



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO MARK THE 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MIGRATION (IOM)**

[Geneva, 29 November 2021]

[[Multimedia](#)]

*Director-General,
Madam President,
Distinguished participants,*

I would like to express my congratulations to the International Organization for Migration on its 70 years of service to migrants. This important event in the history of the Organization, despite the multiple challenges posed by the Covid-19 Pandemic, provides an opportunity to renew our vision and commitment through a more dignified response to migration.

Ten years ago, at the 100th Session of this Council, by decision of my beloved predecessor, [Pope Benedict XVI](#), the Holy See, in a manner consistent with its nature, principles and specific norms, chose to become a Member State of this Organization. The basic reasons that led to this decision are still very valid and urgent today [\[1\]](#).

1. To affirm the ethical dimension of population movements.
2. To offer, through its experience and its well-established network of associations in the field throughout the world, the collaboration of the Catholic Church in international services dedicated to uprooted people.
3. To provide comprehensive assistance according to needs, without distinction, based on the inherent dignity of all members of the same human family.

The debate on migration is not really about migrants. Or rather, it is not solely about migrants: it is about all of us, about the past, present and future of our societies [2]. We should not be surprised by the number of migrants, but rather come towards all of them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their particular personal and family situations. Such a response requires a great deal of human sensitivity, justice and fraternity. We must avoid a very common temptation today: that of discarding everything that is troublesome [3]. This is precisely the “throwaway culture” that I have denounced so many times.

In most of the major religious traditions, including Christianity, we find the teaching that exhorts us to treat others as we want them to treat us, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Other religious teachings insist that we must go beyond this norm and that we must not neglect hospitality towards the stranger, for “for through it, some have unknowingly entertained angels”. (*Heb 13:2*). Undoubtedly these universally recognized values should guide the way we treat migrants in the local community and nationally.

We often hear about what states are doing to welcome migrants. But it is equally important to ask: what benefits do migrants bring to their host communities and how do they enrich them? On the one hand, in the markets of upper-middle-income countries, migrant labour is in high demand and welcomed as a way to compensate for the lack of it. On the other, migrants are generally rejected and subject to resentful attitudes by many of their host communities.

Unfortunately, this double standard stems from the prevalence of economic interests over the needs and dignity of the human person. This tendency was particularly evident during the Covid-19 “lockdowns”, when many of the “essential” workers were migrants, but they were not granted the benefits of the Covid-19 economic aid programmes or even access to basic health care and immunization.

Even more regrettable is the fact that migrants are increasingly being used as bargaining chips, as pawns on a chessboard, victims of political rivalries. As we all know, the decision to emigrate, to leave one's homeland or territory of origin, is undoubtedly one of the most difficult decisions in life.

How can suffering and despair be exploited to advance or defend political agendas? How can political considerations prevail when it is the dignity of the human person that is at stake? The basic lack of human respect at national borders diminishes all of us in our 'humanity'. Beyond the political and legal aspects of irregular situations, we must never lose sight of the human face of migration and the fact that, beyond the geographical divisions of borders, we are part of a single human family.

I would like to take this opportunity to make four observations:

1. There is an urgent need to find dignified ways out of irregular situations. Desperation and hope

always prevail over restrictive policies. The more legal routes exist, the less likely it is that migrants will be drawn into the criminal networks of people smugglers or into exploitation and abuse while in contravention of the law.

2. Migrants render visible the bond that unites the whole human family, the richness of cultures and the resource for development exchanges and trade networks that diaspora communities represent. In this sense, the issue of integration is fundamental; integration implies a two-way process, based on mutual knowledge, mutual openness, respect for the laws and culture of the host countries with a true spirit of encounter and mutual enrichment.

3. The migrant family is an essential component of communities in our globalized world, but in too many countries migrant workers are denied the benefits and stability of family life as a result of legal impediments. The human void left behind when a father or mother emigrates alone is a stark reminder of the overwhelming dilemma of being forced to choose between emigrating alone to feed one's family or enjoying the fundamental right to remain in one's country of origin with dignity.

4. The international community must urgently address the conditions that give rise to irregular migration, thus making migration a well-informed choice and not a desperate necessity. To ensure that most people who can live with dignity in their countries of origin do not feel compelled to migrate irregularly, efforts are urgently needed to "create better economic and social conditions [...] so that emigration will not be the only option left for those who seek peace, justice, security and full respect of their human dignity" [4].

Ultimately, migration is not only a story of migrants but of inequalities, despair, environmental degradation, climate change, but also of dreams, courage, study abroad, family reunification, new opportunities, safety and security, and hard but dignified work.

In conclusion, achieving adequate global management of migratory movements, a positive understanding of them and an effective focus on integral human development may seem like far-reaching goals. However, we must never forget that these are not statistics, but real people whose lives are at stake. Rooted in its centuries-long experience, the Catholic Church and its institutions will continue their mission of welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating people on the move.

I thank you from my heart and I invoke upon all of you, upon the nations you represent and upon migrants and their families the Lord's blessing.

Fraternally,

FRANCIS

[1] Cf. *Intervention of the Holy See, 100th Session of the Council of the World Organization for Migration*, 5 December 2011.

[2] Cf. *Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 29 September 2019.

[3] Cf. *Address to the Joint Session of the United States Congress, Washington D.C.*, 24 September 2015.

[4] *Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 100th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, August 5, 2013.

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