



MIGRANTS  
REFUGEES

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**THE HOLY SEE AND THE NEGOTIATIONS OF THE  
GLOBAL COMPACTS ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS**

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I would like to start my contribution with a quotation from Pope Francis:

We live in times when certain feelings and sentiments that seemed to have been overcome are coming back to life. Feelings of suspicion, of fear, of contempt and even of hatred towards individuals or groups judged different because of their ethnic, national or religious affiliation and, as such, deemed not worthy enough to participate fully in the life of society. These feelings, too often, inspire real acts of intolerance, discrimination or exclusion, which seriously damage the dignity of the people involved and their fundamental rights, including the right to life and to physical and moral integrity. Unfortunately, it also happens that in the world of politics you give in to the temptation to exploit the fears or the objective difficulties of some groups and to use illusory promises for short-sighted campaign interests.<sup>1</sup>

Even amidst the current crisis, experience teaches that effective, shared responses are available. The Catholic Church has repeatedly expressed his will to work together with the international community to promote and adopt such measures to protect the dignity, rights and freedoms of all persons on the move, including forced migrants, victims of human trafficking, asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Speech to the Participants at the World Conference on Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration*, 20 September 2018.

The United Nations processes to produce two Global Compacts, one on safe, orderly and regular migration (GCM), and the other on refugees (GCR), represented a unique opportunity to respond together through international cooperation and shared responsibility. This is why the Holy See decided to contribute actively to the two processes. To support this contribution, the Migrants & Refugees (M&R) Section of the Dicastery for promoting Integral Human Development, consulting with various Bishops' Conferences and Catholic NGOs working in the field, prepared a document titled "Twenty Action Points for the Global Compacts."<sup>2</sup> The points are grouped under four headings: to welcome, to protect, to promote, and to integrate and they have been approved by the Holy Father. They are grounded on the Church's best practices responding to the needs of migrants and refugees at the grassroots level.

In accordance with Pope Francis' teachings, welcoming means offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally. Protecting translates into concrete measures to uphold the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, with particular attention to those in vulnerable situations. Promoting corresponds to ensuring that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities that welcome them – are empowered to achieve their integral human development. The promotion of migrants and their families begins with their communities of origin. That is where such promotion should be guaranteed, together with the right to migrate, as well as the right to not be forced to migrate.<sup>3</sup> Integrating means engaging local populations and foreigners in intercultural processes towards mutual enrichment and active citizenship.

In September 2017 the Holy See presented its 20 Action Points to the United Nations as its contribution to the draft, negotiation and adoption of the Global Compacts. Although the processes towards the Global Compacts were separate, distinct and independent, it seemed appropriate to prepare a single document for two reasons: migration is increasingly composed of mixed flows; and migrants and refugees, before being such, are persons inherently possessed of fundamental human rights and inalienable dignity. Furthermore, this decision underlines the importance of harmonizing the two Global Pacts as much as possible, so as to respond more adequately and seamlessly to the needs of each vulnerable person on the move.

In 2017 and 2018 the Holy Father repeatedly underlined the important potential of the Global Compacts to foster global engagement and cooperation to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees. In his address to the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), reflecting on the realities and commitments towards the Global Compacts (9 June 2017), Pope Francis stated: "Local governments and the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. M&R Section, *Twenty Action Points for the Global Compacts*, [https://migrants-refugees.va/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/20-Action-Points-for-the-Global-Compacts.EN\\_.pdf](https://migrants-refugees.va/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/20-Action-Points-for-the-Global-Compacts.EN_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 12 October 2012.

international community should be provided with all the elements needed to draw up the best agreements for the good of many, especially those suffering in the most vulnerable areas of our planet.”<sup>4</sup> The Holy Father dedicated his Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees to the four verbs, stressing their relevance for the Global Compacts, which are to be understood as “a unique opportunity to advocate and support the concrete actions which I have described with four verbs.”<sup>5</sup> In his address for the 2017 World Food Day, Pope Francis invited the international community to take into consideration the vulnerability of migrants and refugees in the development of the Global Compacts.<sup>6</sup> In November 2017, the Holy Father encouraged Catholic Universities to engage in the processes towards the Global Compacts.<sup>7</sup> In his Message for the 2018 World Day of Peace, Pope Francis emphasized that the Global Compacts “need to be inspired by compassion, foresight and courage, so as to take advantage of every opportunity to advance the peace-building process.”<sup>8</sup> On 14 June 2018 the Holy Father, referring directly to the Global Compacts, encouraged the “efforts to ground responsibility for the shared global management of international migration in the values of justice, solidarity and compassion.”<sup>9</sup> A few days later, during the Angelus, Pope Francis expressed his hope “that the states involved in these processes may reach an agreement to ensure, with responsibility and humanity, assistance and protection to those who are forced to leave their own country.”<sup>10</sup>

Since drawing up the *20 Action Points*, the M&R Section has proactively engaged with the Secretariat of State and the Permanent Missions of the Holy See in New York, Geneva and Vienna, contributing to the presentation of this input to representatives of Member States in consultations, negotiations, side-events and direct meetings.

