



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the International Dialogue on Migration of the International Organization for Migration
Panel 2 – Protection of vulnerable migrants during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis
Geneva, 15 October 2020

Mr. Chair,

In these times of uncertainty and anguish, we often have heard that we are all in the same boat. However, while it may be true that we are going through the same storm, the reality is that the means and resources at our disposal differ greatly. COVID-19, indeed, has made more visible the inequalities and divisions among and within States, as well as the tendency to close in on ourselves or to promote nationalistic and self-serving ideologies as solutions.

Pope Francis repeatedly said that “we can only get out of this situation together, as a whole humanity”¹. Indeed, the ongoing crisis demonstrates that no one is safe until everybody is safe. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to ensure a more humane response to migration, so that migrants and other people on the move are fully integrated, not only in emergency responses to COVID-19, but also in the recovery efforts.

It is regrettable that, amidst the pandemic, many migrants have become even more vulnerable than they were previously – a situation that has been complicated by unequal access to adequate medical care. Those who found themselves in irregular situations face even greater hardships. Out of fear of being detained or deported, they may hesitate to seek medical care and may be compelled to accept dangerous work conditions, with the amplified risk of exploitation and abuse.

Mr. Chair,

It would be a short-sighted approach to measure the impact of the COVID-19 crisis only in terms of physical health or in mere economic terms. There are long-term impacts which also involve the dimension of mental health as well as considerable social challenges, including the lack of job opportunities and lack of access to education. These also are vulnerabilities confronted by many people, including migrants and those employed in the informal market.

Of particular concern for the Holy See is the situation of vulnerability among child migrants, especially those unaccompanied by parents or guardians, since often “they are invisible and voiceless [...]”². They risk falling victim to perverse scourges such as child trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. No matter where they are or where they come from, all children have individual needs and rights even when they cross borders. Response policies must prioritize their best interests at all stages.

Keeping this in mind, the Holy See Delegation wishes to ask the panelists if they could elaborate on some examples of best practices used to address the specific situation of vulnerability of children during the pandemic, including at the local level.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Interview with La Stampa, 20 March 2020.

² Pope Francis, Message for the 103rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees.