



CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT OF NIGERIA
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES UNIT

**NATIONAL POLICY
AND
IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

MARCH, 2025

FOREWORD

One can safely say that migration is as old as human evolution and civilization. It would seem that the innate need of humans to move from place to place relates to the trajectory of evolution of the human person from Homo Habilis (Able Man) to Homo Erectus (Upright Man), in the critical stages in the development of the human person

The ability of the human person to move from one place to another is intrinsically linked to the desire for freedom, which is innate in every human person. God desires that all His children live in total freedom from every form of bondage. Therefore, the need to be free, the need to live full a human life and the need to be safe from harm and persecutions are some of the crucial reasons why people leave one place for another, in the hope of finding a place that will provide and assure the fulfilment of these essential human needs.

When we follow the trajectory of human civilization before the invention and creation of the artificial borders to serve the colonial imperial agenda, we discover that migration is part and parcel of human civilization. Century-old trade routes which still exist to this day are a testament that peoples of diverse cultures, languages and ways of life, engaged in commerce and formed alliances, which resulted in cultural exchanges that have birthed a

rich tapestry of heritages and experiences all over the world.

While the need for better opportunities still remains at the root of why many move from place to place, some of the reasons that inform mass migration of people today have become more complex, often outside the control of those on the move. In other words, most people who migrate today do so for their survival and because moving is the only option left to them.

In many developing countries, many of the factors that force people out of their homelands are created by the insatiable appetite for fossil fuel and profit. The destruction of the rain forests has resulted in the warming of the globe, forcing people who suffer the direct impacts of these negative human activities to seek abode in safer places. Placing profits over people and their dignity is tilting the planet Earth towards destruction, unless all of us collectively, and particularly those with political power, heed the warnings to take drastic corrective measures to ameliorate the problem that is making many places around the globe inhabitable and opportunities for livelihood nonexistent.

We believe more than ever, as shepherds of God's people, that it is our call and responsibility, together with the faithful and all people of good will, to provide succour to those who find themselves in need on their sojourn.

The responsibility of the Migrants and Refugees Unit is two-fold – immediate and ongoing responses in the discharge of its duty on behalf of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, i.e. to offer material assistance and to engage in co-ordinated advocacy nationally and internationally on behalf of migrants. The aim of this advocacy is to ensure that governments will adopt policies that will assure the protection and safety of migrants and their ability to access the assistance and support which they are entitled to.

Bishop Bulus Dauwa Yohanna
Chairman, Migrants & Refugees Unit
of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria

12th May, 2024 Feast of the Ascension of our Lord

PREAMBLE

Jesus declared that he came to bring fullness of life to us on earth (cf. Jn. 10:10). Life in fullness encompasses both the spiritual and material dimensions. This is the core of integral human development, espoused and promoted in Catholic social teaching. It is a progressive improvement of the living condition of the human person in all the dimensions of existence.

In the Church's understanding, development begins with the fulfillment of the basic material needs, and progresses through to the other needs in the hierarchy of human needs. With this understanding, the Church fully supports and promotes all efforts that helps to provide the basic necessities of life. However, in doing so, she does not depart from her proper and primary mission of providing pastoral care, to play a purely social role in the society.¹ Social issues are important in the life of men, whom the Church serves; but the Church approaches such issues as a complementary partner to other agencies equally responsible for the wellbeing of the human person.

¹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, no. 42.

For many centuries, the Church has provided pastoral care for people on the move. Such pastoral care includes all forms of psycho-spiritual and emotional support as well as practical livelihood assistance, advocacy and empowerment that are essential to the well-being of people who are dealing with the ‘uprooting experience.’ When people leave their homelands, especially those who do so in difficult circumstances, they become particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of life. The pastoral care provided by the Church helps such to better deal with their predicaments, live more dignified human lives, sustain and realise the hope of a better future.

The engagement of the Church with and for migrants has taken on an even greater urgency in the light of the phenomenon of human mobility in the contemporary world. Reading the “signs of the times,”² the Magisterium has dedicated much resources to this issue, drawing the attention of the world to the difficult situation migrants around the world often find themselves in.

With the impetus provided by the Universal Church under the leadership of Pope Francis, and in furtherance of its mission, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) set up the Migrants and Refugees Unit at the

² Reflecting deeply on the events unfolding before our eyes in the contemporary world and responding to them out of mature faith as initiated by Vatican II.

Catholic Secretariat to coordinate the migration ministry in the country. Drawing on the general operational principles offered by the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, this document provides a guide for planning and carrying out the apostolate of pastoral care of migration in Nigeria. It is presented in two parts, setting out the policy position of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria as well as being an implementation framework for actors in the field of migration at various levels.

