and means another important step towards a better understanding of the phenomenon, its impact on our societies and communities and to establishing useful pastoral guidelines.

Protection based on simple principles

International protection is based on two very basic and simple principles: the first that people not participating in some violence have a special right to be protected from this violence, and the second, that if protection cannot be provided to them where they are, they have a right to seek protection outside the zone of risk and danger, even across borders.

Church efforts act on the principle of humanity inscribed in the conscience of every person and all peoples¹” and from the perspective of *the moral obligation* to protect. This moral obligation is valid for all and pays respect to all in need of protection and assistance, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, faith or particular migration status or circumstance.

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 505)

Challenges are not only to be identified in the growing numbers

The challenges related to human mobility are not new and do not only come with the numbers of refugees, internally displaced, migrants and victims of forced labour and trafficking; the challenges reside as much in the eroding implementation levels and the tightening economic environment, the decreasing levels of structural solidarity and the political environment not always able or willing to respond adequately to the protection needs of people in some critical situations (e.g. Syria).

- the challenges are in the great inequalities of current categories for protection: status, conflict, natural causes and development policies are insufficient to serve the broader and better understanding of forced displacement.
- The challenges are related to the existing structures and institutions meant to provide protection but who now are stretched between the terms of their 'aging' mandates and the many more compelling needs they meet in comparable situations for which they cannot act.
- The challenge is in the broadening categories of the forcibly uprooted but for which some categories have no adequate institutional or international response mechanisms;
- The challenge is to increase support in a 'shrinking humanitarian space' and amidst a trend of national policies that equally and dramatically reduce funds for development, (30%)
- The challenge is the loss of the valuable solidarity bench marks in social cohesion; in the weakening mentality to welcome the stranger, a growing political fact in Europe which has grown to become an obstacle in the development of adequate protection policies.
- The challenges are in protection policies that generate multiple social effects which are insufficiently monitored whereas they should be an integral part of durable solution policies.
- The challenges are manifold and one could say that they are all together a time bomb ticking in our societies with too little tools or willingness to stop the ticking.

Moving forward

Allow me to highlight four steps in building a different future and mentality:

1. Moving from categories to the fuller human dimension

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI points at the "many overlapping layers which often oversimplify reality in artificial ways and which should lead us to examine objectively the full human dimension of the problems."² What we see today is the opposite towards a broadening number of categories to identify the forcibly displaced. These categories are mainly based on the causes, much less on the response mechanisms or on the consequences. Categories serve a great purpose if - and only if - they are seen in the light of a much broader perspective that connects well-defined and implemented rights, protection measures and assistance in fuller respect of human dignity. They serve a purpose if they are leading to solutions, not if they are to serve statistics only or any institutional mandate. Rather

² Caritas in Veritate 22

than further developing protection on this basis, the fuller implementation of the existing Human Rights and the deeper respect of human dignity would already make fundamental and measurable differences.

To say things differently: what seems to be needed is a lift-up of the protection mechanisms in a two-step response starting with a 'common trunk response' for all forcibly displaced in need of protection whatever the cause or category and as a second step adding the more specialized responses.

2. Moving the focus in migration from causes to vulnerabilities and social costs

Vulnerabilities are transversal of all categories. In removing the axle of protection from the cause to **the vulnerabilities** and **social costs** of forced displacement we stand a better chance—in our particular voice, as Church, and with singular credibility—to build more inclusive definitions and in doing so, to get closer to the fuller human reality, to offering more fair and genuine access to rights, protection and assistance, and therein to deeper respect for human life and dignity. In following this logic we are better equipped to address the “*scandal of glaring inequalities*”³ between existing categories and to remain much more focused on what is defined in the compendium: “*the quality of social life depends on the protection and promotion of the human persons*”⁴.

The social and societal cost of forced migration should therefore not only be understood in terms of those who have left and those who were left behind, but much more in terms of impact on families and social interaction in and with new communities.

3. The Human person as primary route

All of this points at various levels of responsibilities, better applied ethics, political and moral dimensions. Jean Paul II defined that “the **human person is the primary route** that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission” a quote which Pope Emeritus Benedict recalled in his 2013 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. He emphasized “the urgent need for structured multilateral interventions for the development of the countries of departure, effective counter measures aimed at eliminating human trafficking, comprehensive programs regulating legal entry and a greater openness to consider individual cases calling for humanitarian protection more than political asylum”. Such measures would clearly contribute to reducing levels of conflict and serve purposes of achieving peace and community integration. This no doubt refers to the quality of development and to strengthening the processes of *integral* human development. They also clearly indicate that the criteria searched for should not be found in the statistics and numbers but rather in the better use of the existing tools to increase the protection levels on behalf of all people on the move.

³ *Populorum Progressio* 9 cit 261-262

⁴ Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church 81

4. *Moving to shared responsibilities and global authority*

Raising questions on policy coherence and on overall authority or responsibility in international migration automatically raises questions on sovereignty and global governance. In this more political field it becomes obvious how much our world is in an epic moment of re-organization and in need of reviewed or strengthened international structures. Given trends of international migration and human mobility of all kinds, with unprecedented demographic and labour imbalances and increasing social diversity in nearly every nation on the planet, the question is not whether, but how a global reorganizing will come about: with deliberation or accidentally; in a careful movement or—as now—spasmodically continuing to ‘slice’ into categories for specific levels of protection.

In all of these four points Church and civil society play an important role: organizations like Caritas, JRS, CIDSE, ICMC and the many others are largely contributing in the social mix of civil society to develop operational and societal answers? This is what organizations can do and actually do, but there is more: The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) not only responds to immediate humanitarian needs but collaborates with its member Bishops Conferences and other partners worldwide to avoid forced departure, ensure protection through informed, prepared and organized mobility, contribute to international and national protection mechanisms on behalf of refugees, migrant labourers, family unity, social inclusion and in overcoming the many thresholds, fully focusing on integral human development.

5. Conclusion

In an irreversibly plural world, suffering from disorder and fractures, the protection of the vulnerable has to be understood as an integral part of human and societal development. The four paths indicated above may make the difference: in addressing the vulnerabilities one acts in two ways on social cohesion: directly on behalf of the vulnerable and through the growing consciousness of the communities who need to better understand and integrate that these vulnerabilities call for the responsibility and the solidarity of all. It is therefore essential for the Church to advance mercy, solidarity and justice by addressing all processes that generate vulnerability and exclusion; an effort to be done in closer collaboration with and through civil society and all national as well as international communities and structures. An actor of significant response and responsibility, the Church itself brings charisma, experience, social tradition and solidarity to the challenge of considering how durable solutions for all who need protection and assistance can best be built in structures and in the heart.

The Church can contribute—with great credibility and at times with surprisingly welcomed leadership—to a more inclusive, coherent and cohesive vision integrating causes, consequences and consistent acting, while building upon the full respect for the human dignity. Unequivocally, this means that not only “the precepts of international humanitarian law must be fully respected”⁵ but all human rights in an effort to protect the individual, communities and all nations.

⁵ Compendium of the Social Teachings of the Church, 504