



**Statement by the Migration Working Group
of the International Forum of Catholic-Inspired Organizations
on the Occasion of the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees
26 September 2021**

As members of the Migration Working Group, convened by the International Forum of Catholic-inspired Organizations, we write from direct experience in carrying out the Gospel-based mandate: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” (*Letter to the Hebrews* 13:1-2).

On a daily basis, our organizations engage in significant personal encounters with refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, and persons affected by human trafficking and other forms of modern-day slavery. These brothers and sisters are at the center of our care and accompaniment; it is from them that we learn to hope and to open our hearts and love as Jesus taught us. We join local churches and other faith-based communities in addressing the basic human needs of these people who are forced to flee their homes and countries, and provide them pastoral and health care, protection and shelter, formal and informal education, legal assistance, life and job skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities, all throughout their journeys, from the countries of origin, to the places of transit and points of arrival, in all parts of the world. We partner with migrants and refugees themselves to advocate for fair and just migration and asylum policies and promote capacity-building and full integration in a two-way process between host communities and newly arriving migrants in order to build together an inclusive society.

For these reasons, we welcome with joy the opportunity to observe the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees by the Catholic Church. On this occasion, we express profound gratitude to the Holy Father for his message entitled “Towards an Ever Wider “We”¹, through which he appeals, both to the Catholic faithful and to all men and women, “to journey together towards an ever wider “we” ... for the sake of renewing the human family, building together a future of justice and peace, and ensuring that no one is left behind.”

In this time, we are facing major challenges, as the COVID crisis has exposed and accentuated the structural inequalities in the world and has worsened the situation of vulnerabilities among people “on the move”. Many of them are deprived of the possibility of crossing borders, and cannot count anymore on the minimum certainties on which they have built their lives and future. For instance, many migrants working in the informal sector are blocked from the access to treatment and vaccination that is guaranteed to citizens, and migrant and refugee children and adolescents have no access both to learning and to nutritional meals provided in the school setting and thus often are exposed to increased risk of exploitation and abuse. That is why we share Pope

¹https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20210503_world-migrants-day-2021.html. Unless otherwise noted, the quotations in this statement are from the above-cited document.

Francis' heartfelt concern that "Once this health crisis [COVID-19] passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation," and we pray with him that "... after all this, we will think no longer in terms of *them* and *those* but only *us*."² Our daily encounters with migrating people confirm the Holy Father's observation that the highest price ["...of myopic forms of nationalism and radical individualism",³] is being paid by those who most easily become viewed as *others*: foreigners, migrants, the marginalized, those living on the existential peripheries."

We are deeply saddened by the walls erected along national borders to push back desperate migrants and refugees seeking safety, security, and an opportunity to recover their God-given human dignity. A recent study reported of 63 walls and physical barriers built in today's world to protect internal borders or within occupied territories.⁴ There are hundreds more if we consider the many countries which have militarized their borders through deployment of troops, ships, airplanes, drones and digital surveillance. Regional agreements to externalize border control management have built further barriers to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from reaching safety. Therefore, it is crucial to advocate for safe, orderly and regular migration pathways and full conformity of States' laws and policies with the principle of *non-refoulement*. Even our own humanitarian, pastoral, and advocacy actions are sometimes put at grave risk by punitive policies of national governments and local authorities.

In some of our local communities of faith reactions of fear, discrimination, and rejection have deprived migrants and refugees from experiencing the maternal face of the Church. There is a need for deep conversion of hearts and a culture of encounter so that people "on the move" are placed at the center of community life, and their unique dignity, stories and cultural and spiritual gifts are respected and valued. Rejecting attempts to build walls and barriers between "us and them", The Holy Father invites all of us to feel part of a single Church, a single home, a single family. He has urged us similarly on other occasions, by making us aware that "[..] we do not live in an era of change, but rather in a change of era ... Our times call for us to live the problems as challenges, not as obstacles: The Lord is active and at work in the world ... Wherever you are do not ever build walls or borders, but piazzas and field hospitals."⁵

In such a crucial time of pandemic and recovery planning, we therefore jointly commit our respective organizations pledge to urge governments, the international community and the private sector to ensure that vaccines, as well as diagnostic and therapeutic resources, tools, are equitably shared with everyone, including the poorest populations, the most vulnerable people – for instance migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people. Ensuring that all migrants, including those undocumented and in transit, are not left behind in the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns and have access

² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020), #35.

³ *Idem*, #11 and 105.

⁴ Report no 46 on "A Walled World Towards a Global Apartheid" of the Center Delàs d'Estudis por la Pau, Barcelona, November 2020.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Speech to the Fifth National Convention of the Church in Italy*, Florence, November 10, 2015.

to universal health care should become a priority for our policy-makers and a way to concretely realize Pope Francis call for an ever wider “We”.

Having learned and received much more than we can give through our encounters with refugees and migrants, we fully understand Pope Francis’ wise counsel that “today’s migration movements offer an opportunity for us to overcome our fears and let ourselves be enriched by the diversity of each person’s gifts. Then, if we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider “we” can come about.”

Thus, we pray that our constant and concrete efforts “*Toward an ever wider ‘We’*” will help governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, people of faith and of good will, and the entire human family, to build a world that recognizes and respects full enjoyment of rights and dignity; a world of peace and solidarity, and of integral human development, where refugees, migrants, and all people at the margins, can be full and active participants. So, on this 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the invitation of Pope Francis, to “... dream together, fearlessly, as a single human family, as companions on the same journey, as sons and daughters of the same earth that is our common home, sisters and brothers all.”⁶

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⁶ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, #8.