PART ONE

POLICY

1.1 NORMATIVE OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

In his message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018, the Holy Father Pope Francis articulated a proposal for a comprehensive response to the migrants and refugees issue in four cardinal verbs, namely: to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate.³

i. To welcome

This entails changing prevailing negative or unfavourable perceptions about migrants and refugees; receiving them and finding ways to improve relations with them, for example, by removing language barriers and enhancing communication to make them feel at home.

ii. To protect

This entails encouraging formation or membership of associations and solidarity groups that can provide coverage and security for migrants and refugees against

³ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018
(14 January 2018)

violence, abuse and exploitation. It also involves strengthening agencies and institutions that support them, and engaging in advocacy for them, especially in safeguarding their human rights.

iii. To promote

This has to do with promoting and supporting those actions whose main goal is the integral development of migrants and refugees, as well as the communities that receive them. It entails fostering the development and enhancement of the human capacity of migrants and refugees for their own personal good and that of the residents of host communities.

iv. To integrate

Integration refers to the reciprocal process through which residents and migrants and refugees engage in beneficial mutual cultural exchange. This reciprocal process is driven by open and sincere interaction, as well as participation, in which both parties are prepared to learn from and enrich each other.

These guiding principles are meant “to express the Church’s concern for migrants, displaced people, refugees and victims of human trafficking.”⁴ They are proposed to guide the obligations of pastoral agents at all levels in

⁴ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018 (14 January 2018)

their planning and implementation. This policy document therefore recognizes, adopts and appropriately incorporates the principles; they form the framework for an effective national Catholic migration policy, one that is channeled towards the wellbeing and integral development of migrants and refugees in and from Nigeria.

This policy recognizes the challenges of migration in Nigeria; however, like the Universal Church, it focuses more on the opportunities that migration brings and its benefits for integral human development. In the mind of the Church, migration is to be discovered or rediscovered, not only as a field of pastoral commitment, but also as an opportunity and a blessing for the Christian community. It should be a process that is continuously promoted, also because it has the characteristics of synodality and missionaryity, which are the call of the hour. It is synodal inasmuch as through specific initiatives promoted at the national, diocesan, parish, language-cultural mission, and various groups, everyone can be involved in a journey of evangelical discernment. At the same time, it can have the characteristics of missionary spirit insofar as the community is continually open to newness and Easter transformation.⁵

⁵ Guidelines for a Diocesan / National Office for the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility, [Linee-guida-EN-A5.pdf \(migrants-refugees.va\)](#)

1.2 THE NATIONAL OFFICE

1.2.1 General Information

The national office is to be properly designated as the **“Migrants and Refugees Unit” (MRU)**. It was established on the 1st of September, 2023. It is domiciled in the **Department of Church and Society** of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN). The Unit is headed by the Episcopal Vicar or Bishop Chairman from the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN). It is run on a day-to-day basis by the Unit Secretary.

1.2.2 Relevance of the Unit

In establishing the Migrants and Refugees Unit, the Bishops Conference of Nigeria aligns itself more properly with the efforts of the Universal Church to respond to the migrants and refugees crisis. The Unit exists to enable the Nigerian Church provide a more concerted, visible and credible effort in the field of migration by playing the following roles:

- i. To be an official voice on issues relating to migration, able to make appropriate representation on behalf of the Bishops Conference to Government and other bodies on the subject matter.
- iii. To assist the Bishops Conference in its pastoral responses to the needs of migrants, refugees, internally displaced people, victims of human trafficking and climate-displaced people.

- iv. To be a channel of communication between the Bishops Conference and Diocesan offices on migration issues.
- v. To provide a mechanism for effective consultation and coordination among Catholic bodies and other groups involved in activities relating to migration in the country.

1.2.3 Administrative Structure

The authority and governance of Catholic initiatives on migration in Nigeria flows from the Bishops Conference through the Episcopal Vicar to the Director of the Department of Church and Society, and finally to the Unit Secretary. The Unit Secretary is assisted in the discharge of responsibility by a non-governing advisory body. Other collaborators and volunteers from among the clergy, religious and laity can occasionally be co-opted as the need arises.

The Unit Secretary is appointed by the Administrative Board of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria. The job description of the Unit Secretary is provided by the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. An Advisory Committee is constituted by the Episcopal Vicar to a term of four years and serves as the think-tank for the Unit.