The M&R Section has also encouraged all the Bishops’ Conferences to use the *20 Action Points* for information and awareness campaigns, to share them with Catholic NGOs and other civil society groups in their country, and to enter into dialogue with their country’s government officials responsible for the negotiations towards the Global Compacts. Several Bishops Conferences were able to carry out the various suggested actions. Thanks to such advocacy, programmes inspired by the *20 Action Points*, were envisioned, initiated or implemented, such as new humanitarian corridors, special

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Message to the President of the Latinamerican Parliament (Parlatino) on the Occasion of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly*, 9-10 June 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 15 August 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See Pope Francis, *Address for the World Food Day*, 16 October 2017.

<sup>7</sup> See Pope Francis, *Address to Members of the International Federation of Catholic Universities*, 4 November 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 2018 World Day of Peace*, 13 November 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the "Second Holy See-Mexico Conference On International Migration,"* 14 June 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 17 June 2018.

visas for vulnerable migrants, community sponsorship schemes, and the recognition of academic credentials and vocational qualifications of migrants and refugees.

Responding to a general appeal of the M&R Section, many religious congregations and Catholic organizations have joined the Bishops' Conferences in the dissemination and promotion of the 20 Action Points at the national and local levels. They have frequently joined forces with other relevant religious and civil-society actors to advance reflection and more coordinated action to the benefit of migrants, refugees and hosting communities.

After a long process of consultations and negotiations, in July 2018 the final draft of the two Global Compacts were released. In the case of the GCM, the M&R Section gladly acknowledged that elucidations and variations of the four verbs - to welcome, to protect, to promote, and to integrate - could be found in most of the commitments, best practices, policy guidelines and recommendations. The structure itself of the GCM, with its 23 Objectives and Commitments, recalled the general structure of the 20 Action Points. There are few elements of the GCM that the Holy See would regard as highly positive: 1) the recognition of the positivity of the migration phenomenon, when it is voluntary and safe; 2) the person-centered approach; 3) the principles of common understanding, shared responsibilities and unity; 4) a good and strong language on family and children; 5) the right to migrate and the prior right not to migrate; 6) migration/integration as a two-way process; 7) the inclusion of faith-based organizations among the stakeholders.

In the case of the GCR, the Holy See is pleased to acknowledge that the Compact presented the international community with the opportunity to shift from a reactive approach to a more proactive one, which will be more predictable and harmonized and thus more effective. As in all multilateral processes, the outcome of these consultations is a document which reflects compromises, a realistic balance of the interests and aspirations of hosting countries, of donors and other stakeholders.

The GCM was first adopted by 164 Member States in the intergovernmental conference that was held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 10-11 December 2018. On 19 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly officially endorsed the same Global Compact with 152 votes in favour, 12 abstentions, and five votes against, namely by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Poland, and the United States of America.<sup>11</sup> The GCR was adopted by the General Assembly in New York on 17

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. UN News, General Assembly officially adopts roadmap for migrants to improve safety, ease suffering, 19 December 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1028941> (8 January 2020).

December 2018 with 181 votes in favor, two against (Hungary and the United States of America) and three abstentions.<sup>12</sup>

The M&R Section is convinced that two Global Compacts represent a historic advance in our shared responsibility to act in solidarity in favor of people on the move, especially those who find themselves in very precarious situations and those forced to leave. Nonetheless, the M&R Section is already looking 'beyond' the Compacts. Together with its partners, the M&R Section is committed to ensuring that, "as a sign of shared global responsibility, concrete engagement follows from the words that will be codified in the aforementioned two agreements."<sup>13</sup> The Compacts can only provide a suitable framework for a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of migration in its multiple facets and for formulating effective responses to its different challenges.

The real action will be up to the individual States in necessary collaboration with other stakeholders, "among which," as Pope Francis said "you may be assured will always be the Church."<sup>14</sup>

Migration is a complex phenomenon. As Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, said,

The Holy See tries to help understand and deal with this complex phenomenon. As It has done so with sincere concern for the people involved and with respect to States who are primarily responsible for welcoming them, in a spirit of openness, responsibility and collaboration. Only on the basis of a mutual understanding may one propose a lasting response to today's human mobility, sustainable for migrants and refugees, as for all the countries concerned.<sup>15</sup>

The homily that Pope Francis delivered on the fifth anniversary of his visit to Lampedusa serves as a fitting conclusion:

"Before the challenges of contemporary movements of migration, the only reasonable response is one of solidarity and mercy. A response less concerned with calculations, than with the need for an equitable distribution of responsibilities, an honest and sincere assessment of the alternatives and a prudent management. A just policy is one at the service of the person, of every person involved; a policy that provides for solutions that can ensure security, respect for the rights and dignity of all; a policy

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. N. Risse, UNGA Votes to Adopt Global Compact on Refugees, SDG Knowledge Hub, 18 december 2018, <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unga-votes-to-adopt-global-compact-on-refugees/> (8 January 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Francis, Address to the Members of the 'International Catholic Migration Commission, 8 March 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Francis, Address to Participants in the International Forum on "Migration And Peace", 21 February 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Card. Pietro Parolin, Concluding Remarks, 19 October 2018.

concerned for the good of one's own country, while taking into account that of others in an ever more interconnected world."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily during the Holy Mass for Migrants, Saint Peter's Basilica*, 6 July 2018.