



## Justice for Immigrants: Migration Policy Priorities for a New Decade

*Refocusing our Migration Policy Priorities as Defined Through Pope Francis's Welcome, Protect, Promote, and Integrate Framework*





# Introduction

The issue of migration has been a special point of concern for Pope Francis since the early days of his pontificate. At Lampedusa, which was his first trip outside of Rome as Pope, the Holy Father lamented the globalization of indifference shown to migrants and other populations. On multiple occasions, he has called attention to migrant populations who often remain overlooked and ignored or, worse still, deemed a threat. Church teaching calls on all Catholics to provide special attention to migrant populations; this call has important pastoral and policy dimensions, which are geared to the spiritual and physical well-being of migrants and their families and the communities that receive them.

In his 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees message, Pope Francis called for Catholics to welcome, protect, promote and integrate immigrants and refugees. Drawing on this seminal document and in honor of the Justice for Immigrants Campaign's 15 year anniversary, below are some migration policy priorities which reflect Pope Francis's call to welcome, protect, promote and integrate immigrants and refugees.



---

# TO WELCOME

---

## "Welcoming means, above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally"

---

In recent years policymakers have given significant attention to the creation of enforcement mechanisms that attempt to stem irregular migration. Church teaching recognizes the importance of immigration enforcement, so long as it respects the human dignity of migrants, supports the integrity of the family, is humanely and proportionately implemented, and leaves room for humanitarian forms of relief when needed.

Nevertheless, the Church has consistently emphasized the importance of welcoming the stranger and assisting those who are marginalized and alone. For this reason, Catholic teaching has prioritized the importance of addressing root causes, including environmental degradation, inequality, poverty, and violence, which drive people to migrate in the first place. For example, in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope Leo XIII emphasized the fact that "no one would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life." (#47) If living conditions in one's homeland enable individuals to build a satisfying life, they most likely will remain in their homeland. Making sure that individuals have a welcome place in their country of birth is complementary to our obligation to welcome those who migrate out of necessity. Effectively addressing root causes will, in the long run, provide a more effective solution to irregular migration as it will help to ensure that any decision to migrate will be one done by choice rather than necessity.

When we talk about welcoming people, we should be mindful of the experiences they bring and the obstacles and difficulties from which they are fleeing. Part of

welcoming people is understanding where they are coming from, listening to why they are migrating, standing in solidarity with those looking to seek a better life and being present to the experiences of individuals not looking to migrate but rather to live out the right not to migrate.

Policy examples include:

- Consider root causes in legislative efforts that address migration.
- Ensure that ample attention and weight is given to the root causes of migration when evaluating protection claims such as asylum, refugee status or U/T visas
- Educate ourselves, other Catholics and lawmakers on historical and contemporary U.S. foreign and trade policies that have contributed to forced displacement, and promoting alternative policies.
- Promote a better understanding of the intersection of race, criminalization and immigration policy-making, which often leads to situations of unwelcome, marginalization, criminality and exclusion. Introduce initiatives that will help to counter these tendencies.
- Develop programs that will allow individuals deported or excluded from the U.S. on illegal or discriminatory grounds, or due to errors, to return to process their applications and explore other forms of redress.

# TO PROTECT

To Protect "may be understood as a series of steps intended to defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, independent of their legal status."

All human beings have dignity and are entitled to human decency, due process and human rights. As Catholics our belief that our migrant, refugee and asylum seeking brothers and sisters must be treated with human decency and dignity comes from the Gospel. The Gospel of Matthew states:

*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me . . . For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs? He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.'*

A core element of Catholic social teaching is respecting the life and human decency of every human being. When we talk about protecting human life and human decency of immigrants and refugees we should be mindful of ensuring humane treatment and basic human needs.

Policy examples include:

- Protect the well-being of all by providing access to healthcare, food, shelter, religious and legal services at all governmental holding facilities, including immigrant detention and Border Patrol holding facilities as well as state and local prisons and jails.

- Prevent law enforcement from racial profiling of individuals regarding immigration status. Afford all immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers legal assistance, translation and court advocates for their immigration proceedings
- Ensure the long- term viability and accessibility of asylum for populations in need of protection and take steps to restore and repair the asylum system.
- Utilize humane and proportionate forms of monitoring such as alternatives to detention over more restrictive monitoring like immigrant detention or ankle monitors.
- Repeal Muslim, refugee, asylum, and other travel bans that target immigrants based on their race, religion or other personal characteristics.



---

# TO PROMOTE

---

**"Promoting essentially means a determined effort to ensure that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities which welcome them – are empowered to achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions which constitute their humanity."**

---

Healthy families are an indispensable component of any healthy society. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasizes this connection when he writes that "The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected." According to the *Catechism*, "The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society."

Policies that undermine the family will, in the long run, undermine society. Yet in the last twenty years we have witnessed an array of anti-family immigration policies implemented in the United States. Policies such as family detention, family separation, and enforcement policies in the U.S. interior have led to large numbers of families torn apart. While the Catholic Church adheres to the right of nations to control their borders and ensure their sovereignty, such rights are not boundless, rather our faith requires that they be humane and proportionate. As the family is central to Catholic life, it is vital that all immigration policies consider the viability of the family and protect family unity.

Policy examples include:

- Eliminate all forms of family detention in the United States
- Stop separating families along the U.S. border or in the interior
- Designate the existence of family, including parents, spouses and U.S. citizen children, a pre-eminent mitigating factor in decisions regarding removal/deportation
- Promote administrative legal protection pathways such as Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals which ensure family unity
- Remove obstacles to benefits for U.S. citizen children in mixed status families. Require government officials to consider immigrant children's best interests in all immigration decisions and policy making.

# TO INTEGRATE

**Integrating "concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees."**

Pope Francis has emphasized that integration "concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees." Integrating migrants and refugees is an opportunity for the emergence of new understanding and broader horizons, both on the part of those accepted, who have the responsibility to respect the values, traditions and laws of the community which welcomes them, and on the part of the welcoming community members, who are called to acknowledge the beneficial contribution each newcomer can make to the whole community. All are mutually enriched by their interaction. Policy examples include:

- Promote access to citizenship, whether through governmental programs or through community support
- Increase access to English as a Second Language programs
- Ease licensing and recertification processes for migrants who arrive in the United States with professional skills and certification.
- Encourage public-private partnerships to facilitate community welcome of newcomers. Promote inclusive policies by states and localities that welcome and support immigrants and refugees
- Ground border policy in rights-protection, data analysis and meaningful consultation with impacted communities



---

# Resources

---

Many resources developed and promoted by the Church, including those below, are available online and can assist parishes and individuals who are interested in learning more about the Catholic Church's position on immigration. Particularly helpful resources include:

[Justice for Immigrants](#) - In 2004, the Catholic bishops of the United States committed to immigration reform as a priority of the U.S. Catholic Church, and to creating a culture of welcome in which all migrants are treated with respect and dignity. A diverse group of Catholic organizations with national networks joined the U.S. Catholic bishops' Justice for Immigrants Campaign (JFI) in an effort to unite and mobilize a growing network of Catholic institutions, individuals, and other persons of goodwill in support of immigration reform.

[Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#) - Issued in 2003, Strangers No Longer is a pastoral letter written by the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico, and provides an overview of their teaching on migration. It is an extremely helpful resource for anyone interested in becoming more familiar with the moral and Biblical foundations of this teaching.

[Vatican's Migrant and Refugees Section](#) - The Migrants and Refugees section helps the Church worldwide to help those who are forcibly displaced by conflict, environmental degradation, persecution or extreme poverty, and those who fall victim to human trafficking.



*we are one family under God*