Organogram

Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)
Episcopal Vicar

Director of Church and Society
Unit Secretary
Advisory Committee

1.3 DIOCESAN AND PARISH UNITS

In aiming to provide a coordinated, concerted, visible and credible response to the migrants and refugee crisis in the country, the Migrants and Refugees Unit assumes the full participation and collaboration of all Church and non-Church actors with whom it is associated. The Unit presumes to commit itself actively to this national policy framework in order to contribute to the integral development of pastoral agents themselves and the beneficiaries of their apostolates. It also expects the same commitment from diocesan and parish units.

Diocesan and parish units exist to carry out the apostolate for migrants and refugees at their levels. Diocesan unit coordinators are appointed by their Bishops while parish unit coordinators are appointed by the parish priest or elected by other parish agents.

To the extent possible, Diocesan and parish units should have similar structures as those at the national level. Diocesan units shall establish directive collaborative relationships with the national office and participate in the initiatives promoted by it.

Diocesan unit coordinators are encouraged to relate and collaborate with agents in other dioceses, especially those in the same province, in order to jointly promote and support actions at inter-diocesan or provincial levels.

1.4 OTHER PASTORAL AGENTS

Other pastoral agents working in the field of migration do so within the borders of Dioceses in Nigeria. These include religious congregations of men and women as well as private groups and individuals. They are to be acknowledged and collaborated with, as long as there is no prejudice to the policy and operational framework expounded in this document.

1.5 EXECUTIVE BODY

Executive bodies shall exist at the national, diocesan and parish levels.

- i. National executive body:** Composed of the Secretary of the National Office (Unit) and elected Diocesan coordinators.
- ii. Diocesan executive body:** Composed of the Diocesan coordinator and elected parish unit coordinators in a Diocese.
- iv. Parish executive body:** Composed of the appointed or elected coordinator and other elected agents in the parish.

PART TWO

STRATEGIC GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

2.1 VISION

The Migrants and Refugees Unit envisions a world where migration will be a matter of choice, with migrants being able to sustain their hope for a better life, finding help on their way, as well as help to recover and reintegrate fully when they decide to return to the place of origin.

2.2 MISSION

The mission of the Migrants and Refugees Unit is to accompany people on the move, especially those who find themselves in difficult situations; to be a source of hope and provide the necessary spiritual and material help to them as they depart, transit, arrive or return.

2.3 STRATEGIC GOALS

The strategic goals are the guides that will help to realize the vision and fulfill the mission of the Migrants and Refugees Unit. They are concretized in programmes and activities spread over timeframes with expected outcomes. The programmes and activities of the Unit shall be pastoral and developmental in nature, directed at the overall good of the pastoral agents themselves and the beneficiaries of their apostolate.

The strategic goals of the Unit in the intermediate and long-term are:

- i. To institutionalize the Unit at all levels in the country.
- ii. To help to change the misconception and negative attitude towards migrants and migration through reorientation.
- iii. To facilitate the appointment and engagement of pastoral agents of migration around the country and ensure the initial formation and capacity-building of same, as well as ongoing formation of those already engaged in the field, for effective delivery of pastoral care to migrants and refugees.
- iv. To help to reduce desperation to migrate irregularly through awareness-creation and enlightenment.
- v. To receive, rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of trafficking and returnees.

- vi. To collaborate with government agencies and other organizations that support the Church's vision and mission in matters relating to migrants and refugees.

2.4 PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

Periodic programmes and activities shall be planned at the national level in accordance with the calendar of the Universal Church, the Episcopal Conference, international organizations or according to specific needs. These shall include celebrations such as Bakhita Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking, World Day of Migrants and Refugees, International Migrants' Day and other international and national events related to migration. They shall also include renewal programmes, administrative events, awareness and enlightenment campaigns, occasional emergency responses, capacity-building programmes such as workshops, seminars, conferences and other forms of training. An annual calendar for programmes and activities or a pastoral plan shall be designed and communicated to the bodies at various levels for their adaptation and implementation.

Apart from those mentioned above, subnational and local programmes can also be planned by the executive bodies at those levels. Before planning, it is important to be aware of the national and local rules, and systems (frameworks, regulations and policies of intervention) pertaining to such programmes and activities. This can be

in the areas of social services, including housing, education, health, security, financing, employment and other professional services.⁶

Plans for programmes and activities shall, however, be subject to approval by the Local Ordinary and communicated to the National Office. Such programmes and activities must always align with the approach, values, principles and teachings of the Catholic Church.

2.5 METHODOLOGY

Having good knowledge of the reality is always crucial to making the correct decisions about an issue. The analysis of the reality and challenges of migration, for instance, will provide quantitative and qualitative knowledge that can be the first and fundamental step to providing intervention. This course of action is synthesised in the “see, judge and act” methodology, which is an effective schema for translating principles into tangible results. It has been adopted for Catholic social teaching⁷ and is

⁶ [Reintegration Handbook - Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance | IOM Publications Platform](#)

⁷ This methodology is associated with the Belgian Cardinal and social justice promoter, Joseph Leo Cardin. It was explained by John XXIII as follows, “There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles.

hereby recommended for the planning and implementation of programmes and activities. The “see, judge and act” schema is highlighted as follows:

“See”: *Observe the reality of migrants and refugees through contacts, visits, interaction, data collection records, research, analysis, and so on.*

“Judge”: *Interpret the information gathered and look at the reality from the perspective of the Word of God and the teachings of the Church. This will help to determine the needs to be met, according to priorities (also known as needs assessment) and the possible course of action.*

“Act”: *Draw up a pastoral action plan for a short, medium and long-term timeframe. This could include the formation of activities, group work, networking with various organizations and the integration within local communities.*

In this connection, it is important to emphasize collaboration with the competence of social scientific knowledge.⁸ Following the fundamental precepts of human development from the biblical tradition of divine revelation, the Church does not then dispense with the social sciences in understanding and addressing the social,

These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.” *Mater et Magistra*, n.236.

⁸ Cited by FISCH, A., *Op. Cit.*, pp.13-15.

political and economic situation of the human person; rather she employs them.⁹ It is therefore, recommended that pastoral agents develop working relationships and involve institutions or bodies with recognized expertise in the field of human sciences, researchers from different disciplines related to the social sciences or, alternatively, to involve other research institutions or local academic centres in data gathering and analysis.¹⁰

2.6 COLLABORATION WITH GROUPS OUTSIDE THE ECCLESIAL SPHERE

The Church exists and functions within the society. While always maintaining her character and remaining true to her calling, values and principles, the Church often sees the need to collaborate with those outside the ecclesial sphere. These include non-Church actors such as the governmental and non-governmental agencies, local and national institutions, associations that promote the rights and duties of people who have experienced migration or

⁹ According to John Paul II, “the Church's social teaching has an important interdisciplinary dimension. In order better to incarnate the one truth about man in different and constantly changing social, economic and political contexts, this teaching enters into dialogue with the various disciplines concerned with man. It assimilates what these disciplines have to contribute, and helps them to open themselves to a broader horizon, aimed at serving the individual person who is acknowledged and loved in the fullness of his or her vocation.

¹⁰ Guidelines for a Diocesan / National Office for the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility, [Lince-guida-EN-A5.pdf \(migrants-refugees.va\)](#)

uprooting. Working with such actors, the Church can encourage or launch special initiatives of study, awareness-raising, information campaigns, discussions, debate tables, and so on. Contact and dialogue with national and international networks and bodies are not only important, but also strategic; so is participation in important events, processes (social, political, cultural) and forums concerning migration. Groups that the Church can collaborate with include:

- i. The different ethnic groups present in the diocesan territories
- ii. Representatives and pastors of Christian migrants belonging to other denominations
- iii. Religious leaders of migrants belonging to other religions
- iv. Associations and organized groups from civil society that deal with human mobility by offering various services: legal assistance, health care, reception centres, listening and job search centres.
- v. Representatives of the media who promote a correct and humane image of migrants in public opinion
- vi. Institutions promoting the development of laws and public strategies in line with the four cardinal verbs of the pastoral care of migration (welcome, protect, promote, integrate). However, the Unit must always maintain a critical distance to these organizations.

- vii. Representatives of businesses and the world of work, with the aim of facilitating the acquisition of employment by people with a migration or uprooting experience.
- viii. The world of education and universities (research)

2.6. MOBILISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Fundraising is a strategic activity for mobilizing financial resources that serve to ensure the sustainability over time of a project or a social cause. Like any organization, the functioning of the Migrants and Refugees Unit requires the mobilization of financial resources. However, the Unit does not exist simply for the purpose of finding sources of funding to pursue initiatives or projects; rather it aims to create collaborative alliances with people, organizations or institutions that, motivated by the cause of migrants and refugees, decide to become part of it, also by supporting it with financial resources.

Sound financial management of mobilized resources is critical to the achievement of the objectives of the Migrants and Refugees Unit, those of the donors, as well as the timely delivery of services to target groups. In this regard, appropriate financial and accounting systems shall be developed in accordance with the structures set at international, national and diocesan levels so as to ensure proper documentation, reporting and accountability.

Minimal project and programme management competence is also required by unit coordinators at all levels. All pastoral agents are expected to bring their natural talents, passion, commitment and dedication to bear on their apostolate; however, professional trainings for capability development in this regard shall be provided at opportune times.